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topic, like those of Bultmann, Perrin, Theissen, and especially Chilton, however, one finds a different interpretation of this topic in Mark. Finally, Schmidt's presentation of the traditions used by Mark, in terms of pre-Markan material, is not critical enough.

To conclude: As translation, using fresh language to make the narrative of Mark come to life for the modern reader, the SV is a success. In incorporating the best scholarly insights about the content of Mark into the translation, however, the SV is less of a success. Furthermore, if one knows the Greek text, the translation sometimes become highly debatable, demonstrating again that all translation is interpretation. The book is recommended to scholars who are interested in the translation of Biblical texts and in the Gospel of Mark.


Reviewer: Dr P B Boshoff

This book presents the Biblical and non-canonical gospels as well as fragments of gospels as a unit. Hence the title: 'The complete gospels'. Each gospel is preceded by an introduction and the text itself is annotated and provided with cross references. A variety of subjects is discussed in cameo essays. In conclusion several works — mostly English-American — are suggested for further study and the book ends with a glossary. The participants in the project, namely the Jesus Seminar, can be justifiably proud of their joint effort.

The conviction of the compilers that in trying to find how Christendom came into being and for the historical study of the Jesus tradition it was necessary to look beyond the Biblical canon — hence the scope of the work. Where previous generations were indifferent to the details of the life of Jesus, through the growing consciousness of history, a need has developed for a historically accurate biography of Jesus. Jesus must be depicted as a man among men. Although 'the life of Christ' is not a theme of New Testament theology, it is historically possible and permissible to try to answer the questions regarding the historical Jesus. The theologians should not avoid the issue of questions concerning the relation between the works of the human Jesus and the Gospel.

However, to say: (t)he distinction between the canonical and the non-canonicaI gospels did not exist in the period of Christian origins, and therefore is not helpful for understanding the earliest centuries of Christianity in their rich diversity' (p 4) provides a shaky foundation. The early church cannot be understood apart from the definition which it gives concerning itself. This resulted from the concept it formed of Jesus Christ and which was perpetuated in the canon. The revelation in Christ and the evidence of it, constitutes the church.

The Scholar's Version claims to be a translation free from ecclesiastical control, and that a better rendering of the texts in American English would appeal to the reader. But, as usual, getting rid of one authority, does not lead to a position of complete freedom from domination. It simply leads to the acceptance of a new authority. Being independent of ecclesiastical control does not automatically enable the scholars to make faithful translations of the texts. They place themselves at the disposal of the historical Jesus tradition. In Mark 1:40-41 for example, they wish to improve a translation such as: 'A man suffering from a dreaded skin disease came to Jesus, knelt down, aDd begged him for help. "If you
want to”, he said, “you can make me clean”. Jesus was filled with pity, and reached out and touched him. “I do want to”, he answered. “Be clean”! (Good News Bible). The ill-considered Scholar’s Version reads: ‘Then a leper comes up to him, “If you want to, you can make me clean”. Although Jesus was indignant, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and says to him, “Okay — you’re clean”! The first translation describes faith. The believer entrusts himself to God and is helped. His words are repeated verbatim to confirm his faith. ‘If you want to, you can make me clean’. ‘I do want to. Be clean’! He whose faith endures, will stand firm. The second translation has not reflected on faith, but is an account of a remarkable incident in the course of Jesus’ life on earth. The ‘okay’ does not confirm that the righteous live by faith. Nor is the Jesus who is proclaimed by the church indignant when sinners come to him. On the contrary he takes pity on them. The Jesus of the Scholar’s Version was indignant. Hopefully, the effect of ‘The complete gospels’ will be to compel one to read the New Testament with renewed diligence.

Tarek Mitri, (ed) — Religion, Law and Society: A Christian Muslim discussion


Reviewer: Rev Chris le Roux

‘This book is the fruit of two Christian-Muslim colloquia convened by the Office in Interreligious Relations of the World Council of Churches’ a quote from the editor in the Introduction. It stems from the desire to concentrate on the most timely and controversial issues outlined in the ‘Ecumenical Considerations’ on issues in Christian-Muslim relations which were received by the World Council of Churches Central Committee in 1992. Christians and Muslims were invited to re-examine the complex relation of their religions to society and state and this publication is the result of the discussion. This is stated in the Introduction, but in practice the book concentrates upon Islamic law (takbul al-Shari‘ah) concerning the ‘calls for the implementation of Islamic law’ or ‘attempts to impose it’. Calls that are generally met among Christians with fear, indignation and protest.

Questions that are discussed are, for instance, the opinion that legal systems elaborated in historical circumstances different from those of our present world constitute a form of retrogression, and that the enforcement of Shari‘ah could lead to the marginalization and even subordination of those who live in predominantly Muslim countries; also the question whether a religiously based legal system can be an alternative to positive law.

Perceptions like these (and others from the Muslim and Christian sides) do not favour dialogue, although the editor is of the opinion that dialogue is possible, even desirable, despite these obstacles and limitations. He sees dialogue as an alternative to war. Other obstacles are the fact that Shari‘ah does not propose a homogenous, well-defined and delimited body of legal texts and that Islamists will not find an agreed upon and coherent system they can immediately apply. Who would participate in the dialogue? Would it be with those Islamists who believe in analogy (qiydsz) as the accepted method of understanding Shari‘ah, or with those who believe in distinguishing between the normative and contextual and who insist on returning to the Qur‘an itself, who differentiate between Shari‘ah and fiqh (jurisprudence). Therefore the statement of the editor on page ix of the Introduction, is of the utmost importance: ‘A relevant Christian-Muslim dialogue on Shari‘ah cannot progress, or even occur, except in relation to the exchanges and debates among Muslims’.

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