

Rhymes, who has no use for code-morality, the distinction between negative prohibitions and positive commandments does not exist. He seems to think that the traditional Christian code-morality, with its rules about divorce, fornication and murder, is a wrong-headed kind of programme for living a good life, and must therefore be replaced by a right-minded programme based on the command to love. But the Christian code (unlike that of pharisaism) is not a programme for good living at all. It does not attempt to regulate or channel love. It doesn't compete in that market at all. It is simply a set of limits which define the possibilities of a fully human life. (We cannot shirk the belief that to be fully human is necessarily to be Christian, though no Christian can be fully human by his own efforts in this world). Love is not the shapeless interior surge envisaged by Canon Rhymes: it has a structure, and is manifested in characteristically loving behaviour. The prohibition of behaviour which is characteristic of the opposite of love is a rule which gives meaning to the command to love, just as the rules of chess make the game possible. It is because the moral prohibitions are concerned with the possibility of living fully human lives that they are concerned, in one way or another, with matters of life and death. They forbid murder, contraception, divorce, adultery because these are themselves limiting cases concerned with the beginning or the end of human life. We have scarcely begun to show, in the context of English culture, what this idea of morality might mean in detail: until we do, there is very little point in taking part in the sterile debate which these books represent.

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THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, by Joseph Bonsirven, S.J.; Burns and Oates, 63s.

'There are very few works on the theology of the New Testament written by Catholics:' so begins the bibliographical note at the end of this book. It is no overstatement. The author goes on to list the only such works known to him, totalling five: two in Latin, two in German, one in French, ranging from 1909 to 1950. Fr Bonsirven himself partly filled the extreme need for good Catholic N.T. theology with the publication in 1951 of his *Théologie du Nouveau Testament*. It is good to see now a sound English translation of this work. The author has long earned a very high reputation for his learned scriptural studies. In the present book detailed scholarship is contained mainly in footnotes, leaving the text itself readably simple. One important feature of the book is the massive bibliography given in the notes, although most of the references are to the 1930's or earlier.

The book's structure is formed on the four stages which the author sees in the religion of the N.T., namely, Jesus, the primitive Christian community, Paul, and other apostolic witnesses in the developing communities. The two parts on the religion of the community are disproportionately brief, a mere thirty pages or so each, while the other two parts are each at least five times as long. Here is an indication of the book's approach, and also, it seems to me, of its weakness.

Introducing the section on Jesus, Bonsirven says we are looking for 'the direct impression which Jesus made' on his disciples. Then he proceeds to seek this 'direct impression' of the personality, consciousness and message of the Saviour himself in the four gospels. But surely what these four gospel accounts give us is not such a direct impression of the earthly Jesus at all—that is always a little further back than any account we have of him, just beyond our reach, as it were—but rather, four interpretative accounts based on the varying needs of different sections and circumstances of the early Church. These were written in terms of the lived faith and prayer, experienced, under the Holy Spirit, in the Christian communities surrounding the evangelists some decades after the events related took place. On each topic studied, Bonsirven selects verses out of their contexts in each gospel, and brings them together to form a theological synthesis or to point to a prescribed doctrine, instead of starting from what we are actually given: four theological views of the gospel, seen through the eyes of the primitive community. Similarly on Paul, texts are juxtaposed from letters concerned with widely differing problems, small allowance being made for the immediate context of each. What one misses in Fr Bonsirven's book is a sense of salvation history working in the apostolic Church and expressed in its living literature. The various parts of the N.T. reflect an evolution of religious awareness, of theological penetration, in the face of particular historical situations, yet always under the positive guidance of the Holy Spirit. To grasp their message more deeply, all the writings must be read for what they severally are. In general, it remains that Fr Bonsirven is studying (or was studying some 15 years ago) the N.T. theologically in the light of the Church's certain teaching today; as such, his book is valuable—the more so in view of the lamentable vacuum in this field of publication. It is a pity, however, that so often he seems to be showing how the N.T. fits in with our known doctrine, without investigating the way in which the early communities were led, under divine inspiration, to a deepening theological perception. That way we might have been enabled to share more fully in the experience and insight of the apostolic community.

Any compendious work requires detailed indexing if it is to yield its value. The original French edition gave us an excellent Index of Biblical References as well as a very sketchy Subject Index. In the English translation the latter is barely improved upon, while the essential index of texts is simply left out. By this slovenly omission the value of the book is, at best, halved. Do the publishers believe that there are many who will wish to read it through from cover to cover, rather than use it to look up Bonsirven's theology on a particular point or text? And surely those numerous footnotes call for an Index of Authors Cited, even though the French edition also lacks this? Those who can read French would do well to buy the original (still available at about 26s.). Meanwhile it is to be hoped that Messrs. Burns and Oates will realise the generally accepted responsibilities of modern religious publishing by adding a proper system of reference to any future printing.

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