

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

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## Recent Reviews of a Life of Christ

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 8 no. 2 (1960): 411–415

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Atty. Ramon Binamira, technical assistant to the President on community development and speaker at the Third Plenary Session, gave a detailed account of how the PACD mobilized community resources in keeping with its mission to bring social justice to the rural areas. The PACD, according to Mr. Binamira, is deeply concerned with the elimination of the social and political factors which hinder progress and aggravate rural poverty. Among these are archaic land tenure systems, the pressure of the rural population upon the presently available land base, the absence of adequate public administration, and the lack of progressive leadership at top government levels.

The PACD uses the total or coordinated approach to the solution of rural poverty, designed to awaken in the barrio people a desire to improve their living standards and to develop in them the confidence that improvements are attainable. The government through the PACD furnishes assistance on a first-aid-technician basis in matters of improved farm practices, road construction, water supply, local government and other barrio problems. One of its outstanding features is the so-called grants-in-aid program. The government makes available funds in the form of materials to barrio projects on a first-come-first-served basis. Among the conditions are that the people contribute at least 50% of the cost of the project in the form of cash, materials, land or labor and that the people bind themselves to maintain a project after it is completed. The effectiveness of this approach can be seen from the record ₱25-million worth of projects completed during 1956-1959, ₱13 million of this amount coming from the people directly.

The PACD strengthens local governments by delegating the responsibility for development projects to the people themselves. They come in close contact with their governments and are thus encouraged to take an active interest in its affairs. This is conducive to better citizenship.

The conference was divided into four study groups holding discussions on health, employment, minimum standard of living, welfare of children, and rehabilitation of the handicapped. The opening day of the conference was attended by dignitaries and representatives of agencies whose functions are closely related to social services.

DORIS F. CALLEJA

### *Recent Reviews of a Life Of Christ*

About the *Life of Christ* of Andrés Fernández Truyols, S.J., the publisher proudly quoted a statement of Msgr. John S. Kennedy: "A tremendous abundance of learning is comprehensively presented so as

to afford a more penetrating appreciation of the Gospel in its smallest incidents and as a grand whole . . . The book deserves to be ranked with the finest of its kind." The book in question was first published in Spanish in 1948. A second edition appeared in 1954, and it is this which has been rendered into English by Paul Barrett, O.F.M. Cap., and ranked among the finest by Msgr. Kennedy.

Not all reviewers, however, extended to it so warm a welcome. At least two were positively frigid. Their strictures will undoubtedly strike many readers as over-severe. But the severity is deliberate. One admits as much in his conclusion: "If the present reviewer," he writes, "has been hard on this book it is because of the wide circulation it will have in this country as spiritual reading. Its deficiencies should be made obvious. Is it really a service to the faithful to refuse the genuine advances of biblical science for fear of disturbing their piety?"

What are the deficiencies referred to?

The two reviewers, G. Sloyan in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959) 230, and N.J. McEleney, C.S.P., in *Theological Studies* 20 (1959) 287, are in substantial agreement. The basic defect which both find in Father Fernández' book is that it is not up-to-date. "This is a long and detailed volume, redolent of another era in New Testament studies" (Sloyan). "By now exegetes everywhere should be aware of the limitations upon the classic genre *Life of Christ*. Apparently Fernández is not" (McEleney). And Father Fernández (this surely is *too severe*) is charged with "downright ignorance regarding modern critical studies of the Gospels" (McEleney). His book "must be considered retrograde both in the areas of scholarship and piety" (Sloyan).

More specifically, it is claimed that the book fails to take into account the "literary genre" of the Gospels, making of them records more rigidly historical than the evangelists ever intended them to be. "If anything has become clear in recent decades it is that the gospels are primarily theological works. The corollary to this is not that they are unhistorical, but that the historical questions of time and place, or the force of a given phrase, are often completely subordinated to the evangelist's purpose" (Sloyan). "Like his predecessors, Prat, Ricciotti et al., F. constructs a chronological picture of our Lord's life against the background of Palestinian history and geography. To achieve this he harmonizes the Gospels rigorously, and maintains an overstrict correspondence between the texts and reality, lest historicity suffer" (McEleney).

Father Fernández is also censured for adhering to now generally abandoned theories of authorship. The book "is almost certain to continue the known hardships of presenting the case for the literary forms which underlie the gospel composition by assuming as true theories of authorship which are adhered to by increasingly fewer scholars." (Sloyan). "The reader is told that Matthew's sources are 'his own ex-

periences as an eyewitness of almost everything he wrote about, and the body of oral tradition that very soon began to form' (p. 47). He learns that Mark's Gospel has no plan beyond 'writing the good tidings' which he found stereotyped as it were in the teaching of Peter (p. 48). Luke alone specifically proposed to hand down to us the Gospel story in the same sequence in which it developed. Though F. qualifies this a bit, he retains the opinion that Luke's general purpose was to write 'by following the objective succession of events' (p. 50)" (McEleney).

Thus far the reviewers.

The first appearance of Father Fernández's *Life of Christ* in 1948 does not seem to have evoked such sharp criticism as is levelled at it in the two reviews listed above. Normally, a decade ought not to affect the value of a book very much, particularly if its subject matter is in a field so ancient and well-worked as that of Sacred Scripture. The ten years just elapsed, however, have not by any means been an ordinary decade for biblical studies. The period has been one of exceptionally intense activity, amounting at times to turmoil. The greatest disturbance, if we may call it that, was occasioned by the discovery in 1947 of the ancient library of Qumran in the caves along the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. But even before that an angel had come to stir the biblical waters in the guise of an encyclical letter from Pope Pius XII, entitled *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. The letter encouraged Catholic scholars to pursue without trepidation some of the new avenues of approach to the study of the bible which research had opened up since the turn of the century.

