

EDITORIAL

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE INTERPRETER

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In today's biblical studies, one notes a welcome emphasis upon two factors, both of which have been with us for a long time, but which seem now to be of more than usual significance. The first is, emphasis upon the need for a more careful arrangement of scriptural materials in a fashion which does justice to the historically progressive nature of their content. The second is, stress upon a hermeneutic which concerns itself with the meaning of biblical, especially New Testament, materials for those who wrote them.

No Biblical Theology can commend itself to the serious student which does not give full recognition to the progressive aspects of the thought of the New Testament writers and of the New Testament Church. At this point, Evangelicals have frequently seemed to show less than adequate insight, especially as contrasted, for example, with Rudolf Bultmann's organization of his materials. This needs to be corrected.

Nor is the need for such care cancelled out by the fact that the basics of the Evangel were grasped early in the career of the Church, in fact almost at the outset of the Christian enterprise. Our Lord indicated that revelation of some of the details of the Good News must await the descent of the Spirit, who was to round out what He had said. The recognition of "stages" in the post-ascension grasp of truth by the New Testament Church is still a necessity. This is not a plea for a dissective dispensationalism, but for a hermeneutic which stresses the organic unity of the several stages in the Church's grasp and elaboration of the message committed to her trust.

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Second, there is a welcome emphasis upon discerning the meaning of the several New Testament documents for their respective writers. This does not mean that one will necessarily find the writers to be the victims of naive world views and of occult thinking. It may yet appear that those men providentially chosen to write the New Testament, far from being the gullible prisoners of an outworn world-view and of a purely tendentious view of history, were careful in their handling of historical data. At this point, Evangelicals will view with a very critical eye the tendency of the classical-rationalist writers, as for example R. G. Collingwood, who deny that the New Testament writers have produced history at all.

It may yet prove true that the authors were keenly conscious of *Historie*, and that they continued the Old Testament struggle against mythology. They were, further, quite probably conscious of writing materials which cut across the grain of the alternate views of paganism. Thus, their witness to the resurrection of our Lord was made in clear understanding that there was a special form of uniqueness involved in the event.

Two notes of counsel need to be sounded at the point of the study of the meaning of events for the New Testament writers. The first has been suggested already: namely, there needs to be a manifest attitude of sympathetic understanding of their own attitudes toward the materials which they wrote. There is a second of equal importance. It is, that while the writers doubtless had a keen awareness of the meaning of their materials, they also quite possibly wrote beyond their times and beyond their native wisdom. Perhaps we may find a paradigm for this in the stated experience of the Prophets, who are shown to have been "searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Is it not probable that New Testament writers felt a similar sense of wonder and query?