

**MORRIS, LEON L. (1914–2006)**

Leon L. Morris represents the voice of a sane conservatism, not only in the field of biblical studies as a whole, but also in biblical theology in particular. His best work was not always as widely received by his academic colleagues as it might have been, partly because he wrote with deceptive simplicity, partly because a very substantial part of his prolific output was designed either to serve lay Christians or to be a mediating conduit between technical scholarship and well-trained pastors and other Christian leaders. His *New Testament Theology* is an excellent example of the latter. Doubtless his years of pastoral ministry in the Australian bush, combined with his years of teaching and administration at Ridley College, Melbourne, combined to reinforce these priorities.

Nevertheless, in two domains in particular Morris' contribution has been strategic. First, in addition to a score of essays on the subject, Morris wrote at length on the cross and the atonement. His three books on the subject — one technical, one a substantive survey, one popular — reflect the kind of work that was typical of him: painstaking word studies, grammatico-historical exegesis, and close attention to related themes. For instance, in Morris' view the great atonement passage Romans 3:21–26 cannot be abstracted from the argument of Romans 1:18–3:20, which is a damning indictment of Jews and Gentiles alike, both under 'the wrath of God' which is revealed from heaven against 'all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (Rom. 1:18). This datum necessarily feeds into the analysis of Romans 3:21ff.: by God's design, what the cross achieves, amongst other things, is the setting aside of his own principled wrath, such that God himself is vindicated (i.e., his 'righteousness' is disclosed). These connections Morris traces through the canon. Although his views on these matters are not currently in vogue, any biblical theology of the cross that does not wrestle with them merely impoverishes itself.

The second domain in which Morris made important contributions is the field of Johannine studies. In a major commentary, a volume of critical studies, a useful theology of John, and several more popular works, Morris plowed a furrow in line with the earlier works of Hengstenberg and Westcott. In some ways he was helped by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which have gone a long way in showing that the world of the Fourth Gospel by and large fits comfortably into the matrix of first-century Palestinian Judaism, rather than something much later and more esoteric. If he did

not always advance the most original proposals, he was refreshing in his stubborn refusal to stray too far from the text. His theology of John is less interested in the outlook and religio-social world of the Johannine community than it is in the theology of the texts as we have them — a frustration to some critics and a breath of fresh air to many students.

One of Morris' contributions to biblical theology has less to do with innovative synthesis than with a sterling ability to write books helpful to students at the precise moment when faddish research is in danger of leading the discipline astray. When many were highly impressed by the thesis that liturgical cycles explain the structure of one or more of the canonical Gospels, Morris' study of Jewish lectionaries was one of the works that helped turn the tide. When apocalyptic was on everyone's lips, widely advanced as the 'mother' of primitive Christian thought, Morris' little book on apocalyptic helped many a student retain a sense of proportion. Neither work was the sort of thing destined to be milestones in biblical studies, but both exercised a strategic role at the time. Similarly, his many commentaries (he wrote commentaries on almost all the New Testament books, and on two of the Old Testament books) are marked by workman-like sobriety within historic confessionalism — which is surely a better place for students to begin than with the merely faddish, even if in due course they may choose to expand their horizons.

**References and further reading**

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**MOULE, C.F.D. (1908–)**

The contribution of C.F.D. Moule to biblical theology has not so much been in the domain of sweeping synthesis (he has not written a 'New Testament Theology') as in three complementary domains.

First, over against many of his contemporaries, who picture the growth of primitive Christianity in essentially Hegelian terms (i.e., the conflict of thesis and antithesis, Peter against Paul, Jerusalem against Antioch, historical Jesus against resurrected Christ, and so forth), Moule has written at length in terms of organic development. Nowhere is this clearer than in two of his books. *The Birth of the New Testament* lays out a panoramic vision of how the New Testament documents came to be written, and came together. More important, perhaps, is *The Origin of Christology*, which seeks to avoid the Charybdis of fundamentalism and the Scylla of skepticism. Moule argues that although the full development of 'high' Christology took some decades to work out, and can in measure be traced across the New Testament documents, the kernel of the matter was already present from the very beginning. Just as the nature of the oak tree is genetically determined by the acorn, so the development of Christology was determined by who Jesus was, and what he said and did, from the very beginning. Moule thus avoids the anachronisms that pretend the fully developed oak is already present in the acorn, and the skeptical hiatus that supposes there is only accidental connection between the acorn and the tree.

Second, although his published essays are distributed over a large range of themes and texts, much of Moule's written work has revolved around a small number of important themes: the significance of the death of Jesus Christ (and with it the nature of forgiveness, the (in)appropriateness of the category of retribution, the connections between Jesus' death and the notion of 'sacrament'), the Holy Spirit, and miracles. In the first-mentioned, Moule has repeatedly maintained that for Christians, sacrament has replaced sacrifice, and that there is no essential element in the Gospel that requires the language of sacrifice in the strict, cultic sense, even though sacrifice continues to be a metaphor used in the New Testament and in Christian tradition. On some of these themes Moule's influence has perhaps proved less convincing to many colleagues than his work in other domains.

Third, exegetical rigor and clear thinking characterize so much of his handling of the biblical text. That has been a major reason why many of his essays, published willy-nilly, have been collected into books. *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* is never far away from any serious student of the Greek New Testament, and his commentary on the Greek text of Colossians, written with students in mind, is a model of clarity and precision. Long into retirement and after reading countless 'creative' proposals regarding the meaning of 'son of man,' Moule could not restrain himself from publishing a short, trenchant essay that reminded everyone of the actual facts of the matter, which could only trim the more imaginative suggestions. Several of his essays argue for positions that have now become widely

accepted. For instance, his essay on certain datives construed with *apothnēskō* (the verb 'to die') suggests that Paul created the constructions death *to sin*, death *to law*, and death *to the world* by analogy with *zēō* (the verb 'to live') followed by the dative in a relational sense (e.g., *zēō tō theō* 'to live to God,' 4 Macc. 7:19; 16:25; Luke 20:38). His observation that John's Gospel focuses more attention on the individual than do the Synoptics and that this may be part of the reason for a greater emphasis on realized eschatology is widely accepted. Moule's exegetical astuteness has contributed to biblical theology by focusing sober attention on the text.

But perhaps it would not be unfair to say that Moule's greatest contribution to the discipline of biblical theology has been through his students, not a few of whom have become internationally influential. Moule has been above all a teacher and mentor, both at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, where he began and ended his teaching career, and especially at Cambridge University, where he held the Lady Margaret Chair of Divinity from 1951 until his retirement. Knowledgeable observers note how many of his ideas have proved seminal in the minds of his students, who later enlarged, developed, and published them.

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