

**A HISTORICAL EXAMINATION
OF SOME NON-MARKAN
ELEMENTS IN LUKE; A
DISSERTATION, PP. 523-597**

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by Ernest William Parsons

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The University of Chicago

A HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF
SOME NON-MARKAN ELE-
MENTS IN LUKE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS
AND LITERATURE IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(GRADUATE DIVINITY SCHOOL: DEPARTMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT
AND EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE)

BY

ERNEST WILLIAM PARSONS

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Rec. M. V. P. 12-18-39

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INTRODUCTION

The discovery and recognition of the practical or functional element in the writings of both Old and New Testaments have produced results of great value for the interpretation of these books. As long as the approach was from the standpoint of absolutism—that is, as long as the statements which the writings contained were considered valid and true *per se*, as well as authoritative and equally applicable to all time and to every conceivable circumstance—so long did formidable difficulties arise on almost every page the scholar examined. It is not claimed that the application of the principle of pragmatic interest has solved all the problems or laid all the specters, but it is contended that no scientific interpretation is possible where the immediate circumstances of the writing, with regard both to the writer and to those to whom the document was directed, are ignored.

A brief review of some of the New Testament writings will serve to illustrate and establish the position. The correspondence of Paul with the Corinthian church presents almost innumerable difficulties if an attempt is made to interpret it apart from a definite problem-situation. As long as the thought of universal validity was maintained the difficult passages, such as speaking with tongues, eating of meats, the suggestions regarding marriage, the conduct of women in public worship, either were passed by lightly, received fanciful explanations, or were rendered grotesque by an attempted application of them unchanged to the differing conditions of another age. The recognition of the definite purposes and aims of this correspondence not only has cleared up many perplexing statements, but has enhanced the religious value of the letters for modern life. The reality of the problems of that day, the primitive ideas, the crude yet splendid attempts at readjustment of old and new on the part of this church, as well as the sanity and insight of the great apostle, emerge with considerable clearness when viewed from the strictly historical side.

The strange atmosphere of the Colossian letter, especially in the sphere of christological thought and statement, is exceedingly difficult apart from a knowledge and recognition of the definite aim which the writer had before him. The differences between this letter and those generally acknowledged to be Pauline are so marked as to have occasioned grave questioning as to whether the apostle could have produced

it. The recognition of the incipient heresy with its peculiar characteristics against which the writer so stoutly contended has furnished the key to the situation, and, although we may not know all we wish to know concerning the sect at Colossae, enough is known to explain why the theological thinking of the apostle manifests this rather sharp turn.

The Roman letter is but poorly understood until we remember the bitter conflicts and bitterer experiences which had fallen to the lot of the author while he labored in the East. His work practically completed there,¹ this missionary-statesman, with visions of western worlds to conquer, in which campaign Rome as a base of operations was almost indispensable, pens the document which is to introduce him to the church in that city and forestall those opponents who hung upon him so tenaciously. Approached in this way, much of the letter becomes luminous.

Few, if any, of the books of the New Testament have given rise to so many baffling questions, have suffered so many fantastic interpretations, as that which closes the Canon. The history of its interpretation is full of interest² but that is not our concern here. It was not until indications of a definite situation were discovered and expressions which disclosed the purpose of the writer in connection with this situation were noted that any real progress in the comprehension of the Apocalypse was made. If this book is read in the light of the Domitian persecution, the rare faith and fine courage of the author bear a message which cannot fail to be of effect.

The First Epistle of John is in danger of sad misunderstanding unless it is recognized that it was written to combat certain errors which the author considered serious. Hostility to Docetic Gnosticism which was developing along the lines of aristocracy and libertinism was without doubt one of the determining factors in the composition of this letter. Not to remember this and not to allow for it is to miss the original meaning of its composer.

So far little exception will be taken to our statements. In fact it would not be a difficult matter to show that all the epistolary literature of the New Testament was produced by problem-situations more or less definite. But what of the gospels—those fountain-heads of our knowledge of Jesus? Has the pressure of circumstances been operative there? Do these gospels with their resemblances and differences arise from definite situations which have determined their material and

¹ Rom. 15:23.

