

In the Study

SO many studies of Bultmann and his programme of demythologizing have appeared in recent years that many must be hard put to it to decide how adequately to familiarise themselves with the controversy and the real issues without the expenditure of more time and money than they can realistically afford. It is therefore with unreserved thankfulness that I note the appearance of a substantial volume¹ which, while grappling with all the basic problems, may yet, by reason of clarity and readability, be confidently commended to the student whose background of relevant understanding is minimal. Five years ago Dr. Macquarrie gave us a study in this general field which rumour reported the author himself considered to be a little premature. However that may be, his second thoughts and further thoughts have been worth waiting for, and the net result must enhance an already considerable reputation.

Are there limits that must be set to the demythologizing process? Bultmann evidently thinks there are. He will walk the road of existential analysis to a certain point, but then halts to plant in his path and ours an immovable kerygmatic boulder. At the boundary of human possibilities he sets an act of God. This is paradox; but is it contradiction? At least it is a procedure that opens him to attack from two sides—from a Barth who will convict him of the destruction of an objective atonement accomplished apart from man, and from a Buri who will demand that he finish his task and dekerymatize as well. It seems that the Bultmannic position will satisfy no one. The Roman theologian will side with Barth, and the philosophical existentialist with Buri.

Happily there are other interested parties to be considered. There are the biblical writers. There is also modern man. Bultmann is passionately concerned with both. He wishes to bring them together. His concern is in the broadest sense evangelistic. Existential analysis may provide a valid and valuable key to the understanding of the Scriptural Gospel and a meaningful point of entry into the modern predicament. Certainly there are obscurities and ambiguities in Bultmann's thought, or at least in his expression of it. But the verdict of careful examination must be that he is still on the side of the angels, and that the biblical Gospel is still in his hands. Where he fails us is in his estimate of modern man and the extent to which we may rightly go to meet him. In so far as he reinterprets the Gospel with

¹ *The Scope of Demythologizing*, by J. Macquarrie. S.C.M. Press, Ltd. 25/-. 1960.

regard to the modern *world-picture* we should be wholeheartedly with him. In so far as he may verge on the distortion of the Gospel by abasing himself before the modern *self-understanding* we should recall him to his own essential roots. It is this menacing possibility that often makes the rightful paradox in his thinking and presentation appear as damaging logical contradiction.

Such is Dr. Macquarrie's verdict. He arrives at it by way of illuminating discussion of Bultmann's thought and Bultmann's critics. It is a sane and sympathetic assessment; and it may well be right. In any event it will surely contribute to a more appreciative understanding of the work of one of the greatest of contemporary New Testament scholars.

But New Testament scholarship has a wide range of pre-occupation; and the patient examination of Gospel material still provides opportunities for fresh and deeper understanding. So far as the third evangelist is concerned, the portrait of Luke the historian is increasingly being overlaid by the picture of Luke the theologian. We may not simply dismiss this process in terms of the swing of the pendulum. The brushes are being wielded not only with vigour but with discernment. Herein is to be found something of the importance of the translation of some notable studies in Lukan theology.²

This book is a collection of essays rather than a systematic investigation. It seeks to probe St. Luke's mind and reveal some of his significant theological ideas and emphases. Dr. Conzelmann passes under review geographical elements in the Gospel, eschatology, redemptive history, christology, and the appropriation of salvation. He is seldom far from the text. Significant detailed appraisal of his judgments could be provided only by a scholar willing to rework the enormous mass of material pressed into service. Nevertheless, some general observations may be ventured.

I must confess that I found the later pages of the book the least convincing. This may be due partly to flagging zeal, but partly also to a certain incoherence of presentation that seems inseparable from collected studies of this nature. On the other hand, it is surely indisputable that a flood of light is thrown upon the structure of the third Gospel, upon the reflective use of traditional kerygmatic material, upon the determinative theological impact of a delayed Parousia, upon the Lukan answer to the first century situation in terms of the stages of redemptive history. Would it be wholly misleading to assert that it was St. Luke who struck the decisive blow against apocalyptic eschatology, and thus laid the ground-plan for the Apostles' Creed?

² *The Theology of St. Luke*, by H. Conzelmann. Faber & Faber. 30/-, 1960.

Whatever the answer may be, a generation that rightly insists upon the unity of Holy Scripture will yet need to understand and plot that unity in richer and more complex terms. This will necessarily involve a fuller appreciation of diverse theological presuppositions and perspectives. It is just here that a work of this kind can make a lasting contribution.

It is more than forty years since Dr. Relton gave us *A Study in Christology*. Now, in retirement, he has gathered together and made more readily available past essays in the field of doctrine.³ He has no material change of mind to record, and is therefore content that the words of yesterday should speak to today. This is a bold stand for any man to take. There must inevitably be argument about its justification.

