

## Notes and Comments

### THE ISSUES OF THE REFORMATION CLOSED?

#### AN ANSWER TO D. W. HAY

A RECENT ARTICLE in this *Journal* promises a "reopening" of the issues of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> But actually it closes these issues with a bang; for David Hay seeks to show that the controversies of the sixteenth century were little more than a great misunderstanding. The opposing parties proceeded on the basis of different semantics. Had they only compared notes on the meaning of their terms, Trent and Geneva would have been able to exist peacefully side by side. As a matter of fact, the former appears in a slightly better light than the latter. For the Roman Catholic theologians at Trent stressed righteousness by works simply in order to maintain growth in holiness, while the Reformed failed to appreciate the connection between Baptism and justification. In the matter of Scripture and Tradition, the former established a duality which modern Reformed scholars accept. With regard to the Eucharistic sacrifice, the Roman theologians emphasized the sacrificial element at the expense of "man's action in the Son towards the Father," while the Reformers committed the opposite error and thereby lost a legitimate biblical emphasis. Today, thanks to a Protestant trend towards the right and a Roman Catholic trend towards the left, a *via media* becomes visible. It might be defined as faith plus works, Scripture plus tradition, gift plus sacrifice, always with a strong accent on the first member of each pair.

Certainly no one who has followed the developments in our generation would want to pour gall into the author's wine of joy at this reconciliation of Rome and Geneva. What has happened before our eyes is wonderful. Few realized, prior to John XXIII, the extent and sincerity of Roman Catholic reform. Certainly we must vie with their new-found appreciation of the Scriptures in the spirit of that jealousy which Paul describes in Romans 11. The bridges that have been built must be firmed and buttressed.

But is this *rapprochement* really helped by the sort of general statements the author offers? How shall we do justice to our Roman Catholic brethren, if we are biased about our own tradition? I am disturbed by the tendency of Dr. Hay's presentation.

1. Much of the author's critique of the Reformation is directed not against the Reformers themselves, but against their latter-day followers—against the superficial shibboleths and war cries of militant Protestants. Orangemen and others may need to be brought up short with these unpalatable truths. But the author himself admits that the Reformers cannot be

1. David W. Hay, "The Issues of the Reformation Reopened," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 10 (1964), 177-86.

smearred with the same brush. They knew the place of works and of tradition. Yet—*aliquid semper haerit*; they appear as the originators of a *détour* in Christian understanding.

2. The author argues by general inferences. All students of the New Testament today agree that the connection between Baptism and justification must be taken very seriously. But to conclude from the human nature of Christ that incorporation cannot happen "save in a sacramental mode" is a *non sequitur*. Why is water more human than the word? The argument might fit the Lord's Supper, but hardly Baptism.

The author claims that the inward testimony of the Spirit implies the same kind of authority for the church as that of Scripture, conveniently identifying the church with its appointed officials. But does that necessarily follow from the *internum testimonium spiritus sancti*? Can that not with equal right be understood of the rank and file of believers?

3. The Lutheran branch of the Reformation has been all but completely ingored. Calvinists may accept a real and progressive sanctification, but rightly or wrongly Luther stressed the concept of *iustitia extra nos*.<sup>2</sup> One does not have to agree with him. One may consider the Lutheran Reformation a calamity. But surely its concerns deserve to be taken seriously in a reopening of Reformation issues. They ought to be heard in the ecumenical debate, especially when the Reformed are made to appear to be closer to Rome than to Wittenberg. If the author had given more attention to Luther, especially in the light of the Luther Renaissance of the last fifty years, he might have given consideration to some dominant strains in the Reformation which are entirely overlooked in his presentation. Suffice it to name only two which bear on the issue under discussion.

(a) Luther's conflict with Rome was not a merely ideological battle. Luther was not an academician like Calvin. His theological convictions were won in deeply personal struggles, and he scored his opponents not so much for their differing theological views as for their cavalier, cold-blooded juggling of theological truths. He could not conceive of a purely academic pursuit of theological questions, but held that real theological convictions could be born only in *tentatio*, i.e. in the existential encounter with oneself, the devil, and God.<sup>3</sup> It is true that in the struggle with the Enthusiasts some of this *theologia crucis* was obscured by propositional truths, and that the latter ultimately triumphed in the period of orthodoxy. But in the present ecumenical debate, when attempts are so frequently made to achieve unity by semantic legerdemain, Luther's concern for experiential theology in the deepest sense of the word is an urgent need. His radicalism must be taken seriously if union is to lead to unity.

2. This term is meant not to localize our sanctification in a divine beyond—Luther never disputed the inner work of the Spirit in the hearts of men—but to interpret sanctification as a constant return to the *iustitia aliena* of Christ, rather than as an increase in empirical piety. Cf. Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), pp. 69, 77, 80.

3. Cf. Walther von Loewenich, *Luthers Theologia Crucis* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1929), p. 14 and *passim*.

(b) Luther wrote no *Summa* or *Institutes*. In all his theological writings he pursued definite practical reforms. If Wittenberg and Rome had only differed on the fine theological balance between faith and works, they would have been able to reach a compromise. But more concrete matters were at stake. Is it permissible to change traditions of the church? Is the organized church the mistress or the handmaiden of the Word? Shall Christian energy be directed into secular vocations? On these and many other points the theological issues touched the raw edge of life, and here it was that Rome refused to yield. In the last analysis the issue was legalism. No doubt the followers of Luther soon developed a legalism of their own and, thank God, the heirs of Trent are swinging towards a more dynamic understanding of the Word and of the church. But this is not the time to shrug off the healthy impetus that has come from the Reformers. Had they not encouraged the intent and uncompromising study of Scripture (perhaps more than their latter-day followers liked) we would never have come to the present state of agreement. It would be too bad if we should now discourage this attention to Scripture or hedge it in by accepting the voice of Scripture only when understood "in the light of Catholic principles." Here we need nothing less than the absolute authority of Scripture. In fact only by listening to Scripture itself are we likely to discover the inner core of tradition.<sup>4</sup> At this time, when Roman Catholics are willing to lend an ear to the concerns of the Reformation, we need, not less, but more attention to its genius. Otherwise they may soon not only read the Bible more zealously than we, but canonize the Reformers at a time when we have decided to dismiss them with a patronizing nod.

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4. This point is well made by Gerhard Ebeling in a paper, " 'Sola Scriptura' and the Problem of Tradition," prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal, 1963.

#### REMARKS ON THE "SON OF MAN"

WE ARE TOLD from time to time that, in puzzling out exactly what Jesus meant when he referred to himself as the Son of Man, we must look solely at the usage of this expression in the Old Testament, and in Daniel in particular, for the background of his sayings. Vincent Taylor, for example, urges us to cease perusing the pseudepigraphic literature (e.g. 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra) for parallels to the sayings of Jesus, and to rely solely on Daniel: "There is good reason . . . to think that Jesus' use of the title was independently derived from reflection upon the basic Old Testament passage Dan. 7<sup>13</sup>."<sup>1</sup> Alan Richardson writes in a similar vein: "It is not

1. V. Taylor, *The Names of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 27.