

Smith, Charles W. F., *The Paradox of Jesus in the Gospels*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969. 236 pp. \$ 6.50.

Many writers have emphasized that in the Gospels we find the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith inextricably interwoven, that the Gospels are not history written on the spot but history interpreted from the new understanding gained through the resurrection experience. Smith's contribution in this book is to show this tension by a series of paradoxes, such as the familiar Jesus and the unknown Jesus, the baptizer who was himself baptized, the provincial preacher who was the universal Saviour, the Eternal Son who must die, the Messiah who refused the Messianic role, the King who enters the city as a pilgrim, and the Saviour who could not save.

Basing his conclusions on the assumption that the familiar one is the historical Jesus, and the unknown one is the resurrected Christ, Smith takes Mk 4:35-41 and 6:45-52 as a model for this paradoxical tension existing in the Gospels. In the former account, Jesus is addressed as "Rabbi" and is rebuked for sleeping while the disciples desperately seek to keep their boat from sinking in the storm. In the latter, Christ, taking the initiative, is unrecognized and unapproachable. Mk, by placing "a tale about a clearly human Jesus and a tale about a clearly supernatural Christ" in the same basic account, has placed the paradox in the sharpest relief. The Gospels are at "one and the same time about the historical Jesus and the Risen Christ" (p. 19).

To illustrate Smith's method, we examine his chapter on the baptism of Jesus. One paradox is the baptism of Jesus by John. Why should the sinless Son of God be baptized by John? Yet for Smith the greater paradox is the fact that we have preserved faithfully in Mt 3:11b-12 and its Lucan parallel (which Smith considers earlier than Mk) that the baptism of Jesus was to be "by holy spirit and by fire." "Spirit" should be translated "wind" according to Smith, and thus the phrase is understood as the primitive agricultural metaphor for "separation" and "judgment." The wind separates the wheat from the chaff and the latter is burned by fire. However, this expectation was not fulfilled in the eschatological sense in which it was meant. The radical separation and judgment did not take place in the work of Christ. The preservation of this contradiction (Smith calls it a paradox) witnesses to the basic "integrity" of the Gospels. We have preserved John's expectation of the work of Christ which was shared by the first Christians. But instead of judgment, there is mercy and healing. Is the expectation ever fulfilled? Yes, but in an altogether different way. Luke sees its fulfillment in Acts in the coming of the Spirit with wind and fire. In this way the promise of John is "fulfilled." Another important paradox is the fact that though the Gospel had gone as far as Rome when the Evangelists wrote, they still depict Jesus as a provincial preacher who limited his activities to Israel, and in his mission charge to the disciples forbade them to go outside of Jewry. This

again for Smith is witness to the integrity of the Gospels. Smith is throughout quite concerned about the integrity of the Gospels and emphasizes this point with reference to these strange paradoxes. While some alteration and reinterpretation has taken place to smooth the gap between what happened in Jesus' life and the later work of the church, yet the clear indications of these paradoxes remain.

In Chapter V Smith deals with the passion predictions of Jesus. Here again the author finds a paradox. What Jesus actually said was that he must die like any other man, that he would not bypass death like the other apocalyptic figures such as Enoch, Melchizedek, and the Son of Man. According to Smith, "there stands behind the predictions, not a prophecy of the passion, but a disclaimer by Jesus of any Messianic or apocalyptic role which involves the bypassing of death" (p. 115). The "rising again" does not refer specifically to the resurrection but to the apocalyptic exaltation. "It is this which Jesus here disclaims insofar as it requires that death be avoided" (p. 116). The post-resurrection treatment of this saying of Jesus becomes a passion prediction including the resurrection of Jesus after three days. The "integrity" of the Gospels for Smith is again maintained since they preserve the basic substance of what Jesus said even if they have reinterpreted it somewhat drastically.

According to Smith, much of the passion narrative is originally to be connected with the Feast of Tabernacles rather than the Passover, including Jesus' riding upon an ass. The crowds would be shouting "Hosanna" in any case and many others would be riding as Jesus was. This "veiled claim" to kingship would be understood only by his followers and indicates how "Mk has again carefully guarded against any open claim by Jesus or any acceptance of Messianic dignity" (p. 151).

The "paradox of all the paradoxes" is expressed in the statement, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." Barabbas and the two brigands who were crucified with Jesus were members of an underground resistance movement against Rome. They represented the conception of a political and historical Messiah, which role Jesus steadfastly refused to accept. Jesus instead transformed the current Messianic figure and became the Messiah who would die, be crucified. And in his death, indicated by the cry from the cross, "there is that element of the final insecurity of human plans and life which can be redeemed only by the security of the faith that God's purpose will triumph in his way rather than in ours" (p. 179).

The resurrection, as Smith explains it, was "not a *discovery* of the witnesses but a *disclosure* made by a power or a manifestation from outside themselves" (p. 186). This is illustrated by the Emmaus story. Jesus acting as host when he was the guest is the clue to the disclosure.

A significant question is raised concerning the correlation between what Jesus said and did and the Church's interpretation of these. Is the Church's interpretation fitting? Does it really correlate or is it something altogether different? Take the paradox concerning the

expectation of John the Baptist and the early Christians of Jesus as a judge bringing radical separation and judgment. If the Church understood this of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the "fulfillment" does not correlate to the expectation. If the expectation was false, then there need be no fulfillment. What we have then is an attempt to find fulfillment of a false expectation. Is this what Smith means? The paradoxical nature of Smith's expression illustrates what my question is all about—"The paradox of unfulfilled expectation which was yet fulfilled, the discontinuous continuity" (p. 213). I think Smith makes an especially strong case of expectation-fulfillment in chapters IV and VII.

Another question that can be raised concerns the uncanny way in which expectation and fulfillment, though quite different, are found so beautifully in the same words. For example, "holy wind" and "Holy Spirit." The same Greek word can be used with either meaning. Another example is the passion prediction where an original "to be exalted" is interpreted in its fulfillment as "to be resurrected," the same Greek verb being used again for either meaning. Such a phenomenon is altogether possible, but I doubt that these two cases are examples of this. I accept Smith's basic argument in regard to the expectation of the Baptist, but not this specific argument. In regard to the passion prediction, my doubts touch the basic argument.

In spite of these criticisms the book makes fascinating reading and is full of new insights. Smith's positive aim to point up the basic integrity of the Gospels is commendable. While not written primarily as a direct contribution to the "search for a historical Jesus," it does contribute in a significant way to that quest.

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Vriezen, Th. C., *The Religion of Ancient Israel*. Translated by Rev. Hubert Hoskins. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967. 328 pp. \$ 7.50.

The translation into English of Vriezen's *De godsdienst van Israël* (1963) will provide a very useful introduction to the Hebrew religion for students of the Bible and the ancient Near East. The work is a history-of-religions approach to the knotty problems of what constitutes the religion of Israel, its dynamic historical development, and its uniqueness. It covers the earlier periods to the Exile remarkably well, but regrettably portrays post-exilic Judaism with the traditional Wellhausen animosity which sees Judaism's fidelity to the Torah as a bondage to the tradition it created and providing no stimulus for new forms of living. Jewish and Christian scholarship since the 1920's (notably George Foot Moore, R. Travers Herford, James Parkes, Frederick Grant, W. D. Davies, and A. Roy Eckardt) has convincingly shown that this view is at best a Christian caricature, and at worst a fatal fallacy which has no place in a serious reconstruction of