

In the Study

I SUPPOSE that it is now universally recognised that from conception to birth the individual recapitulates in tremendously shortened compass the whole growth and development of the human species through all ages. But surely it is something analogous that may often be traced in the realm of personal belief and understanding. For here also the painful progress of the decades and the centuries may be found unrolling itself at break-neck speed in individual experience and apprehension. It is perhaps a powerful imaginative grasp of this truth that will provide the most potent stimulus to an attitude of humble receptivity before the wisdom of the ages.

In any event, therein is to be discerned one reason for the value of a recent historical study.¹ An examination of the last two hundred and fifty years of changing thought about the meaning and importance of miracles was urgently needed; and Dr. Lawton has enhanced the significance of a comprehensive and accurate presentation by relating it to and setting it against its necessary theological and philosophical background. But his survey comes alive as we recognise that its actors and protagonists exert their influence still today, and that battles fought, lost, and won, are constantly rejoined and re-enacted. Theologians may have gained ground and registered enduring advance by the sweat of their brows and with much travail and tears; but large numbers of ordinary church folk are "deist" and "evidentialist" still, and many a ministers' fraternal screams loudly of arrested development.

Indeed, it is the ministry to whom this book should speak most relevantly. To talk of the miraculous is to talk of the nature and action of God, of the freedom of man, of the order of the natural world. It is also to speak of things that lie very close to the heart of the working faith of the ordinary christian man. Wrong-headed or superstitious thinking here may be a menace to the soul. And if the shepherd fumbles, will the sheep see their way? But for the scandal of its price, this volume might be labelled a necessity.

At least it may unreservedly be commended to all who are dissatisfied with easier resting places; those who are uneasily conscious of the inadequacy of the God of the "gaps," of mental

¹ *Miracles and Revelation*, by J. S. Lawton. Lutterworth Press, 37/6d. 1959.

dichotomies, of uncritical and all-embracing acceptances. We are not offered neat and final solutions, and we should not expect them. But we are given a sympathetic and discerning exposition of the nature of historical enquiry and the aims and limitations of scientific method; and if we will walk with Dr. Lawton to the end, we shall find our conception of the miraculous satisfyingly enriched. We shall learn the fatal error of attempting to distinguish miracles in terms of physical nonconformity. We shall realize that they belong at the very heart of christology and revelation. We shall understand that, within the divine action, they hold "the same kind of place as the most significant symbolic actions of a man do to the rest of a man." And perhaps we shall be driven to grapple again with the work of A. E. Taylor and Edwyn Bevan, John Oman and H. H. Farmer, upon whose thinking the most significant of contemporary achievement rests.

It might be conjectured that this patient study would usefully be supplemented by a book² which explores the wider context of these familiar problems; and a first glance at its scope and interest would confirm our expectation. We are offered three associated discussions, one dealing with the Order of Nature, another with Natural Science and the Kerygma, a third with Christian Ethics and the Scientific Age; and these are presented in terms of a crisis of understanding, of belief, and of living. Each examination is relevant, competent, and fair. Together they constitute a unity of apologetic.

Unfortunately the promise is not fulfilled. The ethical enquiry, while negatively valuable in putting a radical question mark against many of our cherished conventional assumptions, is positively disappointing. This is notoriously difficult terrain; but I cannot feel that Mr. Yarnold really illumines it. Certainly he is to be congratulated on having the courage to draw practical conclusions, and thus implicitly rebukes our inveterate tendency to talk in a vacuum. But I fancy that he leaps too easily from theological principles to practical application, and that there is first needed a far more rigorous examination and diagnosis of the complexities of this industrial and nuclear age than his space allows.

Similarly with the discussion of New Testament kerygma. Historicity, the miraculous, and the methods of divine operation, are large subjects, scarcely susceptible of adequate treatment in sixty pages. If we are given little that is new, we need not be surprised or accusing. What we are entitled to demand is that the author's own assumptions and presuppositions be subjected to

² *The Spiritual Crisis of the Scientific Age*, by G. D. Yarnold. George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 18/-. 1959.

the same relentless scrutiny that he brings to those of 19th century science. And at this point many may find his understanding of history and the historical inadequate, and his theological spring-board too uncritically traditional. J. S. Lawton reminds us that "the modern rejection of the miraculous is in one sense due to a refining and intellectualizing of man's intuitive expectation of the orderliness of nature." Surely there is truth here with which Mr. Yarnold has not perhaps fully reckoned.

What is indisputable is that the crux of this study is to be found in the discussion of the order of nature with which the book begins. Here foundations are laid and scaffolding erected. If there are flaws at this point, a good deal of what follows will begin to shake and may finally prove insecure. The wise reader will concentrate his attention in this area and make his own clear assessment before he moves on. I may, however, be allowed three personal comments. I would think that the attempt to introduce the direct action of God at the sub-atomic level where physical causality apparently fails is open to much the same intuitive objections as may be advanced against the endeavour of N. P. Williams to locate the operation of grace in the unconscious region of human personality. I would feel that the real heart of the contemporary crisis of knowledge is to be found not in the realm of physics but in that of biology. And I would conclude that within the common ground covered by J. S. Lawton and G. D. Yarnold it is Dr. Lawton who proves the most satisfactory guide.

