Mark 16:9-20 (Paul Wilson) 55817

Christian Truth: Volume 6, R.S.V. and the Jews: The Editor's Column (16:9-20)

Another chapter is being written in that long, tragic history of the Jews. No other people on earth have ever suffered as they, and all under the governmental hand of God; first, for their idolatry in the Old Testament times; second, for their rejection of their Messiah when He came to them in love and grace. From that fateful moment when they clamored for His death, and cried, "His blood be on us, and on our children," judgment was decreed. It was withheld, however, until after they stoned Stephen, and thus "sent a message after Him"-their Christ whom they rejected- "saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." They have been scattered among the nations as prophesied, and they have proved Hos. 8:8 to be true: "Now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure." From time to time they have been persecuted in one nation after another. It is estimated that 6,000,000 Jews were put to death under Hitler, or one out of every three Jews on earth.

Now another systematic program of persecution of that people, "beloved for the fathers' sakes," is gathering momentum in Russia and her satellite countries. Arrests, trials, purges, and afflictions seem to be the order of the day. Truly our hearts grieve over the afflictions of the beloved people, although we know they are reaping for their sin. This is not the first or the second time that the Jews have been persecuted in Russia. The pogroms under the Czars were dreadful, and at another time they were persecuted under the present regime.

There appear to be several reasons for the present outbreak in Communist countries of what is mistakenly called anti-Semitism, for the Jews are only one branch of the Semitic people. (1) Jews are never completely assimilated by any nation; they remain Jews, and as such are bound to have Jewish ties, which in the present instance might be with the Jews in the West. Russia will not tolerate such connections. (2) Russia sees an opportunity to curry favor with former Nazis in Western Germany by oppressing Jews, and thus stir up trouble for the West in that country. (3) Perhaps, most important is her desire to ingratiate herself with the Arab world whose antipathy to the Jew is well known. The whole of the Near East is rumbling with unrest, and Russia would like to bring on chaos to the discomfiture of the West by turning the Arabs against the Jews.

Everything is moving in the direction of the time of the end. The West is destined to be the protector of the Jews against the Arab hordes, who will probably be stirred and agitated by Russia, who will herself come against them in their land after Christ returns, only to fall in such a slaughter that it will require seven months to bury the dead (Eze. 38; 39).

It is indeed a sad commentary on Christendom that at this time, when the Jews are under attack in some quarters, and facing that dreadful time of "Jacob's trouble" shortly, a modern version of the Bible should be brought out which would only tend to further their blindness as to the Lord Jesus, their Messiah. It is ironical that the Bible which should open their eyes to see that Jesus was truly their Messiah has been tampered with in the very places that unmistakably point out His deity, and His atoning sufferings. What will a Jew searching for the light think when he finds that the new R.S.V., which claims to be the correct version, is so altered in the Old Testament prophecies that the obvious references to Jesus of Nazareth are almost lost? Instead of finding that Jesus is the key to unlock all the deep secrets of the Old Testament, he will find the R.S.V. Old Testament largely in accord with the Jewish unbelief he has been taught all his life.

There was a time when the light from God was entrusted to the Jews, but the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the Jews' inconsistencies. N o w Gentiles, with greater light committed to them, are casting a stumbling block before the Jews, in the Revised Standard Version.

Surely God will not hold any man guiltless who tampers with His Word.

Some additional information and more questions regarding the Revised Standard Version of the Bible have reached us; therefore, it seems advisable to add some supplementary remarks to our review.

In the preface of the R.S.V. whole Bible (not the New Testament volume alone) is found this statement: "The revisers in the 1870's had most of the evidence that we now have for the Greek Text, though the most ancient of all extant manuscripts of the Greek New Testament were not discovered until 1931." Obviously, this would tend to silence all criticism of the changes made in the R.S.V. New Testament, which had not been made in the Revised Version, which first appeared as a whole Bible in 1885, for if only the later revisers had access to the oldest manuscripts extant, then perhaps such changes were warranted.

To test this statement (from the preface), we turned to the library of the University of Chicago, because Prof. Edgar J. Goodspeed, one of the revisers, is listed as being connected with that institution. To our inquiry, "How are these recently discovered manuscripts listed?" we received the reply that they are known as the "Chester Beatty papyri nos. P. 45-46 and 47." They are classified as of the third century of this era-a date at which the whole canon of the New Testament had been established. Later, we sent the University Library a chart which outlined all the books of the New Testament, and requested information on what portion of the New Testament was contained in these manuscripts. From their notes made on our chart, we learned that the following books are not included: 2 Thessalonians; 1 and 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon; James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; Jude-a sizeable part missing in its entirety. Of the books that were contained in these manuscripts, they gave us this information: "The MSS P. 45, P. 46, and P. 47 are all very fragmentary. No one of them contains the complete books checked. They were discovered in 1933," instead of 1931 (italics are ours). All of this raises a great doubt as to their value being any greater than that of those which were previously known to exist, and makes the revisers' claim seem rather presumptuous.