For the plain fact is that this sort of collection invites the twin charges of incoherence and irrelevance. As to the first, some convincing defence can here be advanced, in that a certain unity is imparted through concentration of interest and attention upon christology both in itself and in its relation to the doctrine of God on the one hand and sacramentalism on the other. As to the second, acquittal is less sure. It is refreshing to be indirectly reminded that not every work of merit and value was written since 1945, that there is so much of theological worth and significance stemming from the early part of the century, though so rarely quoted and so seldom read today. Yet what is lacking is the immediacy and appeal of the theological word that speaks from and to the contemporary situation. The philosophical climate has changed; and if the basic problems are the same, the points of impact have shifted. A call to contend for the transcendence of God against over-emphasis upon his immanence sounds faintly, as if from another world.

Nevertheless, the final balance is a credit one. For we are keenly aware today of the central importance of christology, and it is just here that Dr. Relton has his most powerful word to say. The essential issues that confronted Chalcedon, that divided Antioch and Alexandria, are with us still. We may break with tradition if we will, but we had best understand it before we take such a step. Many who pride themselves on their orthodoxy would in fact find themselves to be in the camp of Apollinaris, or Nestorius, or Eutyches. Others who decry the historical formulations might discover on closer examination that in their different terms they did but echo them. This is a book that should both to see with crystal clarity precisely what it was that the great Fathers were trying to say and to proclaim.

³ *Studies in Christian Doctrine*, by H. M. Relton. Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 21/-. 1960.

But the Chalcedonian Definition did not mark a terminus. It set the limits within which the truth was to be found. For the further explication of that truth the Church has turned to Leonitius of Byzantium and his exposition of *enhypostasia*. It is this conception that Dr. Relton has always defended, and it is its reinterpretation for our day and age that he demands. He leaves us in no doubt as to what was at stake and what is at stake. Whether we reach his conclusions or not, we can trust him to be a sure guide along the way. Perhaps the crucial questions we have to ask ourselves are two. What is it that makes a truly and fully human person? Was it precisely our empirical humanity that the Son assumed? If these are complex problems, yet they cannot be ignored. For, in the end, our christological understanding must govern the whole range of Christian belief.

This truth finds illustration in the interesting study in sacramental theology that Dr. Relton provides. He works out the familiar but still significant correspondences that obtain between christological heresies and eucharistic understandings. The result is a presentation of fundamental cleavages of thought and interpretation which may fruitfully be kept in mind by those who are eager to gain the most from the recent translation of a work on the Lord's Supper⁴ from the pen of an eminent Swedish theologian.

Gustaf Aulen is specially concerned with the problems of sacrifice and real presence in so far as these relate to the eucharistic rite. His work is biblically based, historically buttressed, and ecumenically orientated. He begins with an examination of emergent thought within the ecumenical movement, from Edinburgh 1937 to Lund 1952, but is careful to fill out this discussion by reference to important independent Roman and Anglican contributions. Though most of this will be familiar ground to those who know anything of the modern debate, yet it is extremely valuable to be so forcefully reminded of the shift of interest and attention from real presence to sacrifice that has taken place, and of the unsolved issues thus left behind. The treatment of Reformed thinking that follows is almost exclusively concerned with Luther and the theology that stems from him. It merits high praise for its concentration upon the *Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament* of 1519, which gives us the thinking of the great Reformer before polemical considerations weighted and distorted emphasis and interpretation, for its careful and acute evaluation of the sacrificial motif in Luther's understanding, and for its devastating if indirect attack upon the still prevalent idea that the Lutheran watchword was consubstantiation.

⁴ *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, by G. Aulen. Oliver & Boyd. 18/-. 1960.

From these limited historical enquiries certain questions emerge with regard to sacrifice and real presence which may rightly and necessarily be brought to Scripture and posed for biblical answer. Dr. Aulen's touch at this point is delicate and perceptive. He does not bring his conclusions with him, and he knows how to draw the lines between christology and eucharistic theology. It is therefore with hands judiciously laden that he arrives at his final chapters, where conclusions are offered, clarification attempted, and construction essayed. If he is right in thinking that we are at an ecumenical impasse, he may fairly claim to be signposting some promising tracks along which we may yet advance.

It is of course true that the emphasis in contemporary discussion has moved from real presence to sacrifice, and that basic divergences of belief and understanding may well have been masked by the restatement of old problems in ambiguous new language. Certainly statements concerning the eucharistic sacrifice are not renowned for clarity and precision. There is need for continued thought and study, which this book will surely stimulate and guide. Perhaps the key question will relate to the nature of the eucharistic offering. And perhaps the beginnings of the answer will be revealed to those who are prepared to locate the essential offering not in Offertory Procession but within the Eucharistic Prayer itself.

The desire for unified pattern is deep-rooted in the questing mind of man. The theologian cannot rest content with the ordering of his own thinking, but remains dissatisfied until the scattered thoughts of his fellow have also been pressed into synthesis. And just here lies one of the tantalising problems that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, by his untimely death, bequeathed to the Christian world. Professor Godsey has bravely faced the task.⁵ Since he, like his hero, shares the preoccupations and emphases of the modern theological scene, we are not surprised that the golden key turns out to be christological. Inevitably argument falls short of complete demonstration. But the verdict may well be true.

