

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bq\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php)

## Reviews

G. R. Beasley-Murray: *Baptism in the New Testament*. 424 pp. 50s. Macmillan.

The Principal of Spurgeon's College has put us all in his debt by his full and weighty discussion of every text in the New Testament with any direct bearing on the theology and practice of baptism. An Anglican who is in no sense a specialist in New Testament studies must have diffidence in reviewing this, especially in this place. First of all he must bear witness not only to the immense trouble that has evidently been taken to do justice to the views of scholars in every Western tradition, including Roman Catholics, but also to the balanced reserve, so far as he can judge, of Dr. Beasley-Murray's own exegesis.

That there should be some relation between the making of proselytes to Judaism and of converts to Christianity, both in the method of instruction and in the manner of reception, is at any rate inherently probable. It does not follow that Christian baptism, or the baptism of John, is a direct development from the baptism of proselytes. The absence of evidence for Jewish baptisms before the New Testament may be an historical accident, but it has some weight. Dr. Beasley-Murray seems to me perfectly justified in insisting on the radical difference between the place of baptism in Jewish and Christian initiation. The baptism of John, which he is disposed to interpret as a symbolic action, an acted prophecy, may bear some relation to the lustrations of Qumran, but "there is no point at which contact can be found between John's baptism and proselyte baptism." (p. 42.)

In the discussion that follows of "the foundations of Christian baptism," based on a careful analysis of texts, I find myself sometimes in doubt whether particular passages are not too narrowly applied to baptism in water where the apostle has in mind the whole process of conversion, and the incorporation of new Christians into the body of Christ by baptism and communion. It may be indeed a mistake to treat *I Corinthians* 10: 1-4 as "instruction on the nature of the sacraments" (p. 181), but it seems to me difficult to deny the eucharistic reference of the whole passage down to 12: 13. This has at any rate some significance for the relationship between later developments in the practice of Christian initiation

and the understanding of baptism in the New Testament in terms that include the eucharist.

In his last chapter on "the rise and significance of infant baptism" and in his postscript on "Baptismal reform and inter-church relations" Dr. Beasley-Murray passes outside the strict field of New Testament studies. His judgment within that field commands respect, if not complete assent. I am especially impressed with his contention that *I Corinthians 7:14* cannot possibly refer to a practice in any way analagous with proselyte baptism, but is rather an argument against the baptism of children in the Corinthian church at the time.

What Dr. Beasley-Murray seems to me to have missed is the difference between three kinds of baptism of infants:

1. The baptism and first communion of very young children, often but not always infants in arms, who were baptized with adult converts, but not subjected to the elaborate exorcisms of the catechumenate, at any rate from some time in the second century.

2. The clinical baptism of infants in the first week of life. This seems to have become the African custom, diffused in the West by the influence of S. Augustine, who saw in the practice of infant baptism conclusive evidence of original guilt. Infants thus baptized underwent the subordinate ceremonies at the blessing of the font at Easter or Pentecost, but very few were baptized in church in the West in the Middle Ages.

3. Infant baptism in the face of the Church as this was restored by the Reformers, often but not always with the implication that the symbolic meaning is more important than the effect on the particular infant.

Of these only the first is relevant to historical questions relating to the practice of the first Christians. Only the second and third are relevant to the controversies of the Reformation and since. As an historian, I agree with Dr. Beasley-Murray that "pressures . . . upon the Church from within and from without" (p. 352) played a large part in the development of the baptism of children into infant baptism, but I see this pressure primarily in terms of the difficulty of sending the baby home when the catechumens were dismissed. The clues are in the Eastern practice of baptizing infants when their mothers are ready to make their communion in church. In some Eastern communities children who die unbaptized before this are sanctified by their mother, who may not nurse her baptized children before her purification. Objections to the communion of infants were met in the West by the separation of baptism and first communion, but baptism in the East still means both (and chrismation). So I believe the early Church understood the New Testament, rightly or wrongly.

GEORGE EVERY, S.S.M.

C. F. D. Moule: *The Birth of the New Testament*. 252 pp. 25s.  
A. & C. Black.

This is the first of the companion volumes to Black's N.T. Commentaries. It is the kind of book which has been crying out to be written for many a long day. For there are still people who speak and think as if the N.T. is primarily a literary work, as if, to put it naïvely, the writers sat down round a table and said, "Now let's write the N.T." But we are dealing here, as the title of Professor Moule's book says, with "birth"—not with production. There is, of course, a manner of dealing with the physiological "facts" of birth which removes the mystery and the wonder. There are also Introductions to the Literature of the N.T. which deal with the "mechanics" of the process by which the N.T. came into being. They examine the N.T., book by book, dealing with questions of authorship, date, destination, etc. All most necessary, but it sometimes leaves one gasping with wonder at the erudition, and, occasionally, at the ingenuity of the writer himself.

