

In The Study

In a way it all started with the Tractarians. They acknowledged the convincing force of much "Catholic" belief, and they wanted to remain Anglicans with a clear conscience. If the inner conflict raged at many points, few were more decisive for them than the arena of eucharistic doctrine. Were their acknowledged Articles of Belief capable of satisfying re-interpretation? Could it be fairly argued that on a particular issues Cranmer's intention and outlook were quite other than had generally been assumed? Perhaps it could.

Thus was built up an imposing and liberating edifice of understanding. Late mediaeval Romanism was the villain of the piece. At one level was a pervasive and degenerate nominalism. At another was an indefensible "popular" eucharistic theology. The continental Reformers were tarred with the one brush, while striking at the other. In England, the new men shared the Lutheran misapprehensions—or perhaps they didn't. Or they were seeking the recovery of "classical" Romanist belief. Or Romans and Reformers alike had lost the true Biblical understanding of sacrifice. The variations were endless. But one way or another the impasse could be resolved and the chasm bridged. And the story passed on via the textbooks into the twentieth century gathering reputability as it went, and parts of the ecumenical movement accepted it gratefully at Anglo-Catholic hands, and it seemed that the new age of eucharistic harmony might soon be dawning. Only the sad thing is that it was just not true.

This is the theme of a monumental study¹ from the pen of the lecturer in dogmatic theology at Heythrop College. Much of this has been said before by his Romanist brethren, but the claims are now exhaustively buttressed and made available to the English reader; and surely the case may be taken to be broadly established. We are all debtors to Father Clark, not simply for the destruction of myth but also for that clearing of the theological ground that reveals the real issues and encourages us to grapple with them. It is no part of his task to offer a systematic presentation of the Roman doctrine of the eucharist, but much valuable

¹ *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, by Francis Clark. (Darton, Longman and Todd. 50s.). 1960.

light is shed upon this by the way. If his incidental and indirect expositions of Reformation belief (as opposed to Reformation reaction) smell faintly musty and sound just slightly off-key, there is really no cause for surprise. For has he not amply demonstrated how easily the language of one's opponents can be misunderstood? This is always the great barrier to ecumenical communication.

It is tempting to conclude that our great controversies have been "much ado about nothing," that to penetrate the verbiage of the past and cut away the inaccuracies of its polemic would be to reveal a broad, underlying, sufficient unity. But this book confirms us in the knowledge that the easy way out is not open to us. There are continuing problems, and they are major ones. Only they are not quite what we have generally supposed them to be. Now our paramount need is for the systematic study of the great traditions of belief, particularly in their classic periods, and their classic formulations. It means combined study across denominational frontiers. Its fruit would be rewritten text-books of Church History and Christian Doctrine that would make us rub our eyes and wonder. Its end might be a new engagement in truth, and a glimpse of the future that God intends.

It is scarcely rewriting that Dr. Paul has to offer to us in the historical and doctrinal fields.² His is the more humble aim of making that sketch review of the past that may illumine and assist communication of the Gospel to the contemporary world. Nevertheless, his pastoral concern and his ecumenical spirit combine to ensure flexibility of mind and relevance in application, whilst his historian's training keeps theological judgment rooted in understanding of the complexity of events.

The bulk of his work is concerned with the examination and assessment of expositions of the Atonement through the centuries, Irenaeus and Origen, Athanasius and Augustine, Anselm and Abelard, Luther and Calvin, Owen and Edwards, Campbell and Bushnell, Moberly and Rashdall, Dale and Denney, Westcott and Forsyth, Hicks and Aulen, Taylor and Quick, Brunner and Baillie—it is all familiar ground, and the harvest it yields is gathered with surer hand once the ancient and mediaeval periods are left behind. Here are all the great theories and emphases of tradition, from victory, ransom, and satisfaction to moral influence, penal substitution, and sacrifice. Here is revealed quite clearly how each era uses the images of contemporary society, and how the richness of the image is lost in the rigidity of the theory it creates.