The activity which ensued, and the advances made, have been altogether extraordinary. Nevertheless, troubled waters are seldom clear. It must be admitted that not sufficient time has elapsed for many of the new positions to acquire precision. Nor have they as yet assumed that solidity and hard coating of certainty which is a guarantee of enduring permanence. The state of questions concerning the origin, authorship and sources of the Gospels is still extremely fluid. No definitive solution of the Synoptic Problem has as yet been found. And there is perceptible shifting of positions even on such a fundamental problem as the dates of composition of the New Testament writings. For example, although non-Catholic critics tended to assign rather late dates to the composition of the Gospels, the vast majority of Catholic scholars dated the Synoptic Gospels before 70 A.D. Now, however, we are witnessing something of a reversal. The Bible of Jerusalem and one of the most recent Catholic Introductions to the New Testament, that of Wikenhauser, manifest a willingness to accept dates after 70 A.D. for the final redaction of at least two of the Synoptics; whereas the non-Catholic Albright has on more than one occasion, and with the evident intent of pressing the point and provoking discussion, asserted that in the light of the discoveries at Qumran, Chenoboskion, etc., there is no reason for dating any of the New Testament writings after 70 A.D.

Consequently, while not denying Father Fernández's ultra-conservatism, is it not possible to consider his position with a little more sympathetic understanding? Though aware of the progress made in the biblical sciences, he may have felt justified in not radically revising his second edition in view of the fact that he was writing not for specialists but for a popular audience, and also because the advance positions so splendidly won by modern biblical research have not yet been sufficiently clarified and consolidated.

Again, although Father Fernández may treat the Gospels as if they belonged to a strictly historical genre, he was surely aware that the evangelists did not intend to write biographies of Christ in the strict sense of the word. In the first edition of his *Vida de Jesucristo* he writes: "Los evangelistas no quisieron darnos una historia seguida y completa, y harto sabido es con qué dificultades tropieza el intento de armonizar los cuatro evangelios. Nosotros nos atendremos a la sucesión de los hechos que después de largo estudio y seria consideración nos parece mejor fundada y daremos oportunamente sobre todo en los casos más discutidos, las razones de nuestra preferencia."

But that leads to a problem wider in scope.

Is it wrong to attempt to reconstruct a biography of Christ from the data furnished by the Gospels? Since they did not intend to write a *Life of Christ*, are we not misrepresenting them when we force their accounts into a strictly biographical mold? A recent article has proposed the problem in these terms: "Difficulties and misunderstandings may arise from the *Lives of Christ* which have made such a magnificent contribution to our understanding of Christ. A false impression may be created that a precise day-by-day account of Christ's comings and goings with irreproachable chronological and topographical details is provided by the Gospels. This would be conceived as the main thing to look for in the Gospels . . . the obvious danger is the imposition on the Gospels of a purpose and mentality that is not necessarily theirs."

The eminent Dominican, M. J. Lagrange, O.P., after long years of scriptural study and research evidenced reluctance to handle the Gospels in this way a quarter of a century ago. In the introduction to his *Gospel of Jesus Christ* he wrote: "I have given up all idea of presenting a *Life of Jesus* of the usual kind, preferring to leave the gospels more opportunity for speaking for themselves. They are inadequate as historical documents for writing a history of Jesus in the way in which a modern author would write the history of Caesar Augustus or Cardinal Richelieu; but such is their value as a reflection of the life and teaching of Jesus, such their sincerity and beauty, that in the presence of their inspired words, one despairs of any other attempt to produce the life of Jesus. The gospels themselves are the only life that can be written. Nothing remains but for us to understand them as well as we can."

If the result of such an attitude — an attitude which undoubtedly influenced the two reviews discussed above — is to get more people to read the Gospels themselves, it will have borne splendid fruit. Yet it might also give rise to an excessively critical spirit. Surely there is still a place, provided the proper limitations are observed, for harmonies of the Gospels and biographies of Christ. Such works will always involve personal, conjectural reconstructions on the part of the author of the topographical and chronological framework of the events in the life of Christ. But it is difficult to see how any great harm can come of that. The evangelists themselves exercised considerable liberty in arranging our Lord's works and words to suit their own purposes. May not a modern author, even though ungraced by the charism of inspiration, follow the example they have set?

J. J. KAVANAGH, S.J.

### *The Mother Butler Guilds*

In the field of the lay apostolate there emerged four years ago a type of work for Catholic women quite different from those ordinarily known, such as teaching catechism, supporting free schools and charity clinics, fighting adverse labor legislation or visiting and counseling inmates of hospitals or welfare institutions. It is a very domestic and prosaic endeavor which makes use of the needle and thread and which involves the sewing of church vestments and altar linen. This evidently is not new in the sense that it has not been attempted before. It is new only in the sense that this is the first time, in the Philippines at least, that it was launched as an organized movement. The organization which promotes this kind of apostolate is known as the Mother Butler Mission Guilds.

The organization began at Marymount College in New York late in 1940 after the death of Mother Mary Joseph Butler, Superior General of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. An outstanding trait of this extraordinary woman was her great charity for the home and foreign missions. It was thus with the intent of propagating and perpetuating this charity that the Mother Butler Mission Guilds came into being.

The Guilds succeeded well in this intent; so well in fact that today the organization and its beneficiaries can be found almost anywhere in the world. Some missionaries in the remote parts of Mindanao claim to have been recipients of the Guilds' charity long before the establishment of the local Guilds.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this organization should take root in the Philippines. What began as playful banter over the use of needle and thread became, to the surprise of the protagonists