Even if these Chester Beatty manuscripts were of special value, they certainly were obtainable to the Catholic translators of the Confraternity version, and Ronald Knox who translated the New Testament in English, as also to Gerrit Verkuyl, Ph.D., who brought out the Berkeley Version of the New Testament in modern English, in 1945. While mistakes may be found in any literary work, as there must be in the three versions just named, yet there does not appear to be in them the biased renderings and slanted readings which we have noticed in the R.S.V. It is our judgment that the revisers' statement regarding these papyri is an attempt to justify any and all changes they made, which others did not make, but with very, very little real evidence in hand to support them.

Another change in the R.S.V. that has troubled many Christians is the deletion of the close of Mark's Gospel from the regular text-verses 9-20 of the last chapter. These verses are printed in small italics as a questionable supplement, and they are preceded by a note which says: "Some texts and versions add as 16. 9-20 the following passage." We shall quote from others on this subject.

W. Kelly says on Mark 16:

9-20: "I am aware that men have tampered with the closing verses, as they have sullied with their unholy doubts the beginning of John 8.... I admit that there are certain differences between this portion and the previous part of chapter 16. But, in my judgment, the Spirit purposely put them in a different light. Here, you will observe, it is a question of forming the servants according to that rising from the dead for which He had prepared them. Had the Gospel terminated without this, we must have had a real gap, which ought to have been felt.... 'This wonderful Gospel of His ministry would have left off with as impotent a conclusion as we could possibly imagine. Chapter 16 would have closed with the silence of the women and its source, 'for they were afraid.' What conclusion less worthy of the servant Son of God! What must have been the impression left, if the doubts of some learned men had the slightest substance in them? Can anyone, who knows the character of the Lord and of His ministry, conceive for an instant that we should be left with nothing but a message baulked through the alarm of women?"

Speaking further of the internal evidence for the Holy Spirit's authorship through the Evangelist Mark, W. Kelly says, "The very freedom of the style, the use of words not elsewhere used, or so used by Mark, and the difficulties of some of the circumstances narrated, tell to my mind in favor of its genuineness; for a forger would have adhered to the letter, if he could not so easily catch the spirit of Mark.... I am not aware that in all the second Gospel there is a section more characteristic of this Evangelist than the very one that man's temerity has not feared to seize upon, endeavoring to root it from the soil where God planted it.

"Accepting these words [vv. 9-20] as the words of God, you have a termination that harmonizes with a truly divine gospel; but not merely that- here you have a divine conclusion for Mark's Gospel, and for no other. There is no other gospel that this conclusion would suit but Mark's; for observe here what the Spirit of God finally gives us. He says, 'After the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God.' As the Gospel of Mark exhibits emphatically Jesus the workman of God, so even in the rest of glory He is the workman still.... While they went forth upon their mission, they were to take up the work which the Lord had left them to do. 'They went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the words with signs following.' Thus Mark, and no one else, gives us the picture most thoroughly, the whole consistent up to the last. Would a forger have kept up the bold thought of 'the Lord working with them,' while every other word intimates that He was then at least quiescent?"

Mr. Kelly concludes his remarks by saying, "The positive external proofs, and the internal, prove not only that it is inspired Scripture, but from none other than Mark himself To allow that these verses are authentic Scripture, but not Mark's own writing, seems to me the lamest supposition possible."

Mr. J. N. Darby says in a footnote of his translation, "I do not enter on the question of the authenticity of verses 9-20 here. I read them as Scripture. Burgon has pretty well demolished the authorities against them." Then, after naming four manuscripts that omit or qualify them, he says, "All other uncials and cursives and versions have the passage. It is quoted by Irenaeus and also by Hippolytus of the second or third century."

Ronald Knox gives this footnote in his translation: "It seems that the manuscripts of St. Mark were mutilated at the end in very early times; the whole of this chapter being sometimes omitted.... And in a few of our existing manuscripts these last twelve verses are wanting, which fact (together with the abruptness of their style) has made some critics think that they were added from another source. But they are evidently of primitive account, and there is no reason why we should not ascribe their inclusion here to St. Mark."

