

In the Study

BULTMANN'S attempt to demythologize the Gospel has been widely misinterpreted. This curious fact is due partly to the unfamiliarity of the categories with which he works, partly to the pioneering character of his efforts, partly to the ambiguity of his expression. But the result has been that his bold and brilliant re-statement has not commanded the appreciation it deserves. It is surely a sign of the times that it is from a Belgian Roman Catholic that there comes the sympathetic and discerning discussion of which we stand in need.¹

In general, Father Malavez confines his criticisms to the conclusion of his study, where they belong. His exposition and interpretation of Bultmann's thought is acute, illuminating, and dispassionate. He demonstrates—as I would think—conclusively that much recent criticism is unjustified. The Christian message is not swallowed up by an existentialist philosophy. The objectivity of the Christ event is not surrendered. It is the false Cartesian separation of subject and object that is rejected. It is the assimilation of transcendental divine action with "this-worldly" action that constitutes indefensible mythology.

It is true that Bultmann's use of Heidegger is open to attack. He misinterprets his teacher in an unnecessarily nihilistic direction. He grafts upon the preliminary discussion of *Sein und Zeit*, an ontology which Heidegger has not yet expounded. But these are minor causes for hesitation. There is no wholesale capitulation to modern philosophy. The Christian theologian is well aware of the inadequacy of the existentialist conception of inauthentic existence, is ever mindful of the inescapable need of the empowering grace of divine action.

Malavez is profoundly aware of the imperatives which drive Bultmann forward. He knows that scientific advance and philosophical insight create new problems for theology. He knows also that

¹ *The Christian Message and Myth*, by L. Malavez. S.C.M. Press, Ltd. 25/- (1958).

Bultmann's restatement has religious roots, that it represents an attempt to re-apply the Lutheran concept of justification by faith in the realm of knowledge. He attacks shrewdly at all three levels, and inevitably ranges himself at the last with the verdict of tradition. But he leaves the reader with a new appreciation of the gallantry and necessity of Bultmann's theological struggle.

Within the New Testament itself, Bultmann lays particular emphasis upon the Fourth Gospel as illustrative of the early attempt at demythologization. It is thus of interest to set alongside his work the recently published essays of J. E. Davey in the field of the historicity of St. John,² even though Dr. Davey never faces up, at Bultmann's level, to the whole complex question of "history" and "factuality."

If these historical and christological studies combine to make an inconclusive book of uneven merit, it is no more than we must expect. The presence in the Fourth Gospel of a historical substratum would be increasingly accepted. But the process of sifting material demands a mixture of technical competence and intuitive rapport that is rare indeed. Today we possess few scholars with the mastery of historical method of a C. H. Turner. Dr. Davey deals in probabilities and possibilities, and in many cases it is very easy to adjudge his probabilities as possibilities and his possibilities as remote. His enunciation of "foundation pillars" of the historicity of John does not, I think, carry the conviction of Schmiedel's comparable work in the Synoptic field. Similarly, his advocacy of the identification of the John of Ephesus, whose witness underlies the Fourth Gospel, with John Mark seems to underestimate the daunting chronological obstacle.

Nevertheless, such studies are needed and worth making; and the author is aware of the provisional nature of most of his conclusions. He may well be right in his detection of Johannine counterparts to the wilderness temptations dramatized for us in Matthew and Luke. He has certainly made his case for the heavy Johannine emphasis laid on the dependence of Jesus upon his Father; and the attempt to give this dependence more than temporal significance is noteworthy. For the rest—where we dissent we must do better.

J. E. Davey would find in the Fourth Gospel the clue to a more adequate understanding of Christology and Trinitarian belief than the classic formulations of the past ages supply. It is therefore helpful to turn from his tentative movement towards restatement to a fresh examination of early Christian doctrine.³ The notable work

² *The Jesus of St. John*, by J. E. Davey. Lutterworth Press, 25/- (1958).

