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EDITORIAL

Humility, said T. S. Eliot, is endless. Historians should expect to discover this sooner than most, even if at times academic ambition and intellectual arrogance display themselves in the study of the past no less than in other disciplines (including, dare we say it, theology). For the past which the historian studies is the human past, which in a real sense means his own past. There is a striving for objectivity, but how objective can one be in understanding human situations, and responses to those situations, when one is as deeply involved in life in the present? Of course, it is often through the particular perspectives offered by the historian's subjective interest, that fresh light can be shed on the past. Historical study is always interpretative, and therefore never completed. Therein lies the need for humility, in an endless questioning of the presuppositions, motives and maybe prejudices of the historian, especially when dealing with an event, person or movement charged with polemical interest. When the polemics are religious or political, the need is great indeed, and when they are religious and political together, perhaps the need is greatest of all.

This is well illustrated in the article by Ian Sellers on the treatment of the Anabaptists by historians, especially by British and American Baptists since the last century. Both the degree of sympathy with the Anabaptists, and the extent to which Baptists have recognized themselves as of the house and lineage of the Anabaptists, have varied considerably. Dr Sellers presents evidence indicating a pattern in this variation. As Baptists have wished to present themselves as part of mainstream, acceptable and respectable Christianity in the present, so have they been more inclined to disparage the Anabaptists and to repudiate any real historical connexion with them. Conversely, where the Baptist self-image has been more religiously and socially radical, so greater affinity with the Anabaptists, and a more generous attitude towards them, have been welcomed. The *Quarterly* will pursue this subject further before long, in a series of articles on Anabaptist educational thought and practice.

One remarkable American Baptist cited by Dr Sellers as having swum against the rising anti-Anabaptist tide of his time was Walter Rauschenbusch, the most famous exponent of the "Social Gospel" at the turn of this century. He is also the subject of an article by Ernest Clipsham. Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel, along with whatever else smacks of pre-1914 "liberalism", have in later years been disparaged, despised and dismissed (compare the Anabaptists!). Theological naivety there may have been, too many assumptions about progress and too little recognition of judgement and grace. But Rauschenbusch was concerned with society when most churchmen were not - a man of his time, yes, but like other prophetic figures one who saw what others of his time could not or would not see. Such figures are not to be dismissed before slums, mass unemployment and gross inequalities have also been dismissed from the scene.

The considerations of this editorial thus far revolve around the central fact that Christian faith by its very nature takes history with the utmost seriousness while worshipping a God who ultimately transcends human history. The incarnation affirms history as nothing else does, and also points to an End before which all history stands. The temptation is either to flee from the requirements of our contemporary historical situation in the cause of "eternal truth", or to be so immersed in the present hour that the givenness, the ultimacy of the Gospel and the transcendence of God are lost. It is perhaps the Christian preacher who faces this temptation most acutely, in the continually felt tension between truth and relevance, content and method. We are very grateful, therefore, to R. T. ("Peter") Brooks for his thoughtful essay on "Preaching in an Audio-Visual Age". Written out of many years' experience in religious broadcasting, and of theological reflection upon the nature of human communication, his article should encourage many to persist with the pulpit ministry, firmly convinced of its necessity while paying attention to the peculiarly contemporary ways in which people apprehend truth for themselves, in a culture increasingly influenced by the electronic media.