

The Theology of Christ's Teaching
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Our readers will perhaps remember an article which appeared in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* a few years ago from the hand of the late Principal King on the subject of the Fatherhood of God in our Lord's Teaching. The article referred to was marked for its sobriety and lucidity of treatment of a topic much abused and obscured by the vogue of certain modern misconceptions regarding it. To receive a whole volume in which the entire compass of Christ's teaching is handled in the same able manner will be an agreeable surprise to many. Biblico-theological discussions of the teaching of Jesus abound in our day. Unfortunately the number of those in which not only the infallible authority of our Lord as a teacher, but also the inspired character of the Gospel-transcript of His life and doctrine is unhesitatingly accepted and given its legitimate effect, is extremely small. In the work before us this is done without qualification. Dr. King gives us a full-orbed, well-balanced statement of what our Lord actually taught, uncurtailed by any critical vagaries and pervaded by the spirit of humble submission to all its content as absolute truth. These two qualities, however, by no means constitute the only merit of the volume under review. It is characterized by great lucidity and orderliness of treatment, virtues which it probably derives in part from its origin in class lectures of the author. To this fact we are also indebted, it seems, for the practical tone which pervades the discussion. Another feature which will immediately obtrude itself to the reader, even apart from the reference to it in Dr. Orr's appreciative introduction, is the evidence of Dr. King's wide reading and freshness of mind. The lectures were plainly delivered with the live issues of modern thought constantly in the author's mind, whence results what Dr. Orr well calls a certain "modernity," in the best sense of the word, so that the student, besides being put into possession of the facts, also receives the benefit of a broad and wise guidance as to their present-day theological significance. The method of the book is exegetical. It presents the results of an inductive study of our Lord's teaching grouped under certain outstanding topics. The manner in which this is done reveals not a little of both exegetical skill and independence of judgment. So far as this exegetical structure of the work is concerned it may be properly called undogmatic in its method and in full harmony with the prime requirement of true biblico-theological study. Dr. King, while thoroughly friendly to the theology of the Church, knew how to distinguish between its viewpoint and the simple and as yet uncrystallized form in which the substance of truth in most cases lies before us in the inspired utterances of Jesus. He also had an open eye for the incompleteness and, if we may so call it, provisionality of much of our Lord's teaching, as this was inseparable from his place at the beginning in the scheme of New Testament revelation and from the fact that His teaching preceded the great crisis of His mission in His death. Both this important fact and the historical explanation of it are set forth with more than ordinary felicity and convincing force. And yet it must be acknowledged that the book has certain important limitations due to an insufficient detachment on the author's part from the dogmatic viewpoint. Of the two main requirements for biblico-theological study, the exegetical and the historical spirit, Dr. King was obviously more strongly endowed with the former than with the latter. The whole attitude of the book is determined not so much by the author's desire to project himself, so far as this is possible, into the human mind of Jesus and look out upon the field of religious truth with the latter's eyes, but rather by the habit of the theologian, who, with his own questions and problems in mind, would interrogate the teaching of Jesus, much as a witness is interrogated for the purpose of extracting information. The result is that we receive a fairly complete résumé of our Lord's deliverances on

the principal topics of revealed truth, with here and there an illuminating touch of historical apprehension, but comparatively little insight into the organic relation which the several groups of doctrinal data sustain to each other, sometimes not even an inkling of the serious problems, which an attempt to grasp the facts historically forces upon the student at almost every step. Some of the burning issues of present day biblico-theological debate, such as, e.g., the question as to the facts and the genesis of our Lord's Messianic consciousness, are barely touched upon, and others are treated in a manner which the recent trend of the discussion has antiquated to a considerable extent, e.g., the treatment of the Son of Man problem. In the arrangement of the chapters Dr. King evidently follows the viewpoint of the fourth Gospel since the order of treatment is, after a preliminary discussion of the Old Testament Scriptures, and God, that first the Person, then the Mission of Christ, then the Death of Christ, and only after this the Kingdom are dealt with. From the point of view of the Synoptical Gospels this would of course be a hystero-proteron, because here our Lord for considerable time keeps the truth about His Person and personal mission in the background and places the prime emphasis upon the subject of the kingdom. Dr. Orr, in the introductory notice, apologizes for the author's method of indiscriminately appealing to the Synoptics and the fourth Gospel, and observes that on this point the work represents an older stage of theological and critical discussion than that now in vogue. We on our part have no objection to the joint presentation of the Synoptical and the Johannine phases of teaching. On the contrary we admire the courage displayed in this, the courage which takes the utterances of the fourth Gospel at their face value as literal renderings of the words of Jesus, and shows its sincerity in doing this by subsuming under them the Synoptical data. This method is unobjectionable so long as we truly believe that the two sets of truth coexisted in and proceeded from the same consciousness. But, and this is the point we desire to make, wherever this method is pursued, the different orientation of the two modes of teaching, the Synoptical and the Johannine, should be distinctly brought out and some effort made to explain each historically, as well as to show the higher harmony in substance. In this Dr. King's book is lacking, as it is lacking in appreciation of the historic relation of our Lord's teaching generally. As a model of summarized exegesis distributed according to semi-dogmatic viewpoints it is a highly meritorious production, which, especially for the purpose of quick and practical orientation concerning our Lord's attitude toward the great questions of theology, will well repay careful perusal. Those who desire to study the teaching of our Lord from the point of view of its adjustment to the larger plan of revelation and to its historical environment as well as of its internal organism, will require something more and something different.