³ *Early Christian Doctrines*, by J. N. D. Kelly. A. & C. Black, Ltd., 30/- (1958).

of Bethune-Baker in this field has long demanded its successor; and few are in better position to provide it than Dr. Kelly. With a sure hand he guides us from the frontiers of the New Testament to the middle of the fifth century, and if it is patient plodding all the way, at least we never stumble. All students of this formative and critical period will be grateful for the ripe fruits of patristic scholarship, so clearly presented, so cogently argued.

The aim of the author is understanding and impartial exposition. He has, accordingly, quoted generously from the original sources, and has endeavoured to proceed by way of exegesis rather than eisegesis, forbearing to impose pattern and homogeneity where these are lacking. It is true that quotations, superficially carrying one emphasis, may point in quite a different direction when read in the larger context to which they belong. But Dr. Kelly always provides his references, and may justly direct the suspicious critic to search for himself and form his own conclusions.

One of the most valuable features of this survey is the prominence given to the contemporary philosophies which so often provided the Fathers with their categories of thought and modes of expression. We are already familiar with the confusion occasioned by the use of such key-words as *ousia*, *prosopon*, *hypostasis*, in conflicting senses. But we have to learn to look deeper and find controversies illumined by an understanding of the Stoic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonic tools that forged expression. We may suspect that even Dr. Kelly has failed to do full justice to this at every point.

Though all is competently done, yet it is the section covering the period from Nicaea to Chalcedon that reveals the author at his best and most confident. The discussion of Christology is superb. Partly this is due to the nature, richness, and greater malleability of the material. Nevertheless, it is no mean achievement to march thus triumphantly through the confused battlefields of the fourth century, bringing order out of chaos. Only very rarely does our mentor fail us—as when the notorious Cyrillian juxtaposition of the *mia phusis* and the *ek duo phuseon* is left in its normal Stygian darkness.

If criticism is to be made, it must be at the point where every expositor and interpreter is vulnerable. Dr. Kelly also has his pre-suppositions. He is a devotee of the Chalcedonian settlement. He has long since given his imprimatur to the decisions of orthodoxy. He knows in advance that what will be rejected is heresy and aberration. Of course he is too good a scholar to rig his evidence, too discerning an interpreter to shout "heresy" loudly before orthodoxy has been established. But pre-suppositions always influence treatment. The reader who is most alert to them will get the most from this notable doctrinal study.

Perhaps we should be grateful that the early Councils failed to provide us with a definite doctrine of the Church. Indeed, the time for framing one is not yet; and we must, therefore, welcome thankfully two recent contributions which shed light upon this area of classic controversy.⁴ In an age pre-occupied with problems relating to the Church's strategy, the Church's action, and the Church's task, Mr. Kenrick offers us a timely corrective. He has not only made his own that profound slogan of the Ecumenical Movement: "Let the Church be the Church", he has also seen its implications. He has learned in personal experience that the Church cannot *act* unless she has reached the deeper understanding of what, in her essential being, she *is*. So he is concerned, first of all and most of all, with the laying of the indispensable foundations, with the nature of the Church, with ecclesiology. Then, and only then, will he move on to enunciate the corollaries, to determine what such an understanding will mean for the working of the Body of Christ—its life, its ministry, its ethic.

This is a dangerous book; dangerous to read, dangerous to criticize. And it takes a bold man to write it. For to believe its thesis is to stand under judgment individually and corporately, to be driven to repentance, revolution, and renewal. If Mr. Kenrick is right, then some of our theory and most of our practice is wrong. The "natural" man in us revolts against so disturbing a conclusion. Surely there is a flaw somewhere. Perhaps there is. But we had best expose ourselves in humble receptivity to this prophetic summons, before we try to draw its sting by adding our question marks and our qualifications.

