

## “ DOGMATIC VERSUS BIBLICAL THEOLOGY ”

The purpose of this book<sup>1</sup> of nine essays by distinguished exegetes and dogmatic theologians is, the editor tells us, to show to what extent their long-standing differences have now been composed and to prepare the way for complete agreement. It is a meaty book and any analysis of its contents cannot but be inadequate.

K. H. Schelkle opens with a fundamental essay on “ Sacred Scripture and the Word of God.” The Bible is the word of God and the Word of God is Christ. It is He who makes it different from, and essentially superior to, the sacred books of other religions. But it has its human limitations. As literature it is not on the whole distinguished ; ignoble, St. Augustine found it, when compared with Cicero. It is a heterogeneous and uneven collection of writings with no definite, coherent plan.

The only way really to understand the Scriptures is to see Christ as their centre and completion. “ In the Son of God came the great Yes. All the promises of God that there were in him are the Yes.” (2 Cor. 1, 19 f). The Scriptures are therefore in a sense the incarnation of the eternal Christ, “ a single perfect body of the Word ” (Origen), filled by the living God. The faith expresses this, says the author, as the inspiration of Scripture, which is not merely an event of the past but is in every age the supremely present activity of God, spiritual and soul-piercing (cf Heb. 4, 12). But the word in the book, *logos embiblos*, like the Word incarnate Himself, *logos ensarkos*, is hidden and can truly be reached only by faith.

But faith comes by hearing. To hear the scriptural word accurately and fully two aids are needed. The first is a scientific exegesis of the books in their setting, their literary forms and grammatical usages, and the individual psychology of the writers and their religious and cultural milieu.

The second aid is the tradition of the whole living Church. By Church the author means not only one communion, not only the Roman Church, but, as he says, the *una sancta Catholica (sic)*. He pays deserved tribute to the exegetical work of the Evangelicals. The organs of this tradition are preaching, the liturgy, and the unanimous consent of the Fathers (but in the incomplete state of patristic research this is not always easy to assess). He adds a word on symbolic interpretation : “ We also begin to suspect, once again, how antiquity and the Middle Ages, sensitive to the symbolical meaning of all nature and history,

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, a pupil of Rahner's. English trans. by Kevin Smyth. Burns Oates 30s. Why “versus”? The German title is *Exegese und Dogmatik*.

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could find an approach to the truth which is closed to us." Such a view sees all nature and history imbued and borne onwards by the one God, manifesting Himself in words and actions, dimensions and signs, which in their resemblance become symbols one of the other, "word for word, thing for thing, man for man, history for history, and finally Testament for Testament."

Tradition transmits and explains Scripture ; but Scripture retains its primary value and dignity. The New Testament is the root from which the vitality of the Church springs. It is, says the author, always creating the Church, a statement which calls for some scholastic distinctions to determine and limit its true sense.

Karl Rahner follows, lecturing the exegete and the dogmatic theologian. The exegete should remember that he too is a theologian, expounding a science of the faith. He has therefore a duty to show the compatibility of his findings with defined dogma and non-defined official teaching. In Mariology, for instance, he ought not to be content to say that there is nothing in Scripture to support some particular doctrine ; he must find its implicit source. Likewise he must be prepared to defend the traditional facts about the life and consciousness of Jesus, even while he rightly admits that theological interpretation was used in the apostolic age. Nor should he allow a Protestant bias in his work, ignoring the fact that a Protestant exegete often works from a preconceived philosophy. Rahner requires the exegete to have a good working knowledge of scholastic theology ; it will help him to clear ideas on such points as merit. One has a feeling, or a hope that in his estimate of the possible shortcomings of the exegete Rahner is not quite up to date.

The dogmatic theologian for his part, says Rahner, should be alive to the findings of modern exegesis, and should offer dogmatic explanations which satisfy the demands of sound exegesis. Rahner himself in the final essay, writing on the problem of Christ's knowledge and its limitations, exemplifies his own advice. His solution is that all human knowledge is stratified in the mind ; there is conscious knowledge which is deeper than conceptual and which only gradually, as life's various influences are felt and absorbed, comes to the surface in explicit, developed concepts. Christ because of the Hypostatic Union had direct vision or consciousness of His divinity ; but it was vision without beatitude. During His mortal life He experienced the ordinary human development, His consciousness of His Divine Sonship growing in clarity and His awareness of His mission and of men and events developing into ever fuller conceptual knowledge. In this way He definitely grew in wisdom. Rahner makes no place for infused knowledge in Christ.

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As loyal servants of the magisterium both exegete and theologian deserve its confidence and freedom to work. The exegete in particular is a front-line fighter for the faith ; on him depends the success of the apostolate to the modern, scientific and positivist intellectual.