Much water has flowed under the bridge since L. W. Grensted gave us his contribution to the Library of Constructive Theology in *The Person of Christ*; and the volume, though sober and weighty, did not prove to be one of the most significant of the series. After the lapse of a quarter of a century, a replacement was overdue, and Dr. Pittenger was commissioned to provide it. He has given us "constructive theology"³ at its best. It is only to be regretted that the work of his predecessor, though commended in a brief footnote, is otherwise sunk without trace.

It is upon the basis of the biblical presentation of the Lord, and in the context of christologies ancient and modern, that Dr. Pittenger essays his own reconstruction. He makes fruitful use of four contemporary trends of thinking, finding in them indispensable keys to convincing theological restatement. Emergent evolution provides a valid interpretation of the world-order; process-philosophy, bringing life and movement to the heart of metaphysics, offers the means of relating God sufficiently intimately to his creation; existentialism gives an understanding of life as

³ *The Word Incarnate*, by Norman Pittenger. James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 21/-, 1959.

essentially encounter demanding decision; and the new philosophy of history sustains the understanding of events as made living factors in present experience through community remembrance. With such tools the necessary reframing of Chalcedonian christology can be effected.

This is an essay in adventurous reformulation. It comes like a breath of life-giving air into the steamy fastnesses of neo-orthodoxy, and at crucial points it batters down the doors and flattens them. Nothing is more urgently needed than the continuance of the tasks associated with the great figures of the "liberal" period. To wrestle bravely with the modern world of thought and action and to ground the centralities of Christian faith at its heart is to put the whole Church in debt. Here is a book that not only tries but in large measure succeeds. It deserves the highest praise and should be accorded urgent, critical, and sympathetic attention.

How far does it depart essentially from traditional orthodoxy? By no means as radically as might appear, if we take Chalcedon as our standard. And in so far as our problems have changed, our preoccupations much change also. It is enormously valuable to be reminded of the operation of the Logos outside the Christian circle, and to be confronted sharply with the challenge that "Jesus *defines* but does not *confine* God in his relationship to the created world." To take this seriously is to be delivered from a false christocentricity. Similarly, there is real gain in the underscoring of history in terms of community "remembrance," with the resulting indissolubility of Gospel and Church and the necessary delineation of christology in terms of *totus christus*. Fortunately this need not lead us to follow Dr. Pittenger to the Knoxian critical position, with its easy dismissal of problems of historicity.

In the end the point of controversy will be as to whether the essential deity of Christ has been adequately maintained. The sympathies of the author are with the Antiochenes; he safeguards the full humanity of the Lord; he defines the distinction between Jesus Christ and the indwelling of God in other men as one of degree rather than of kind. Nevertheless, his argument is subtle and his qualifications many; and he believes that the *de Deo Deus* is fully preserved. I think he is right. Certainly he is not so readily open to the damaging criticisms that can be levelled against D. M. Baillie. But perhaps he is a little too impatient with the *enhypostasia* of Leontius and its contemporary explications. It is difficult enough to comprehend exactly what the Fathers were trying to say in the context of their philosophical presuppositions and anthropological assumptions, and on this issue Dr. Pittenger may be challenged. But it is an even more hazardous task to

attempt to translate into modern terms what we think they intended to assert. And his measure of success here will surely be debated for many a long year to come.

The widespread understanding of the sacraments in terms of the sacrifice of the Word Incarnate is one of the encouraging features of the modern scene; and a book⁴ which, while ranging far, preserves this emphasis demands attention. If Mr. Every disappoints it is because he casts his net too widely, and too eagerly pursues the quest of *multum in parvo*. The result is that the unifying theme is easily lost to sight, and not a few really major issues remain inadequately explored. In the context of comparative religion, baptism and eucharist, marriage and coronation, are presented and discussed, and treatment ranges from the biblical and the historical to the contemporary. We are provided with an abundance of useful information and a good deal of acute judgment and assessment. But perhaps a more disciplined use of the material would have left the reader without an uneasy sense of inconclusiveness.

Nevertheless these studies are important, and that in several directions. It is pure gain to be so ably reminded of the light shed upon the Christian sacraments by the understanding of the rites of initiation and sacrifice in early religion; and this opening chapter displays a relevant and judicious perceptiveness not always found in discussion of this field. Further, Mr. Every would have us relearn that baptism is fulfilled in eucharist, that the baptismal rite is incomplete until it has reached forward to first communion. An understanding of this fact might make us more careful in our interpretation of early Church discussions, and would certainly assist the return of the sacrament of initiation to its rightful central position. Finally, we are made to see quite clearly the folly of attempting any separation of sacrament, sacrifice, and salvation, and yet to realize how lastingly the traditional terms of controversy have been undercut by a more accurate biblical and historical comprehension. Would that the Protestants who are still fighting 19th century battles would read Eugene Masure!