Nevertheless, criticize we must. This is a good book. It could have been a better one. It moves at breath-taking tempo, challenges with compelling urgency; and therein lies something of its power. But sometimes it moves a little too quickly, lays its foundations too simply and easily, drives in its nails with Christian courage and vigour but with insufficient use of precision tools. Theology is made central: to the bar of theology the work must go. What if the hand at work must be adjudged slap-dash and occasionally unsure!

It will not do to defend the Resurrection with the categorical assertion that disillusioned men were in no mood to imagine it. Such a statement betrays a complete misunderstanding of the psychological springs of hallucination. It will not do to make the distinction between the bread and the wine, the Body and the Blood of the Sacrament, identical with a distinction between life and death. Such an interpretation is patently unbiblical. These are

⁴ *The New Humanity*, by Bruce Kenrick. Collins, 12/6d. (1958). *A Theology of the Laity*, by H. Kraemer. Lutterworth Press, 15/- (1958).

only straws; but they rightly make us pause and examine more closely the central issues. And then, one reader at least is forced to the conclusion that a firmer grasp and a more subtle use of the concept of "analogy" would have led to a more accurate understanding of the relationship between the Church and her Lord.

But we must not evade the impact of what is always a creative call, relevant to our situation. Free Churchmen need to be reminded that the Body of Christ has high claim to be regarded as the determinative New Testament description of the Church. And all devotees of an incarnational theology will profit from the insistence that our primary need is identification not with the world but with our Lord.

It is as well, however, to remember that all ecclesiological discussion is likely to be barren so long as it conceives of the Church in terms of an ecclesiastical order. In recent years, pressure of circumstances has forced upon us a new awareness of the place, function, and importance of the "laity"; and the myopia of centuries stands revealed. We need a theology of the laity, a theology which will be more than a footnote or appendix to the congealed doctrinal formulations of our past. Dr. Kraemer offers us a significant, though slender, Protestant counterpart to the great work of Father Congar, which blazed the trail.

Free Churchmen would be ill-advised to imagine that they have long ago solved this problem. Indeed, the distressing phenomenon of the self-assertive laity is directly related to the theological lacuna which Dr. Kraemer is striving to fill. He provides us with an interesting and selective historical survey and a provocative approach towards theological restatement. If we remain dissatisfied, we must build more surely.

The inescapable ambiguity attaching to the term "laity" bedevils the historical discussion, opens it to constant criticism, and leaves behind a deep sense of irritation. And I wonder whether we really know as much about the early centuries as Kraemer's assertions seem tacitly to assume. The attempt at theological restatement is avowedly provisional and should be treated as such. The thought is always stimulating, and often controversial. It is also confessedly one-sided—and perhaps too heavily.

We must agree that something bigger than a new doctrine of work is needed. We must assent to the affirmation that the fresh understanding we seek must be relevant to the laity as a whole rather than to the select and educated minority. We must approve the call for a wholehearted reorientation of our traditional ecclesiology. We must applaud the insistence that the Church exists not for itself but for the world, as *diakonia* and as mission. But we must continue to ask whether there is not demanded of us a yet deeper understanding—an understanding of the place of the laity

in worship, of the normative and directive function of the liturgy of the baptized? At this point Kraemer is strangely silent. But I wonder whether if we fail here we do not fail altogether.

It is always salutary to be reminded that the laity are not an abstract concept but a collection of individuals in need of pastoral care; and one of our most reliable guides to that fascinating terrain where pastoral theology and psychotherapy meet is the American scholar, Wayne Oates. In this,⁵ his most recent contribution, he explores the various kinds of anxiety that afflict, torment, or stimulate mankind, and fruitfully subjects pastoral and psychotherapeutic material to the interpretative scrutiny of biblical insight and theological understanding. Legalistic, economic, and finitude anxiety; the anxiety of grief, of sin, of moral indifference, of the cross; all these and more are given meticulous examination.