New Testament exegesis is of the first importance, because in the New Testament we have the final covenant and its Author and the source of all subsequent teaching. Anton Voghtle ("Problems and Progress in New Testament Exegesis") puts the present *status quaestionis*. We must allow for theological development in the apostolic Church. In certain doctrines this development is clear ; in the Trinitarian baptismal formula for instance, which represents the final post-Easter proclamation of the Trinity and a stage subsequent to baptism in the name of Christ only, as found in the Acts and St. Paul ; but the developed form is implied in the other. But metaphors sometimes cloud the issue. Hence it is far from easy to determine the precise doctrine and to separate imagery from fact in the teaching on the new heaven and the new earth ; far more difficult in fact to manage than the imagery of creation in Genesis. In general, the exegete has a difficult problem in trying to enter into the minds of the writers and to understand the limits they set themselves.

Two vital developments in biblical criticism have been made this century. First, form-criticism, whose aim is to discover and arrange the tradition concerning Christ which the Gospels incorporate. Then, the history of redaction which studies the working-out by the individual evangelists of the raw material of tradition. Catholic research in these fields was blessed and encouraged by Pius XII.

Biblical criticism, concludes the author, is the *ancilla theologiae*. The preaching Church came first, and all the books of the New Testament were written to serve her.

Exegesis prepares the ground for a theology of the New Testament. How this theology may be formulated is discussed by Heinrich Schlier ("The Meaning and Function of a Theology of the New Testament.") It will necessarily be uneven. Only certain themes will show a considerable degree of development, notably Christology, ecclesiology and eschatology.

The first stage is analytic, to discover how each writer interprets and expands the common tradition, beginning with the simpler teaching of the Synoptics and passing on to the highly developed theological reflection of St. John ; then to St. Paul whose theological mind evolved from his Damascus experience a wide and deep understanding of the Christological message and its implications. Of the other books I Peter and Hebrews are the most weighty.

The next stage is synthetic, to take from the individual books the major themes, such as the reign of God, Christ's death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit, the new life, faith, and to work out the basic unity of the New Testament in presenting them. To complete the study and produce an integral theology the doctrinal relation of the Old Testament to the New must be examined.

A theology of the New Testament guides and completes the work of the exegete ; and it has an essential bearing on dogmatic theology and the history of dogma, in that it gives them a richer and more adequate view of the sources.

E. Schillebeeckx in "Exegesis, Dogmatics and the Development of Doctrine" starts with an explanation of religion. It is a meeting with God in faith. This, he says, is the modern and correct expression for the dogma of grace. One wonders. A meeting is not an abiding or an indwelling ; and the primary grace is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Only persons, he continues, can meet, and they really meet only in so far as they make themselves known to each other. Every meeting, therefore, involves revelation and faith. *A fortiori* the meeting with God. But there the revelation and faith are not mutual ; God addresses man and man listens by faith.

Revelation is always a growing process. In the Old Testament it was a development in deed and word, a salvific history, directed to the final stage, the mystery of Christ. The New Testament followed a similar process but in a shorter time.

Scripture is a fundamental part of the structure of the apostolic Church, along with the apostolic offices, the living preaching voice, and the sacraments. It is part of the deposit of faith by which the post-apostolic Church is always guided. The magisterium is the immediate norm of our faith and the final judge in interpreting the Bible ; but it must itself be guided by the Bible. So too must dogmatic theology in its thinking out of the faith ; it is dependent on exegesis and biblical theology and they exercise a critical function in its regard.

But dogmatics is more than exegesis. Its function is to present to each age the unchanging doctrine in ways of thought that the age understands. This Chalcedon did in Christology. The presentation of the word of Scripture in a contemporary context is the work of tradition. Dogmatic theology investigates this changing context and in consequence develops revelation to meet it, not by adding new truths but by bringing out the implications of the original revelation (this the author calls eisegesis, which is the complement of exegesis).

In Scripture the word of God is given human expression and therefore possesses a prophetic expandibility, a certain relativity in the

sense that there will always be more to know and attain by the living activity of the believing Church in the light of faith. Moreover, since the word is God's, it has a dynamism from which we can educe the "fuller sense" of Scripture, identical with the implicit literal sense and developing from it. The author instances Mariology. The Old Testament themes of the dwelling of God in the Daughter of Sion are, as it were, prisms through which we may glimpse the reality of Mary. And in the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse "Woman-Church" which is primarily indicated is, so to say, contained in one perspective with "Woman-Mary."

The next essay, by R. Schnackenburg, deals with "The Dogmatic Evaluation of the New Testament." The writers of the primitive apostolic Church approached the Old Testament dogmatically. They contemplated it as a preparation for Christ. Their established faith in Him they took as their starting-point, and explored the Old Testament, especially the prophets, in the light of this faith. They did not proceed the other way round, from Scripture to faith. In interpreting the Old Testament they allowed themselves a latitude which we today would not adopt; nor have we yet worked out the exegetical principles they followed. St. John in reporting the discourses and actions of Christ Himself follows a similar line. He gives them a theological transformation and interpretation but always with the obvious conviction that he was being faithful to the original revelation and was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit whose mission it was to lead the apostles into all truth.

