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Review: The Gospel according to Matthew

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The Gospel According to Matthew, by Leon Morris. Pillar New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992. Pp. xvii + 781. \$39.95.

As Leon Morris draws near to 80 years old, it is an appropriate time to reflect upon his second contribution to the Pillar N.T.C. (see his *Romans* [1988]) in the light of his long and illustrious career as a New Testament commentator and theologian. In a career spanning over half a century, Morris has published over 40 books. Particularly because of his contributions to such important evangelical biblical resources as the *Tyndale New Testament* (and *Old Testament*, see his "Ruth" [1968]) *Commentaries*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* and the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, there are very few serious conservative Bible students today who are *not* consistently in his debt. Add to that his ongoing role as the revision series editor for the *Tyndale N.T. Commentaries*, and the astounding scope of his influence on NT scholarship today begins to come clearly into focus.

When we home in more closely on Morris' work in the Gospels, it is realized that Morris' *Matthew* represents his third major work on a different gospel. His massive volume on John appeared in the NICNT series in 1971. Then his smaller work on *Luke* was published in the TNTC in 1974. In today's hyper-specialized scholarly climate, it is little short of amazing that one man could combine this kind of range with exegetical depth and (at least, substantial) awareness of the necessary primary and secondary research to date.

The other interesting angle is that Morris has not (yet) published a major work on Mark. Perhaps this merely reflects the way that the invitations to contribute to a series came to him. Still, it certainly cuts across the grain of 20th century NT scholarship's fascination with the Gospel of Mark (mostly via Markan priority). The bottom line here is that it is possible to make serious contributions to Gospel studies (even Synoptic studies) in our day without specializing in, then playing everything off, Mark (and, often, Q).

Morris is to be commended for vigorously displaying exactly this kind of reserve in his approach to the First Gospel. He sticks closely to the inspired text, rather than consistently engaging in the kind of "synoptic speculation" that has dominated so much of the publication on the first three gospels for longer than this reviewer wishes to remember. May his work prove to be a harbinger of a new generation of close-to-the-text major gospels commentaries!

If anything, Morris' treatment of Matthew is consistently notable more for what it does *not* do than what it does. He refuses to go out on exegetical limbs that cannot be strongly supported from the text. In a scholarly environment where most, like the philosophers Paul met on the Areopagus, are constantly seeking new ideas, this sort of restatement of tried and true orthodox biblical positions will likely be considered bland, if not backward.

It would be a mistake to think that Morris is doing nothing more than saying "Amen!" to his own preconceived notions, however. In most cases, he patiently lists and weighs the plausible and/or historic positions on the passage or issue. This "sifting" process almost always serves him well. Between Morris' command of language, theology, and logic, there is no wasted verbiage, just a relentless pursuit of meaning and truth.

A final characteristic of Morris' *Matthew* is its approachability. With many works this size, just to peruse the introductory material is to feel like you've been sat upon by an elephant. Then you get to the *really heavy* part. By contrast, while Morris' volume feels like 800 pages in your hands, it doesn't in your mind. His style is eminently readable and occasionally quite pastoral. It doesn't come off as heavy and overwhelming, but the content has not been sacrificed.

Having said all this, is there *really* a need for another nearly 800 page commentary on *Matthew*? Certainly, recent works as diverse as Gundry (1982), Carson (1984), Mounce (1985), France (1985), and Davies and Allison, Vol. 1 (1988), all have made their own unique contributions. However, there is still a place, even a *need*, for solid, even-handed readable commentary from a veteran master of the craft.

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The Continuing Voice of Jesus: Christian Prophecy and the Gospel Tradition, by M. Eugene Boring. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. Pp. 303. \$18.95, paper.

This volume is an updated and "remodeled" (for a wider reading audience) version of Boring's *Sayings of the Risen Jesus: Christian Prophecy in the Synoptic Tradition*, published in 1982 in the prestigious Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series. The author, recently appointed as Professor of New Testament at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, has extensive background in this field through ongoing participation in Society of Biblical Literature seminars and other published articles, as well as his commentary on *Revelation* in the Interpretation series (John Knox, 1989).

Professor Boring's work is a rigorously consistent, if not exhaustive, example of recent New Testament critical scholarship that evangelicals should analyze with care. As in most of such cases, it is a field of "wheat and tares," with some of each "harvested" later in this review. However, before proceeding, two foundational points deserve explanation.

The first is a helpful clarification regarding the meaning of "prophecy" in this book (and throughout Scripture). Many evangelicals have tended to be preoccupied with the predictive aspect of biblical prophecy. However, Boring correctly broadens the concept to include directly inspired speech toward the end of "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (1 Cor 14:3). He does not deny the eschatological "bottom line" of prophetic speech, but emphasizes primarily the role of prophets and their prophecies in shaping the wording of the Gospels (though the Fourth Gospel is handled only in passing) in general.

That leads to the second point of explanation. As necessary a corrective as Boring's expanded definition of prophecy is, his unquestioned critical methodology is a subjective exercise in undermining the straightforward