² See von Dobschütz, *The Eschatology of the Gospels*, pp. 39-60; H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, pp. cciii-ccxv; R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*.

colored its presentation to a greater or less degree? It is coming to be, if it is not already, generally recognized that this is true in a striking way of the Fourth Gospel. The points of dissonance and disagreement between it and the Synoptics are seen to be very largely the result of definite situations and aims which controlled its production. To take but one example: the representation of John the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel with its peculiar and striking dissimilarities to the Synoptic picture is wonderfully well explained as a polemic against a Johannine sect which preferred claims for its founder that made him a rival of the Christ.¹ It can scarcely be gainsaid that the Fourth Gospel is a pragmatic work, and in the light of this admitted fact it must be interpreted.²

As to the Synoptics, the answer is not so clear nor so unanimous. There have been statements as to the purposes of these gospels, but they are general purposes only and throw but little light on many of the problems. It is true that Luke gives a statement of purpose in his preface,³ but it carries us only a short distance on our way. Of Mark some are content to say that he sets forth the public career of Jesus with little or no conscious argumentative purpose;⁴ others, however, detect a more or less definite purpose. One is justified in saying that it was written for purposes of propaganda and not as critical history. With regard to Matthew it is generally said that his aim is to show that Jesus is the Old Testament Messiah founding the kingdom which after Jewish rejection is thrown open to all. Sometimes a definite situation is suggested, but rarely with assurance. It is in the very nature of things that there should be a greater amount of indefiniteness in discovering the exact purpose of the Synoptics, assuming for the moment that they have more than a general one. In the first place, the narrative and biographical material which they use serves at times to make the discovery of purpose difficult. The charm of the narrative diverts the attention and only by careful searching can such purpose be detected. In the second place, these writers are using for a later period stories of a past or passing generation, and sayings that ostensibly were spoken by a person of a past generation in view of situations which confronted him at the time of speaking. The matter is further complicated by the

¹ As to the existence of such a sect, cf. Acts 19:1-5, and p. 44.

² Note the specific aim of the Fourth Gospel as stated in 20:31. For a statement of the aims of the Fourth Gospel, cf. E. F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel*, pp. 65-103; Baldensperger, *Der Prolog des vierten Evangeliums*.

³ Luke 1:1-4.

⁴ Cf. Ernest D. Burton, *A Short Introduction to the Gospels*, pp. 33-40.

use of sources which in all probability themselves took form in whole or in part in response to immediate needs in the early Christian communities. It is not required for the purposes of this essay to trace this matter farther here. The pragmatism of the Synoptics, while highly probable and generally admitted, is discoverable only after a patient and somewhat minute examination. But its discovery, even with what lack of definiteness may attach to it, has been of value and will be increasingly so in the determination of origin and date.

The point of the foregoing partial survey has been merely to show the existence, and that generally of a specific and definite purpose in the New Testament writings. They were not written merely because an author wished to produce. They did not aim—in nearly all cases—to be historical works, at least, primarily. They were rather writings pressed out in the heat of controversy, struck out by the blows of the militant young religion as it met its foes and thrust back its frontiers, and sometimes called forth by the pain and mystery of persecution. That is to say, they were produced in some definite historical situation and to meet some specific need which is reflected more or less clearly on their pages.

If the books of the New Testament as they now stand are found on examination to manifest practical aims which help in their interpretation and elucidation, is there any valid reason against carrying back the process to the sources of these books where such sources are discoverable? Will it not yield the same assistance in regard to these sources as it has yielded in regard to the books themselves? This has been done in a measure in the case of the Apocalypse. The remains of an older Jewish apocalypse, some Christian apocalyptic reflecting the time of Nero, and later additions from the time of Domitian, have been thought by some to be discoverable there. But we are in a better position in the matter of the discovery of sources with respect to the First and Third Gospels than with respect to any other books in the Canon. The use of Mark by each, the statement of Luke himself, and the comparison of the non-Markan sections of these gospels yield us results which cannot be obtained elsewhere in our field. There is no need to detail or even to outline the work that has been done on the literary relationships of the Synoptics. Our concern is not with that. The purpose of this essay is to submit some of the non-Markan material of the Third Gospel to an examination from the historical and problem-situation standpoints, with a view to discovering the interests which lay behind the formation of the tradition and thus to gain a knowledge of the provenance of such tradition and the date at which it probably took form.