The American background is real, though not obtrusive; but there is little that is not applicable to the British scene. The relevant writings of Kierkegaard are plundered, and the fashionable Tillychian categories are heavily employed. Nevertheless, unnecessary jargon is shunned. If this is not always an easy book to follow, it is partly because of the nature of the issues under discussion and partly because of the method of presentation adopted. Sometimes we seem to be grappling with a series of jottings in staccato style rather than a progressive argument. Perhaps this is inevitable where a target is attacked from so many different points of vantage.

An illuminating study such as this prompts three reflections. I wonder how far the effective use of counselling techniques depends upon a certain measure of understanding, a certain standard of education, on the part of the counsellee. If the answer is not clear-cut, yet the question is worth asking seriously, before bright young ministers rush ahead.

More basic still is the emerging sense of tremendous perils attaching to a facile reliance upon techniques. Counselling and the pastoral ministry are fraught with so many dangers. The minister had best begin to learn that he also stands in need of healing, that the relationship within which he must work is one of mutual enrichment, of giving and receiving, never *de haut en bas*. He must never contract out of the pain of total redemption, of the agonizing search for sensitivity of approach and discipline of conversation. Wayne Oates is profoundly right in using as his *leitmotif* the pattern and reality of the Cross and Resurrection.

Beyond all this, there remains the irreplaceable healing power of the community of love. The pastor can never work adequately in isolation, only as representative. The Church remains the Body of

⁵ *Anxiety in Christian Experience*, by Wayne E. Oates. George Allen & Unwin, 15/- (1958).

Christ, where the unacceptable must find acceptance and the unlovely find love. This is at once the point of highest possibility and of deepest failure.

Increasingly, in our age, psychology and associated disciplines intrude into the philosophical domain; and in his latest book⁶ Austin Farrer has again and again to reckon with them. William James defined philosophy as "an unusually obstinate attempt to think clearly." It is a dictum that must be kept firmly in mind by a Gifford Lecturer who sets out to debate determinism and free will against the background of a discussion of "mind and body, speech and conduct, nature and spirit, responsibility and value"; and Dr. Farrer does not fail us. Occasionally he permits himself an anguished *cri de coeur*. "How difficult it is, in philosophy, to advance! After hours of discussion we find ourselves just able, by hard running, to catch up with our starting-point." But we suspect that, while the reader may be flagging, the author is in firm possession of his second wind and good for another hundred pages yet.

This book is more than an essay in metaphysics. The material provided by psychology and neurology is given the important place it deserves, treated fairly, and handled competently and seriously. Argument is directed towards the vindication of free will on the basis of failure to reduce human action to the sum of its determinate factors whose effect is theoretically calculable. Epiphenomenalism is rightly and decisively rejected. But the link between physiological events on the one hand, and conscious intention on the other, is found to reside in a pattern of physical action, correlated with consciousness and productive of real physical effect.

Again and again the author refuses to be led away from the rock of commonsense experience. All things are not what they seem. Nevertheless, in the richly human act of choice and decision lies reality that will stand against a hundred sophisms. Just as solipsism is self-destructive, so deterministic objections will often be found to be double-edged weapons, eating away the ultimate ground on which their exponents stand.

It will be clear that Dr. Farrer is battling in an arena that is of paramount importance for Christian faith—though he himself halts, of necessity, at the outer gates of theology. Almost certainly this is not a definite work of the calibre of *Finite and Infinite*. Too much time is expended on the careful delineation of a position that is to be demolished in a sentence a paragraph hence. Too often the necessities of internal debate make the opponents men of straw and ignore the endless permutations and combinations of the determinist

⁶ *The Freedom of the Will*, by Austin Farrer. A. & C. Black, 28/- (1958).

objector. Yet much ground is permanently gained, the insubstantial demons are banished, and a murky battlefield is floodlit for our generation. And ever and anew, a Farrerian *mot* is dropped into the conflict. It is good to be reminded that "for a discerning palate, one steak differs from another steak in glory."

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