

Editorial

THE present issue of THE CHURCHMAN has been planned as a 'general' number. No attempt has been made to adhere to a particular theme, as is normally done, though it so happens that the first two articles deal with aspects of the Roman Church: the papal claim to infallibility and the development of the cult of the Virgin Mary. The first of these articles is by the Bishop of Down and Dromore, whose contribution will be particularly welcomed in view of his recently published volume *A Handbook on the Papacy*.¹ A review of that book appears at the end of this issue. The writer of the review, the Rev. R. J. Coates, vicar of Rawtenstall, Lancs., is also the author of the article on Mariolatry. As a former Superintendent of the Irish Church Missions Mr. Coates can claim a first hand acquaintance with the Roman controversy and he has made a close study of the subject.

The article on Conversion is by the Rev. D. A. Brown, who is one of the younger clergy, having been ordained in 1948. He is at present curate of Immanuel Church, Streatham Common. The Rev. Dr. C. Sydney Carter contributes an article on Philip Doddridge to mark the bi-centenary of the death of this celebrated Nonconformist divine. With this issue the Rev. F. J. Taylor's Contemporary Commentary enters upon its fifth year. This quarterly review of current affairs and theological trends has now become an established feature of THE CHURCHMAN, and we know that it is much valued by our readers.

The new series of "Studies in Biblical Theology" now being published by the S.C.M. Press made an auspicious start with an English translation of Oscar Cullman's *Baptism in the New Testament*.² This work by a leading continental theologian is in the nature of a reply to Karl Barth's essay on the same subject published under the English title *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism*.³ Accordingly, one of Prof. Cullman's main concerns is to justify infant baptism by proving that the practice is in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. He begins by associating baptism with the redeeming work of Christ and argues that by His death and resurrection the Lord accomplished a 'general baptism' on behalf of the whole of mankind. This means that "all men have in principle received Baptism long ago, namely on Golgotha, at Good Friday and Easter. There the essential act of Baptism was carried out, entirely without our co-operation, and even without our faith. There the whole world was baptised on the ground of the absolutely sovereign act of God, who in Christ 'first loved us' (1 John iv. 19) before we loved him, even before we believed" (p. 23).

From this starting point the author goes on to consider the meaning

¹ Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 18/-.

² Price 6/-.

³ Trans. E. A. Payne. S.C.M. Press, 2/6.

of the *individual's* dying and rising with Christ in the act of baptism, and consequently the applicability of the rite to unconscious infants. It is freely admitted that there is no conclusive evidence with regard to the New Testament *practice* of baptism in the case of infants and that the question can only be decided on the ground of New Testament *doctrine*. At the same time it is pointed out that there are no traces at all of the baptism of 'adults' born into a Christian home and brought up in the Christian faith. "Those who dispute the Biblical character of infant Baptism have to reckon with the fact that *adult Baptism for sons and daughters born of Christian parents, which they recommend, is even worse attested by the New Testament than infant Baptism* (for which certain possible traces are discoverable) *and indeed lacks any kind of proof*" (p. 26).

What does baptism actually accomplish? It sets a person within the divine covenant of grace and incorporates him into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 13). In the reception of this act the baptised person is the passive object of God's dealing: he "is baptised" (Acts ii. 41)—an unambiguous passive, as Cullman says. Baptism is thus an act of grace, an absolutely free work of God. It is something which is done for a person: not something which he does for himself, the value of which depends upon his understanding, or his faith, or his confession.

Has faith, then, no connection with baptism? Assuredly it has. But here as always faith has the nature of *response* to what God has done and therefore is subsequent to the divine deed. In this connection Cullman draws a parallel between the baptism of redemption which Christ accomplished for all mankind at Golgotha and baptism into the church whereby a new member is added to the Body of Christ. Both 'baptisms' are first and foremost divine acts, independent of men, and it is of the essence of both that faith must *follow* as the human answer to what God has done. "If in the Baptism of the Church faith is primarily not a *subsequent answer* to God's work but a precondition of God's dealing with us, Golgotha and Church Baptism as acts of reception into the covenant of grace lie no longer on the same level" (p. 33). On the other hand, if the parallel thus drawn is justified, it must be conceded that the really important thing about faith in this connection is not that it should precede baptism, or be contemporaneous with it, but that it should follow baptism as the necessary response to the divine grace.

Cullman is insistent that the baptismal act itself neither stands nor falls with faith. In the case of adult baptism faith is indeed demanded beforehand as a sign to the church that the candidate will genuinely continue in the life of faith thereafter. In the case of the child born of believing parents, his very membership of a Christian household ensures his right to reception into the church (1 Cor. vii. 14) and is at the same time a sign that faith will follow in due course. Another aspect of the matter is the faith of the congregation at the time of baptism, though this is not to be represented as vicarious faith. The church prays for the person being baptised (Acts viii. 15), that God may complete the miracle of baptism in the baptised person, whether adult or infant. This prayer of faith on the part of the congregation

is an indispensable element in the baptismal act. The following conclusion is therefore reached with regard to the relation between faith and baptism :

- (1) *after* Baptism, faith is demanded of *all* those baptised ;
- (2) *before* Baptism, the declaration of faith is a sign of the divine will that Baptism takes place, demanded from *adults* who individually come over from Judaism or heathenism, but in other cases lacking ;
- (3) *during* the baptismal act, faith is demanded of the praying congregation.

Enough has probably been said to indicate that Professor Cullman's work is of exceptional interest. It ought certainly to be studied by all who are giving thought to the present discussions on baptism and are seeking to discover the theological foundations on which baptismal practice should be built.

In the same series of studies (and at the same price) is Floyd V. Filson's *The New Testament Against Its Environment*. The writer's concern is to emphasise the distinctiveness and originality of the Christian Gospel when viewed against the background of the non-Christian religious life and writings of New Testament times. Whatever parallels may be drawn between the Gospel and Jewish or Hellenistic thought, the points of departure are more significant than the points of agreement. This is because the entire Gospel is centred in the historical person of Jesus Christ, who came "in the fulness of time" to redeem mankind, and who victorious over death sends the Holy Spirit for the continuance of His work in the life of the community and of its individual members. "This is indeed the Gospel of Christ the risen Lord. It is not in its essentials a secondary echo of themes originating elsewhere. It has the stamp of freshness, vitality, and originality. . . . One may ignore it, reject it, or accept it, but one cannot reasonably deny that it is a distinctive message which sets it against its environment."