Only a few texts of the Bible have received a fully authentic interpretation by the Church. There are many questions to which the Bible itself gives no definite answer. Where however tradition or authoritative pronouncements of the magisterium or sound speculation give an answer, it may rightly be called biblical because it is in line with the organic development of the Bible. The author adds a warning on metaphors; they must not be overworked. An instance is St. Paul's metaphor from jurisprudence to describe justification. As examples of truths in which tradition has worked out an initial Scripture doctrine, he gives Mariology, the procession of the Son as indicated in His mission (which is how St. John primarily presents the procession), the Holy Spirit, and the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. Texts which the exegete explores only in their literal sense can become much more meaningful for the dogmatic theologian since he views them in the whole context of the Catholic faith. Certain difficult points can be interpreted only by the theologian: the kenosis, for instance, and Christ's ignorance. In other

matters the theologian must fix the limit of lawful exegetical interpretation ; on Christ's imminent coming, for example, or on the true character and setting of the Last Judgment (described differently by St. Matthew and I Thessalonians). In a word, New Testament problems concern both the exegete and the dogmatic theologian and they must co-operate in solving them.

The next article deals with development of doctrine in the Old Testament. The writer, H. Gross, briefly surveys four themes to trace the nature of this development from the material to the spiritual and from the limited to the universal. First, Wandering : Abraham, then Moses, then the Jewish pilgrims to Jerusalem, and finally the flowing of all peoples to Sion. Next, Sion itself, David's city and the site of the Temple ; from being the relatively unimportant centre of David's kingdom it is finally seen as the centre of the universal kingdom of Yahweh. Thirdly, Peace. There was first the earthly peace of Solomon's day when throughout the country each man sat undisturbed under his vine and fig tree ; then the idea of universal peace put out by Micheas, to become fully real only in its eschatological fulfilment. Lastly and especially, the Covenant. There is a Covenant in creation itself, re-ratified to Noah. But the real Covenant began with Abraham, in whom, says the author, the *act* of divine election is transformed into a *state* of election. God ordains circumcision as the sign of the Covenant, and promises Abraham that he will be the father of many nations. Abraham, for his part, believes and commits his whole personality to God. This Covenant, however, is but the prelude to the Mosaic Covenant. On Sinai God establishes a new relationship with the Hebrew people, setting them apart as His special acquisition, a kingdom of priests, a holy people. It is a permanent Covenant, ratified by sacrifice. The Law is its by-product. This abiding Covenant is seen on a higher plane by Jeremias. For him it is a marriage between God and His people, and the sign of it is not now only the external rite of circumcision but the interior gift of the heart.

There is therefore a dynamism in the Old Testament. As these examples show, the same motif runs throughout in each theme, but it is always open to a more developed and deeper presentation as revelation grows.

The vital question on which the very meaning of a book of this kind depends is the character of Christ, as the New Testament and especially the Gospels present Him. Since what was written was written in the service of the kerygma, do we in the New Testament reach the historical Jesus at all ? Or do we reach only the Christ of faith, a figure of history certainly, but whose true character has been

altered by subsequent and radical interpretation? F. Mussner faces the question briefly but squarely in "The Historical Jesus and the Christ of Faith." Like almost all the authors of this book it is with German thought that he concerns himself. Destructive criticism begins with the liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Kahler's reply had many good points but was inadequate. More recently we have the destructive form-criticism of Bultmann (It may be noted in passing that one of the authors of this book, H. Schlier, was once a disciple of Bultmann). To establish the identity of the Christ of faith with the historical Jesus Mussner summarises the criteria presented by Dahl in *Kerygma und Dogma*, (1955). (1) Jesus died a violent death on the cross. This is an absolutely certain starting-point. Hence (2) it is clear that He made some special claim, namely that He was the Messiah. (3) Jesus in the Gospels is an individual of a very marked type. This can be seen in His attitude to the Pharisees, the tax-gatherers, sinners and the poor. (4) The world in which He lived was unmistakably late Judaism. There could be no controversy with the Pharisees elsewhere. (5) His teaching is obviously that of the individual wisdom-teacher. It is not the method of the systematic theologian, who does not speak or write in short pregnant sentences, or build up characteristic episodes which are easily fixed in the memory. Mussner himself adds (6) The teaching is not worked into a composite whole. "It is precisely in the fact that the rough edges are not smoothed out that we see how tied the Evangelists were to the data of tradition." Clearly they had great reverence for the words of the Master; His difficult sayings are not omitted or managed. Writing of the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord, the Evangelists had to explain these central events by the circumstances and teaching which led up to them and in that way give them a larger historical setting. But they were not writing a biography, and attempts in modern times to compose from the Gospels a life of Christ are not, and cannot be entirely successful.

While, then, it is true that we reach the historical Jesus only through the medium of the apostolic preaching, it is also true that there has been no falsification. An apostle, as the New Testament presents him, is one sent by Jesus personally and having the status of an eye-witness of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. In his explanation of the history of Jesus the apostle continues Jesus' self-explanation; and in his witnessing he has a complete conviction that it is by the Spirit of truth that he is guided, his fellow-witness sent by the Lord Himself.

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