But what justification is there for travelling once again the old path, even though it be in the company of one who brings an unusually fresh and discerning eye to the terrain and enhances our

²*The Atonement and the Sacraments*, by Robert S. Paul. (Hodder & Stoughton, 30s.). 1961.

appreciation by a constant stream of shrewd comment? It is a fair question, and receives a convincing answer. For Dr. Paul has a double preoccupation. He is concerned about the disunity of the churches, and especially the cleavage between Protestant and Catholic. He is concerned also about the man in the pew and his perplexity. And in the Atonement and in the Sacraments and in the indissoluble relationship between them he finds the key at one and the same time to unity and to understanding. To make the Atonement central to theology and to make the sacraments integral to worship is our common need. The Protestant sees one side of the coin, the Catholic the other. But the Atonement is communicated to us in sacramental living, whilst sacramentalism must ever be governed by the Atonement.

It is against this background that the writer proceeds to a brief discussion of baptism and a very inadequate treatment of eucharist that seek reconstruction and some advance beyond the ecumenical impasse. Seldom have I encountered among paedobaptists so clear an understanding of the real issues and so humble a readiness to follow the argument where it leads. He frankly asserts: "There is something like a conspiracy of blindness in the way in which theologians in all confessions who are the most anxious to understand and develop the meaning of the Sacraments will take the sacramental ideas of Paul (which implied conversion, the significant imagery of believers' baptism and faith-union with Christ) and apply them without any further comment to the practice of infant baptism where none of these most vitally important factors are in the least operative." This needs to be said. And we should all go on to join him in his recognition that within divided Christendom the incompleteness of our own sacramental experience precludes full understanding of the baptismal sacrament.

Dr. Paul would have us build upon the life of our Lord. Jesus underwent both circumcision and baptism. May it be that what is demanded of paedobaptists is a form of baptismal confirmation in years of understanding and commitment that retains the symbolism of immersion and all that it involves? There would be no question of anabaptism, but rather the adoption of a form of confirmation integral to baptism itself, a going down into the waters understood not as a second baptism but as a completion of the one unified sacramental action. It is a brave suggestion—though it might serve only to make confusion worse confounded. It should at least stir us to a like willingness to adventure. For my own part, I become increasingly convinced that a paramount cause of paedobaptist myopia is the sub-Biblical theory and practice of so many Baptist churches.

Meanwhile, strange things are happening on the New Testament front which would make our fathers wonder; and at no point

is the contemporary scene more fascinating than in the area of Gospel criticism and construction. Rarely if ever do the standard text-books reflect the sparkle and brilliance of the present situation, for either they are the work of the individualists who hold fast to their own line or else they betray the hand of the mediators who seek balance and neatness, reflect the consensus of opinion, and favour appropriately the sober hues. If we would catch for ourselves the exciting glimpse of tomorrow, it is to the brief article and the learned journal that we must turn—or listen in at a meeting such as the International Congress of the Four Gospels (1957). This is why we must be grateful for a production that puts between two covers a judicious selection of papers read at that same Congress.³ Of the sixteen contributions offered, fourteen are in English and two in French.

What is here provided should be of wide appeal. From first to last we breathe the atmosphere of a living, relevant, and dynamic faith. There is no hint of the cloistered seclusion of the study. Theological understanding combines with pastoral concern to make scholarship meaningful to minister and teacher alike. Real and major issues are being wrestled with, and the outcome has significant implications for our understanding and use of the Gospels and thus for our presentation of New Testament faith. Clearly it would be impossible to examine seriatim the individual contributions. Nevertheless, there may be singled out for special mention the review of the present position of textual criticism in the New Testament given by Kurt Aland. With the possible exception of E. C. Colwell no one surely would have been in a better position to discharge the task. The summary assessment is all too brief. But it forcibly reminds us of the complexities of the problem, clearly establishes the present state of research, and incidentally provides illuminating background to the recently published section of the New English Bible.