The writings of the German theologian are distributed within three periods, distinguished in terms of "foundation," "application," and "fragmentation." The years 1927-31 saw the appearance of *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, and witnessed an overriding concern with Christ-in-the-Church. 1932-39 is marked by a shift from systematic theology to biblical exposition, by a new emphasis against the background of the Hitler régime upon the Lordship of Christ over the Church, by the production of *Creation and Fall*, *The Cost of Discipleship*, *Temptation*, *Life*

⁵ *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, by J. D. Godsey. S.C.M. Press, Ltd. 25/-. 1960.

Together, 1940-45 betrays a tremendous concentration upon Christ as Lord of the world, and gave us the fragmentary *Ethics*, and the *Letters and Papers from Prison*. All this diverse material is worked through and summarised by Professor Godsey; and an evaluation of his stimulating theology is offered by way of conclusion.

Perhaps the most valuable thing about this expository study is that it sets before us, so far as the possibilities allow, the complete Bonhoeffer. Contemporary interest and attention has naturally been focussed upon the final phase of his theological reflection. But the longer and wider view is needed if misinterpretation is to be avoided. It is difficult enough to know where the young martyr was heading. If we ignore the points from which he came we shall needlessly complicate our remaining problems.

But still the fascinating obscurities abide. If only the *Ethics* had been completed! If only the book projected in the prison cell could have been written! Even so we have enough to set the mind thinking significant thoughts about God and the world which could, in due time, foster creative ways of Christian obedience. Professor Godsey is a reliable guide, and is fortunately not an uncritical recorder. He knows that Bonhoeffer did not get the existentialists, the psychiatrists, and Karl Barth quite right—and he tells us so. He also affirms the true significance of what is certainly a theology for our times.

I think, however, that a warning must be added. The publishers have included this book in their "Preachers' Library." That was either a very lazy or a very discerning decision. Clearly this is theology to be preached. It was forged on the anvil of proclamation and pastoral travail, fashioned amid the turmoil of this turbulent era. But the preacher had best make sure that he has some essential understanding of what it is that Bonhoeffer was really seeking, before he takes this out of his study. And if he starts haranguing his congregation about religionless Christianity and worldliness, he will court disaster. This is heady wine—a seductive brew. Yet it may become the water of life.

Let the preacher however take heart. Deeply theological studies of preaching are few and far between, and even the books and lectures that show awareness of profounder issues than those of method and technique seldom range sufficiently widely or lay the foundations at an adequate level. It may be that in this connection a heavy price has been paid for our specialisation in theological disciplines, and that the gulf that still exists between the systematician and the exegete, between the Old Testament scholar and the New, has gravely hindered constructive advance in crucial areas that overlap our boundaries. Certainly we shall be grateful

for the translation of a substantial work⁶ that nobly treats of the proclamation of the Word, presents a clear and consistent thesis, and at one and the same time argues widely, theologically, and at depth.

As might be expected, the impress of Luther is clear in almost every chapter; and the whole book reflects indirectly but faithfully the modern revival in Lutheran studies. Dr. Wingren rightly emphasises that the centre of the Gospel is not incarnation but death-resurrection, and interestingly works throughout with the theme of conflict and victory. Law and Gospel are expounded in their inter-relationship along lines which should correct popular ideas of the Lutheran position. Creation and redemption are firmly tied together after the manner of Irenaeus, with the inevitable and significant corollary that the work of Christ is seen in terms of making man not "religious" but truly human. And all the diversity of exposition and enquiry is unified with reference to the living Word of God, proclaimed between Pentecost and Parousia for the healing of the nations.

There are few sermon hints in this discussion—though the Christian Year comes under scrutiny and the preacher's use of Scripture is realistically examined. But something far more important is offered. It is nothing less than a vision of the magnitude of the herald's task, and of its true centrality when understood in terms of the fulness of the Gospel. The crucial theological themes are wrestled with tenaciously and profoundly, because this must be done if the minister is to understand his calling and the Church her destiny. The wise reader will sup slowly at this table; for the fare is rich, and some of it may have to be rejected. The polemic against Barth bears witness that this book was written at the close of the last war, and therefore not all of the arrows quite hit the mark of 1960. The understanding of Christian faith in terms of conflict between God and Satan and of the Christus Victor school involves large assumptions that not all will be prepared immediately to accept. The exposition of "body" and "conscience" in connection with the distinction between Law and Gospel raises hesitations for those who are not quite convinced that this is the biblical emphasis. But these are cautions rather than complaints. For Dr. Wingren has discharged his task magnificently. He does not mention Phillips Brooks. But I would hope that all his readers may agree that "truth through personality" should now be labelled "sunk without trace."

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⁶ *The Living Word*, by G. Wingren. S.C.M. Press, Ltd. 25/-. 1960.