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The New Testament: A Personal Interpretation: The Power and Wisdom

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understand—and hopefully, to overcome—the peculiarly Philippine reasons for the divisions which separate us. Professor Gowing's modest and tentative offering of his book as 'first-aid' towards an ecumenical history of the Philippine Church has encouraged this reviewer to comment freely in the hopes of contributing to a fuller achievement of the end sought by its author, particularly if, as is likely, it will have further editions. It is to be hoped that Roman Catholic scholars will not only contribute to filling the many gaps in historical investigation which have made difficult Professor Gowing's work, but will likewise adopt his ecumenical approach to the history of the Philippine Church.

JOHN N. SCHUMACHER, S.J.

THE NEW TESTAMENT: A PERSONAL INTERPRETATION

THE POWER AND WISDOM: An Interpretation of the New Testament. By John L. McKenzie, S.J. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965. xvi, 300 pp.

The author of this book, who is the most well-known Catholic biblical scholar in the United States and a prolific writer, hardly needs any introduction. Father McKenzie has been shifting his focus and field of interest from the Old to the New Testament and has shown his grasp of the vast literature and insoluble problems in both fields in his monumental *Dictionary of the Bible*, a veritable tour de force in this day of necessary specialization due to the sheer output of scholarly publications. The present title is a companion volume to *The Two-Edged Sword* (which has gone through many reprintings and is now in a paperback edition) and is a similar type of book. Though regrettably delayed, this review is not really late since the lasting value of this book merits constant attention.

This is not a NT introduction in the classical sense, explaining each of the NT books, offering essays on historical and archeological background, literary forms, biblical theology, etc. Nor is it really an introductory volume. Rather it presupposes a familiarity with the NT and at least a passing acquaintance with the more important current problems of exegesis. In coming to an exegetical fork in the road, M. always and expectedly chooses the more liberal modern path. But he does not stop with NT interpretation; he proceeds to apply it in general terms—sometimes in particular—to perennial and present situations. From one aspect the book could be termed an introduction to NT theology, but since it deals with so many NT elements, themes, realities and includes reflections on the failure of Christians to live

up to the NT message and ideal, the author more appropriately describes it as a "personal interpretation," stated with as much persuasion as he could muster, and invites criticism to be uttered "with the same freedom with which the interpretation is written."

The first two chapters deal with historical and literary background. M. provides thumb-nail sketches of the Roman empire, its Hellenistic culture, its mystery religions and stoic philosophy, and then Judaism with its emphasis on the Law and its politico-religious parties. In the literary section, M. masterfully highlights the oral background of the Gospels as the proclamation, the reflectively expanded proclamation in the written Gospels, the Church's authority behind them, and their nature. Their literary form, much like the revolutionary events which they proclaim, is highly singular, since they cannot be classified simply as biography or apologetics or theology or even history. Their origin in the individual stories or sayings of Jesus which the primitive Church adapted to the particular needs and problems of the time is fundamental for understanding the Gospels as a witness to the apostolic faith. We come to a knowledge of Jesus only through the apostolic proclamation and the teaching of the primitive Church. All is based on a faith that was adult and sturdy and reinforced by the Resurrection and Pentecost.

The content of the NT message makes up most of the remaining chapters. M. explains the coming Kingdom of God which Jesus preached, its demands of total repentance and a new life, its eschatological ambiguity, its relation to the Church. Many OT figures are seen fulfilled and perfected in Jesus and by Him: the Messiah king, the Judge, the Servant of the Lord, the Son of Man. In these the mystery of Jesus' person in Himself and in His embodiment of Israel is outlined and illuminated.

The saving act of Jesus is complex; it is both the death and resurrection together, and the power of love revealed in Jesus allows the Christian to share that saving event and to live a new life in Christ. In baptism by which the new man is born, the transformation effected is no less revolutionary than the final resurrection itself when the Christ-life in the Christian reaches maturity.

The new, eternal life given the Christian enables him to "know" God intimately and each of the Divine Persons specially. The requirements of this new life are repentance, belief, baptism, and of course the Eucharist as a means of sustaining it. The Christian moral revolution effected by this life manifests itself in terms of love. Paradoxically and provokingly, M. says that the NT "more frequently tells us that the Christian should be Christ than that the Christian should imitate Christ.... One lives in Christ not by aping him, but in the manner described in Philippians 2:5-7. The Christian lives Christ when he shares in Christ's passion and death in the way in which God commits this share to him. Imitation could be again a

question of isolated acts; identification with Christ touches the root of the acts, the principles by which one habitually judges and decides." There is indeed food for thought.

The chapters on the Church likewise emphasize the bond between the various orders and between the members as the power of love. The leadership exerted by Church leaders is one of love and service as much as, if not more than, that of authority. The description of episcopal collegiality is stimulating; the problem of anti-semitism and anti-Judaism in the NT has always been tantalizing. M.'s provocative and brief treatment whets the appetite for fuller fare. The presentation of the Judaizing crisis as a narrow, nationalistic refusal to allow a gentile frame of thought and culture correctly underlines the Church's present insistence on openness to other cultures and religions, particularly in Asia.

M. concludes with chapters on the Church and State, approaches to God, demythologizing. If he has made scattered homiletic reflections in earlier chapters, here his applications are more extensive, and, one might say, occasionally offensive.

This brings us now to a brief criticism of the book which the author expressly invites. At times oversimplifications, such as Christ's and the Christian's unconcern for material goods and the immorality of war could have profited by modification or at least clarification. But M.'s style which is incisive and sharp can also be biting. "Behind all the [Christian] political ethics of defense and security, one can see the cornered rat with fangs bared." Less defensible is the disparaging tone—withstanding the author's protests of objectivity—in contrasting biblical prayer with the rosary, devotion to the Sacred Heart, the contemplative life. Church leaders also receive their share for abuse of power. The abuse of authority, "spiritual snobbery," and the exaggerated esteem of popular devotions are real evils in the Church. They have always been and they will continue to be. Whether or not they should loom so large on the horizon in a NT interpretation may be a matter of opinion, or of taste. At any rate the latter chapters are not as eirenic nor as objective as one would have expected from the tenor of the rest of the book.

M. has given his readers in *The Power and the Wisdom* a truly thought-provoking and challenging book. The criticisms above should not detract from its value, but should indicate the formation and mature outlook helpful for prospective readers. This book is not a NT introduction. It is to be hoped that in later printings—and there should be several—a new edition will appear with the rough spots smoothed out. There would then be no reason why this volume could not be as challenging, objective and enjoyable as the author's popular *Two-Edged Sword*.

PHILIP J. CALDERONE, S.J.