R.S.V. gives John 7:53 to 8:11 the same treatment which it accorded those closing verses of Mark 16. It casts a blight on that portion of the Word of God by first remarking that most authorities either omit these verses or insert them with variation elsewhere, and then by printing them in small italics in the form of a foot note. By way of challenging the revisers' handling of this portion of the Word of God, we shall again quote the words of others who have before written on this subject.

Augustine (354-430), the celebrated bishop of Hippo, who so faithfully withstood the Pelagian heresy which denied mankind's fall and depravity, said that there were persons of small faith, or rather enemies of the faith, who had taken the above mentioned portion away for fear of allowing immorality. (Such persons never felt the heat of the light that the Lord that day turned on the woman's accusers, or they would never have thus spoken.)

W. Kelly, a well-known authority on Greek and Greek manuscripts, says that it was the incredulity of some copyists that indisposed them to reproduce the story of the adulteress. He adds, "This is plain from some copies which leave a blank-a fact wholly inexplicable, if the scribe had not been aware of a paragraph which he knew to exist, but for reasons of his own thought fit to omit." He gives a list of Greek uncials (those written in all capital letters) which do include the disputed for-

Lion, and also says that 330 cursives (those written in a running hand) and many versions have it.

Taking up another form of objection to these verses, W. Kelly says, "Many alleged verbal peculiarities have acted on the minds of a considerable number, and led them to question its title to a place in the genuine Gospel of John.... I have examined with care, and satisfied

myself, that the alleged weightiest argument against the passage, in its entire diversity from the style of John's narrative, is superficial and misleading. Some peculiar words are required by the circumstance; and the general cast and character of the passage, so far from being alien to the Evangelist's manner, seems to me, on the contrary, in his spirit, rather than in any other inspired writer's, no matter in which of the manuscripts we read it.... Mature as well as minute consideration of them fails to raise the slightest doubt in my own mind, and therefore to me it seems so much the more a duty to defend it, where the alternative is a dishonor to what I believe God has given us."

The statement that "most manuscripts" omit this portion (also found as a side note in the Revised Version of 1885) is challenged by the same writer, when he says, "The idea of many distinct and independent texts (as distinguished from abundance of various readings) seems an evident exaggeration." He then goes on to explain the method by which such a computation is accomplished, and says that it is "eked out" by putting many manuscripts together and classifying them as one group.

The remaining point which should be examined is the internal evidence about which W. Kelly says: "The moral and spiritual indications are incomparably graver and more conclusive than any evidence of an external sort. Not that the external evidence is really weak, far from it. That which gives such an appearance is capable of reasonable, unforced, and even of what seems almost to amount to a historical solution.... The account is exactly in harmony with the scripture that follows it.... There is here an indissoluble link of connected truth between the facts related and the communication our Lord makes afterward.... Choose for me in all Scripture a preface of fact so suited to the doctrine of the chapter that follows. The whole chapter from first to last, beams with light-the light of God and His word in the Person of Jesus. Is not this undeniably what comes out in the opening incident? Does not Christ present Himself in discourse just after as the light of the world, as God's light by His word in Himself, infinitely superior to law, yet at the same time giving law its fullest authority? Only a divine person could act in perfect grace, and at the same time maintain immaculate holiness, and so much the more because it was in One full of grace.

"The scribes and Pharisees manifest no holy hatred of evil, and certainly feel no pity for the poor sinner. 'They say unto Him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou? This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him.' Their hope was to ensnare Christ, and to leave Him only a choice of difficulties: either a useless repetition of the law of Moses, or open opposition to it Enmity to His Per son was their motive. To agree with Moses or to annul him seemed to them inevitable, and almost equally prejudicial to the claims of Jesus.... But the fact is, the grace of God never conflicts with His law, but, on the contrary, maintains its authority in its own sphere."

The Lord's all-perfect way of handling both the accusers and the accused is well known, so we shall say little. Again, from the pen of Mr. Kelly we quote: "His words were few, simple, and self-evidencing. 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.' It was the light of God cast on their thoughts, words, and life. The effect was immediate and complete.... Why did not some of the witnesses rise and do the office? What! not one? 'They..., being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one.' The law had never done this.... But here was the light of God shining full on their sinful condition." Oh, the perfection of the Lord and His ways in this incident, and of the way in which it is dovetailed into the divine record at this very point! How can any devout Christian question either its divine authorship or the special place it has in John's Gospel?

A footnote in the new Berkeley Version is worthy of note here. While it admits that some old manuscripts omit the passage, this conclusion is appended: "The incident has such a Christ-like ring, the omission of it would be a great loss. We accept it as a true report."

We stand by our earlier statements that the R.S.V. is untrustworthy, and strongly advise against its use, except as a reference book, and then only with great caution.

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