What of the general trends that this collection exemplifies and reveals? There is a turning away from a scepticism which owed as much to concealed philosophical presuppositions as it did to sane and sober methods of scholarly investigation. The limitations of Form Criticism are more apparent and more widely recognised. A more patient reckoning with the Evangelists' own aims and understandings is apparent. It is not that the clock has been turned back or that we are asked to accept conservatism refurbished. But if the Gospels are not biographies neither are they community inventions, and if our understanding of history is more sophisticated than of old yet the search for the Jesus of history is not entirely vain. And this is why it is no accident that so much of the interest is centred on the Fourth Gospel, whether in itself

³ *The Gospels Reconsidered*, by Basil Blackwell. 27s. 6d. 1960.

or in its relationship to the Synoptics. New light has been shed on old problems, not least by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Old questions are now being asked in a new way, as we find that the relevant questions themselves are subtly different to what we had supposed. No fresh agreed positions are in sight. All is in ferment. The value of such a volume as this is that it will introduce the non-specialist into what might become for him a new world.

But the modern problem of Scripture is essentially that of comprehending Biblical revelation in an age which is heir to rapid and enormous advance and upheaval both in the scientific and in the historical field. It would be a bold man who would confidently claim that the difficulties of wielding the old weapon in a new world have been satisfactorily solved and clearly overcome; but it is reasonable to suppose that an understanding of the broad movement of the last three hundred years and a grasp of the fruitful lines of theological reaction and reappraisal will be the indispensable preliminary to fresh assurance. It is the value of a slim and readable contribution to the series of S.C.M. paperbacks⁴ that it performs this service with accuracy, clarity, and comprehensiveness.

The seventeenth century was marked by the scientific revolution—that outstanding achievement of Christian civilisation, carried forward by pioneers many of whom were deeply Christian thinkers. But the inevitable disintegration of the mediaeval world-view was a prolonged process, and science succumbed more rapidly than history. In the latter field, eighteenth century man remained a Hellenist at heart. In science, he was a modernist; in history, a mediaevalist. Only in the nineteenth century was the revolution in historical thinking carried through, as cyclical and static categories gave way to concepts of change and progress. So historical method was applied to Christian origins and Christian Scriptures, and philosophical and theological systems were framed in evolutionary terms.

But at this point the theological revolution in Britain divides from that of the continent. On the one hand we find *Essays and Reviews*, *Lux Mundi*, Lightfoot, Westcott, and Hort, the speculative liberalism of the Broad Churchmen, but also the liberal orthodoxy of Gore and the Anglo-Catholic leaders, and the inductive, experiential, evolutionary approach to the Bible. On the other hand, there is Schleiermacher, with his complete acceptance of historical criticism, his necessary formulation of a new doctrine of revelation, his understanding of Christianity as a positive historical religion, his proclamation of a theology of the religious consciousness, and there is Karl Barth, with his unqualified rejection of

⁴ *The Bible in the Age of Science*, by Alan Richardson. (S.C.M. Press Ltd. 5s.). 1961.

Schleiermacher's historical method, his substitution of church dogmatics for the study of Christian religion, and his interpretation of dogmatics in Christological terms. It is against the background of Barth's dissociation of critical method from liberal presuppositions that contemporary developments in Biblical studies are to be understood.

Four concluding chapters outline the recent trends. Bultmann and the existentialist theology are expounded and criticized; Dodd, Cullmann, Ernest Wright, and the *Heilsgeschichte* theology with its preoccupation with the Biblical proclamation of God's action in history, are sympathetically discussed and commended; Austin Farrer and the theology of images are presented in their seminal significance; typology with its understanding of historical foreshadowing and fulfilment is perceptively reviewed. This is the work of a master. It avoids quick solutions and unnecessary technicalities. It stimulates thought and challenges obscurity. It deserves a wide circulation. It is cheap at its price.

It may also help us to understand how inevitable it is that in every generation expositions of Scripture reflect the background of the times and the preoccupations of the age; and at least from the Reformation era onwards this fact has been particularly evident if we limit our concern to commentaries on so explosive a book as the Epistle to the Romans. Since the last quarter of a century has been marked by an unparalleled attack on crucial problems of ecclesiology and a massive awareness of the Church as belonging to the Gospel itself, a new commentary was fairly to be expected which would use the ecclesiological key to unlock the apostolic treasure. It has now been made available to us in an admirable English translation provided by Harold Knight.⁵ If we are wise, we shall not attempt to drive an apportioning wedge between the influence of the *Zeitgeist* and that of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, to be alert to the one while remaining receptive to the other may lead to the conclusion that at this point they belong together more closely than might have been supposed.