Dr. Pittenger will certainly find common ground with George Every, but what will he say to Dr. Cullmann.⁵ The Basel Professor has no use for Chalcedon. He declares that "functional Christology is the only kind that exists." Nevertheless, the systematic theologian must build upon the biblical testimony, and the

⁴ *The Baptismal Sacrifice*, by George Every. S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 9/6d. 1959.

⁵ *The Christology of the New Testament*, by O. Cullmann. S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 42/-. 1959.

present work provides for him an examination and discussion that cannot be ignored. The approach is by way of a grouping of the most significant christological titles under four heads, in so far as they relate primarily to the earthly, the future, the present, and the pre-incarnate work of Jesus. Within this scheme each title is discussed by reference to comparative religions, Jewish antecedents, our Lord's own understanding, and general New Testament usage. The adoption of such perspectives proves fruitful and self-justifying. Thus is confirmed the author's conviction that they are imposed and dictated by the nature of the biblical faith.

The reader who is familiar with the earlier works of Dr. Cullmann will gain most from this weighty survey; for most of the characteristically Cullmannic themes reappear. Among the incidentals will be noticed the distinction drawn between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Christ, and the identification of the Pauline *exousiai* with the invisible angelic powers. Among the essentials will be remarked the controlling and pervasive influence of the principle of *Heilsgeschichte*, and of the central significance of the idea of "representation" (the one for the many) that governs and informs it. Further, it will not be lost sight of that the general line of emphasis and conclusion corresponds fairly closely to the *textus receptus* of current British New Testament scholarship. There is nothing of Bultmann here. And Gnostic myth and Hellenistic influence have a pretty thin time. I think that in substance Cullmann is generally right. But the general reader will be hearing so often what he wants to hear that he had best beware of his critical faculties silently retreating into coma. Perhaps the warning is specially relevant so far as the discussions of the Logos and the Ebed Yahweh are concerned.

I would adjudge the most illuminating chapters of this work to be those which are directed to the examination of the titles, Son of man, Son of God, and High Priest. Sanity and balance combine with a massive competence to provide us with interpretations that will not easily date or be superseded. The once-popular understanding of Son of God as a predominantly messianic category will scarcely survive this frontal attack. The wide-spread delimitation of the significance of Son of man will surely crumble, and the term receive a new and proper fullness, as a result of the rich context in which it is here presented. The tendency to dismiss the title High Priest as a quirk of the author of Hebrews will hardly abide this penetrating and comprehensive discussion. Yet always we must be alert for the possibility presented as confident assertion. Things are rarely as simple and straightforward as Cullmann might make us believe—as a comparison of his fascinat-

ing exposition of Jesus the Prophet with J. A. T. Robinson's recent examination of the problem of Elijah, John, and Jesus, will testify.

Certainly this work could not have been left untranslated; for within its limits of method and material there is nothing in English to rival it. To its significance the now familiar convictions of Dr. Cullmann regarding the connection between Jesus, the Hellenists, Hebrews, and the Johannine literature bear witness. For the ultimate importance of Qumran lies in the light it sheds on the rich variations of Palestinian Judaism, the inadequacy of the simple Jewish/Hellenistic distinction, and the new orientation of our understanding of Christian beginnings that all this involves. For the new picture that must emerge, this study provides indispensable sketches.

Not the least stimulating section of Dr. Cullmann's discussion is his brief examination of the Christology of Hebrews; and the reader, driven thereby to a fresh study of that perplexing Epistle, should count himself fortunate that a new commentary⁶ is ready to hand. He is offered introductory material, translation, and exegesis. Greek is transliterated. Scholarly technicalities are seldom obtruded, and are made subservient to the interpreter's task. The minister and the careful student will be the richer if they will keep company with Father Snell; and his love for one of the neglected books of the New Testament will surely be imparted to them.

In its own way and within its avowed limits, this is a model commentary. It is sane and judicious. Behind it lies an impressive depth of learning. The introductory material is wisely selected, as is evidenced by the inclusion of sections dealing not merely with the usual critical problems but also with key words of the Epistle, its use of the Old Testament, its relation to the expansionism of Stephen, its christology and eschatology. There are adequate indices, and a salutary appendix on the meaning of "blood" in biblical thought. It is suggested with due caution that Barnabas is author, Cyprus the destination, and a Jewish Christian group the recipient.

Not all of the exegesis will win assent. This is inevitable. But it may confidently be claimed that none will close these pages without having garnered a rich harvest of understanding and inspiration. For beyond the section by section commentary, this study presents features of importance and significance. It relates the Epistle to its necessary Old Testament background. It relates the parts to the whole, and the whole to other relevant portions of the New Testament. And it makes use of P.46.

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⁶ *New and Living Way*, by Antony Snell. The Faith Press, 18/-. 1959.