"Is this not a miracle of the Spirit?" exclaims Professor Moule near the end of the book. And that is the proper reaction to a scholarly, careful, and reverent enquiry into this "birth." It brings us to our knees before the sheer mystery and wonder of it. Professor Moule has many interesting and valuable things to say about the usual problems of N.T. Introduction, but the "mechanics" or physiological "facts" with which he deals are the circumstances and needs of the worshipping, witnessing, suffering Church. "Probably at no stage within the N.T. period did a writer put pen to paper without the incentive of a pressing need." He enquires into the origins of the N.T., not book by book, but, so to speak, need by need: "The Church at Worship"; "The Church Explains Itself"—which is sub-divided into (1) "Stages of Self-Awareness" (i.e., in relation to Israel), (2) "The Use of the Jewish Scriptures," (3) "The Gospels and Acts" (The Gospels are "aids to Christians in explaining their faith and defending it when occasion offered"), (4) "The Reign of Christ" (dealing with the derisive question "Where is your Messiah?"); "The Church under Attack"; Building the Superstructure and Consolidating"; "Variety and Uniformity in the Church"; "Collecting and Sifting the Documents" (i.e., the Canon).

Here is one of many jewels: "N.T. eschatology at its deepest level concentrates upon entering into, implementing, loyally expressing that which is already given, which is Christ; it does not say, 'How long will it be before the whistle blows 'no side'?' but, 'Where ought I to be now, to receive the next pass?' In other words, the fact that the kick-off has taken place, that the game is on, and that we have a Captain who can lead us to victory, is all that matters."

This cursory glance at the chapter headings may convey the impression that the author is maintaining that the Church, and its needs, were the determining factors in the making of the N.T. True this book is a child of "form criticism." Nevertheless, as Professor Moule observes, "a good many of the assumptions that frequently go with form-criticism have been discarded or qualified" in his book. Right at the beginning we meet with the much-needed caveat that "our professors are in danger of crying worship, worship where there is no worship." And one thing clearly emerges from each chapter—that, while the N.T. undoubtedly took its genesis, humanly speaking, from the questions that were asked in those early days (by the Church and its opponents, and by enquirers like Theophilus), it was Jesus Himself who, through the Holy Spirit, brought the Church and the Jewish and Gentile world not only into the position of needing answers but also (more important) of needing to put the questions. Characteristic is the statement that "the dominant use (of scripture) was as compared with its Jewish antecedents—a quite new and convincing one: and the best explanation for this is that it was derived from the Lord himself." Or again, after a convincing picture of the wide range of Christian doctrine and practice with which a traveller from Jerusalem to Ephesus would meet, say, in A.D. 60, we are confronted (all the more because of this variety which some exponents of N.T. unity are apt to overlook) with an equally convincing demonstration that "its various writings speak with a remarkably unanimous voice of a single Gospel and of one Lord." Yes, indeed, a "miracle of the Spirit."

Professor Moule closes with a plea for the "ethical translation of the Gospel" in our own day, and urges that this "translation" must be carried out in the same manner as were the Christian ethical decisions of the first century—through "informed discussion, prophetic insight, ecstatic fire—all in the context of the worshipping, and also discriminating, assembly, met with the good news in Jesus Christ behind them, the Spirit among them, and before them the expectation of being led forward into the will of God."

To the interesting list of contrasts between circumcision and Christian baptism on pp. 48-50 we would add—the need of faith.

W. E. MOORE

R. W. Thomson and J. E. T. Hough: *The Service of our Lives*. 120 pp. 6. 6d. S.C.M. Press

The co-authors of this excellent little book, who need no introduction here, lead into their main theme with a chapter on "The Affluent Society" which gives a vivid sketch and interpretation of society, at least, as we know it. This provides the broad and contrasting background to our thinking on Christian Stewardship which is summarized in Chapter 2 as "the sustained, sacrificial and

systematic offering of time, abilities and material possessions of all kinds, in the belief that they are a trust from God to be used according to his will, for the good of his world-wide family in response to the redeeming love made known most perfectly in Jesus Christ."

For Chapters 3 and 4 a couple of arresting headings have been found under which to discuss time and talents, namely "Consecrating the Clock" and "Frozen Credits or Working Capital." The writers may begin with the man who, upon retiring at 65, found he had spent 22 years in bed asleep, but go on to say valuable things about finding the correct proportion of time for the right ingredients in the mixture of daily life in work and leisure, emphasizing, and giving practical advice about, the vital things for which a Christian must "make time" (e.g., Bible study, prayer and thought).

The fourth chapter is concerned with the stewardship of "skills with which we have been endowed" and in the realm of Christian service in the community "large pastoral opportunities" are indicated for people who fulfil the condition of sharing in Holy Communion—"to be in love and charity with your neighbours"—and who care for the lives of others and who are ready to fill the gaps in the "social service state" by informed and "personal" co-operation with professional workers. (A note on the "Southbridge experiment" in Birmingham might have been helpful here.)