The *Commentaire Du Nouveau Testament* series has elicited noteworthy contributions from the pens of Hering and Masson. This study from Leenhardt is of at least equal merit and importance. Needless to say, the critical issues are never shirked. But the aim is theological exposition, and the goal is triumphantly realized. Style is attractive, thought is clear, interpretation is sometimes fresh and always challenging. This is the work of a cautious exegete who is never content to drift with the popular currents, but will listen patiently and persistently to the text and weigh it soberly and sanely, even though the result dictated be less exciting. He will not throw

⁵ *The Epistle to the Romans*, by Franz J. Leenhardt. (Lutterworth Press. 45s.). 1961.

out the plain assertion of natural moral understanding in Romans 2 just because it may become entangled with classical theories of natural law. He will not shut himself up to autobiographical interpretations of Romans 7 when the general tenor of the Epistle is against them. He will not equate the political authorities of Romans 13 with demonic powers. If he is to be challenged at any major point it must perhaps be in his exposition of sacrifice. That this has its representative aspect may not and will not be denied. But it must be asked whether there is not at the centre of the Biblical understanding a controlling element that must be described as substitutionary, and whether a failure to give adequate recognition to this pivotal reality does not subtly unbalance the argument at more than one point.

However that be, the significant feature of this study lies in its grasp of the essential unity of the Roman epistle. As Paul pauses before turning to the West he confronts the problem raised by the tremendous extension of the Church of Christ. Could the sense of unity and continuity still be preserved? And wherein did it really consist? Only a reasoned affirmation of what essentially constituted the inner being of the Church could provide the answer. But that answer must be given not in terms of timeless essence but of historical emergence and growth, of divine purpose and action. This is the theme of the epistle. Only when Romans 9-11 is seen not as an interruption but as the inevitable next link in a unified chain is "justification" rightly understood.

If the Church is seen as belonging in this way to the divine purpose and the total Gospel, the question of the Biblical attitude to Church Order cannot for long be evaded. The appropriate concern will be not preoccupation with the details of practical development but rather a keen attention to the shaping of the Body of Christ within the New Testament period in so far as this reflects the self-understanding of the apostolic Church. It is the supreme merit of a new contribution to the series of Studies in Biblical Theology⁶ that it reviews the evidence from this perspective.

The common weakness in this field is to generalize from a pre-determined position and press the facts into a tidy and coherent scheme. Dr. Schweizer wisely will have none of this. Patiently he explores the New Testament writings, and moves on to a brief and sketchy examination of the Apostolic Fathers. Only then will he attempt to unify and draw conclusions. He admits the presence of varying emphases, but would find in the Pauline thinking the most adequate approach to a full and balanced explication. The details of exegesis are inevitably open to attack at many points. But it is a refreshing experience to company with one who does not profess

⁶ *Church Order in the New Testament*, by E. Schweizer. (S.C.M. Press, Ltd. 16s.). 1961.

to know the end from the beginning, and who seeks at every point to listen humbly and receptively to the text.

His conclusion is that the Church is built and ordered upon the basis of faith both in God's freedom and in his faithfulness. It lives by the past and present activity of God in Jesus Christ, and its ordering must always bear witness to this. In so far as it rests upon the historical redemption that culminates in the historical Jesus, it looks back to the cross and resurrection and forward to the parousia, and sees itself on pilgrimage in time. In so far as it is a new creation it looks upward to the risen Lord who is from everlasting to everlasting, and understands itself as caught up into the heavenly places. In the one case the emphasis in Church Order will be upon continuity and its historical head. In the other it will be upon newness and the Spirit. But either way, it is of God whose freedom and faithfulness must always be held together. This is true, important, and relevant—and its implications for contemporary thinking and reform are profound. I ask only whether the primacy of christology to pneumatology must not be continually asserted, and whether this does not mean that the argument must be taken one decisive step further.

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