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THE PRESENT CRISIS IN ETHICS*

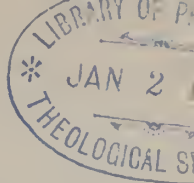
"It is a fact worth weighing," says one of the most learned and judicial of our present day writers on Christian ethics,—
"it is a fact worth weighing that for some two hundred years or more after the Reformation and the rise of modern philosophy no one ever questioned the supremacy of the Christian ethic, though from every other quarter inroads were being made upon the received traditions."¹

So recently, indeed, as 1873 Mr. John Stuart Mill, the ablest as well as the fairest of modern unbelievers, wrote as follows: "About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this preëminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion can not be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity."² Nor are such testimonies exceptional. Unbelievers in dogmatic Christianity from widely different standpoints have united in exalting its ethics. When the charge was brought by Christians that the bitter attacks on Christian dogma must issue in the overthrow of Christian morality, it was hotly resisted by scientists and by litera-

* An Address delivered in Miller Chapel on September 26, 1918, at the Opening of the One Hundred and Seventh Session of the Seminary.

¹ Thornton, *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 3.

² *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 253.



Scriptures, and in general will give satisfaction; but the later chapters are marked by partisanship, and disclose scant acquaintance with the literature of the subject.

A remark made concerning Pss. ix and x may properly receive a brief explanatory comment. The author, speaking concisely, says that "in Psalms 9—10, 37, two two-line stanzas are given to each letter, the characteristic letter standing at the beginning of the first of the four lines" (p. 31). The statement by reason of its conciseness is liable to convey misinformation. For as the two psalms, ix and x, exist the statement regarding the initial letter is true only in respect to ix. 2-6, 8-18, x. 12-17; that is, for twelve of the twenty-one [twenty-two] consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. Stanzas beginning with *daleth* and *samech* are certainly missing; and also, in Dr. Briggs judgment, those beginning with *he* and *kaph*. By alteration of the verse divisions in Ps. x. and a single transposition (placing 3^b after 5^b and before 7 and 8^b) the sequence *mem*, *nun*, *pe*, *ayin* may be obtained; and *tsade* is conjectured from the Septuagint. Furthermore, in the present Hebrew text four lines, neither more nor fewer, do not invariably accompany each existing initial consonant; but greater symmetry in this respect is yielded by a critical text which though not final is yet founded on plausible conjecture.

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JOHN D. DAVIS.

Het Evangelie van Lucas. Door PROF. DR. J. DE ZWAAN, Hoogleraar aan de Ryksuniversiteit te Groningen. J. B. Wolters' U.M.—Groningen, Den Haag. 1917. Pp. 148. Prys f. 1.90. By subscription f. 1.40. (Tekst en Uitleg, no. 4.)

This little volume is the fourth instalment of the series of brief commentaries issued under the editorship of Dr. Van Veldhuizen. The three preceding issued (Mark, Matthew, Romans) were noticed by us on former occasions. The present exposition is constructed on the same general plan. After a short isagogical orientation, an original rendering of the text is given, and as a third part follows the exposition. Dr. De Zwaan modestly restricts the scope of his work to the effort of "putting the reader of our time there where the first readers stood." We doubt whether this is a sound hermeneutical principle; at any rate it ought to have been formulated objectively: to convey to the modern reader what Luke desired to convey to his first readers, and doubtless this is what is meant by the author himself. Of the task of making us understand what the first readers will not have been able to apprehend he absolves himself and also disavows every effort to control the writer as to his fidelity to the facts. The compendious nature of the work obviously made these restrictions inevitable. In reality, of course, it is not easy to carry out such a self-denying programme. It is not impossible to guess from certain comments what are the author's theological affiliations and propensities. It is only fair to say that this is not due to any conscious effort on his part to inject them. As an exegete Dr. De Zwaan reveals a cer-

tain originality. As an illustration we may mention the import attributed to Satan's words in the second temptation (Luke's sequence). These are interpreted as an offer on Satan's part to become Jesus' Wazir in the administration of the world. This, on the ground that at this point of the temptation Satan cannot, in Luke's opinion, have had any further doubt as to Jesus' refusal to become Satan's Wazir. We do not see that his ingenious inversion of what the words naturally suggest, to any extent solves the psychological problem of this stage of the temptation. Could Luke have ascribed to Satan any doubt as to the refusal of Jesus to accept him as his Wazir? A no less interesting and more entertainable suggestion is that in the parable of the Samaritan the priest and the levite turn aside from fear of defilement through contact with what might possibly turn out to be a dead body. As worthy of note we further quote the observation that the lost penny of the woman cannot have formed part of an amulet, or bridal necklace because the text speaks of drachmae, which were stamped with a heathen image rendering them to a Jewish woman unfit for such an intimate purpose.

In connection with the difficult problem of Luke's account of the Supper, the author for a moment indulges in a critical digression. He favors the view that vs. 19, 20 were lacking in Luke's original writing. Luke mentions the first passover-cup, passes over the second cup, then introduces the breaking of the bread with the solemn words "this is my body." This seems to imply that the cup mentioned in vs. 17 was the ordinary passover-cup, not the cup of the new sacrament, to which later in the account, after the excision of 19b, 20, no reference is made. The author suggests that Luke on purpose avoided giving a clear, articulated description of the institution of the Supper, because he did not want to convey to non-Christian readers the impression that Christianity was a new religious cult with its own cult-actions, the latter being the criterion of a new religion and a new religion being forbidden.

Enough has been said to show that the exposition is suggestive. If at certain points it proceeds to a point of compactness which puts it in need of some exegesis of its own, this is hardly the fault of the author, but due to the limitations of the scheme under which he was working.

Princeton.

GEERHARDUS VOS.

Het Eeuwige Leven by Paulus. Een Godsdienst-historisch Onderzoek.
Door JOHAN THEODOOR UBBINK. By J. B. Wolters' U.M.—
Groningen, Den Haag, 1917. Pp. 174, lxx f. 250.

This is a dissertation offered for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the University of Groningen in The Netherlands. It is a dissertation of more than average value and importance, both because of the live subject it deals with and because of the wide reading and mature judgment which it reveals on almost every page. Its purpose is to compare Paul's eschatological teaching with the corresponding beliefs