In thirteen pages the writers manage to cover an amazing amount of the Biblical teaching on possessions offering a number of clues to some of the sayings of Jesus and Paul. Schemes for Christian Stewardship are described briefly and sources for more detailed information documented. The writers can commend all the schemes they mention (with words of warning about professional firms) but stress planning in detail, adequate Biblical teaching, the need for well produced literature and the use of the lay forces in the church. What cannot be commended is the continuance of "haphazard methods" without system or teaching.

This book is packed with live material for teaching and proclaiming Christian Stewardship. Not only is it a challenge to individuals to make an "honest and sober" assessment of what they must offer to God but also a challenge to all the churches for which Mr. Thomson and Mr. Hough write, to catalogue the abilities God has given them, to break out of some of the existing patterns of local life and find the stimulus of worthwhile tasks and existing opportunities.

This book is a worthy contribution to the "Living Church" Series and will be read widely—it will do good work in the hands of Church membership enquirers. There is a slight misprint on the last line of page 44.

B. HARRISON

*Oxford Bible Atlas*. Edited by Herbert G. May with the assistance of R. W. Hamilton and G. N. S. Hunt. 144 pp. 21s. Oxford University Press.

Every student of the Bible needs a good Bible Atlas and here is one available at a very modest price. It contains a very brief introductory survey of the history of the Biblical period, four physical maps, twenty historical maps (fifteen for the O.T. and five for the N.T.), two archaeological maps, an article on Archaeology and the Bible, and a Gazetteer.

It is difficult to avoid comparing it with the *Westminster Historical Atlas* and it must be said at once that it has several distinct advantages. It measures only approximately 10 x 8 inches and is consequently easy to handle. Each map has the relevant text on the facing page so that there is no need for frequent turning of pages for reference. The maps showing vegetation and rainfall form a useful section. The relief maps are excellent making the overall picture of the contours of the Bible lands easy to grasp.

In the historical maps these heavy contour features have been fully retained with the result that sometimes the special feature of the map does not stand out as clearly as it might. For instance, the *Westminster Historical Atlas* with its use of colour gives a much clearer view of the settlement of the tribes in Palestine. The trade routes on p. 67 and the Assyrian boundary on p. 71 are faintly marked although these are the points of the maps. The map showing the spread of Christianity does not indicate the route of Paul's journeys although their course is mentioned in the text. On the other hand, the two double page maps of Palestine in O.T. and N.T. times are excellent.

In the Introduction compression has resulted in a somewhat arid account of the struggles between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, but there is a very good section on the Jewish Diaspora which provides an excellent background for the spread of Christianity. The text facing the maps consists of an outline of Biblical material with special references to the places concerned. In the main uncritical, it provides a good commentary on the maps. The article on Archaeology is especially good, showing its relevance to modern Biblical study. The illustrations are well selected and are placed near the appropriate text.

Altogether this is a most useful piece of work and a very handy tool for student, minister or layman who wishes to understand the movements and conditions of the people of God throughout the centuries.

H. MOWVLEY

The Independent Press has published a useful series of biographies in connection with the 1662 celebrations. Each runs to about 20 pages and costs two shillings. Each is called *A Heritage Biography*, and the following people are covered :

John Penry	Vavasor Powell
Joseph Parker	Roger Williams
William Carey	John Goodwin
John Bunyan	John Angell James
Jonathan Scott	Thomas Goodwin
C. H. Spurgeon	Benjamin Keach
The Dissenting Deputies	Robert Browne
Robert Hall	Isaac Watts
John Milton	Barrowe and Greenwood
John Robinson	R. W. Dale
John Howe	Philip Doddridge
Richard Baxter	Andrew Fuller
John Owen	Oliver Cromwell
George Whitefield	Benjamin Waugh

**Other books received include:**

- Olive Parker, *The New Commandment*. 79 pp. 7s. 6d. Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Thomas Gornall, *A Philosophy of God*. 247 pp. 21s. Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Thomas H. Keir, *The Word in Worship*. 150 pp. 15s. Oxford University Press.
- John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Edited by Roger Sharrock. 183 pp. 35s. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press.
- Harry Escott, *Isaac Watts*. 302 pp. 28s. 6d. Independent Press.
- R. Tudor Jones, *Congregationalism in England*, 504 pp. 63s. Independent Press.
- Hugh Montefiore and H. E. W. Turner, *Thomas and the Evangelists*. 128 pp. 10s. 6d. S.C.M. Press.
- E. N. Ducker, *A Christian Therapy for a Neurotic World*. 224 pp. 21s. Allen and Unwin.
- S. H. Hooke, *Babylonian and Assyrian Religion*. 128 pp. 14s. Blackwell.
- Len Addicott, *Cry Angola*. 144 pp. 6s. S.C.M. Press.