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In The Study

PATRISTICS is a fascinating field. It confronts us with the Church in her great formative period, and helps us to understand her. Of course it remains true that our angle of vision is largely decided for us, that we cannot turn back the clocks and re-live the classic era of church history. The labels of orthodoxy and heresy have already been apportioned, the palms of victory finally awarded, the marks of the vanquished indelibly stained. And the literature that still survives on the whole reflects these verdicts. So much is lost to us, so much known only through the comment of the hostile critic and the captious broadside of the apologist.

But hope does not entirely disappoint. The tools of scholarship are constantly refined and the past continues to yield up its buried treasure. That is why many will turn with interest to a new survey of the scene.[1] Though it follows hard on the translation of the more substantial work of Altaner, yet this summary presentation is its own justification. It is not a study in history or doctrine but a condensed introduction to Christian literature from the close of the New Testament on to Nicaea. Two further and similar volumes are projected to deal with the later Greek and Latin Fathers. Meanwhile, we end with Paul of Samosata and Methodius, with Novatian and Lactantius. A word on hymnody and inscriptions is added, and a note on bibliography appended. The general reader will get most from this study if he has constantly at his side Mr. J. Stevenson's *A New Eusebius*.

The erudition of the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity ensures the basic dependability of this work and prepares us for the mass of scholarly knowledge that in so brief a compass he has somehow managed to insert. Inevitably opinions are advanced without full discussion of the arguments that prompt the conclusions. But alternative views are usually mentioned, and indefensible dogmatism avoided. An early date for the Didache, persistently held by Continental scholarship, is supported; Gnosticism is viewed as a pre-Christian heresy; Montanism is rightly labelled modernistic; the Stoic roots of Origen's philosophical thinking are stressed. Dr. Cross goes against the stream in concluding that the doctrinal affiliations of Novatian are with Irenaeus and Hippolytus rather than with Tertullian—an intriguing suggestion that cries out for development and substantiation. On the other hand, the hallowed dogma of the conservatism of Hippolytus is simply repeated and, some might feel, too readily accepted.

[1] *The Early Christian Fathers,* by F. L. Cross. Duckworth (Studies in Theology), 15s. 1960.

Probably the most fascinating treatment, and certainly the most original, is that afforded to Melito of Sardis. Dr. Cross can describe the recently recovered tract on the Pasch as "the most important addition to Patristic literature in the present century." It sheds a flood of light on the early Easter Festival, and is here adduced as the unique example of a Christian Paschal Haggadah. Whether or not the case is cogently made further examination and discussion must decide. But Melito stands clearly revealed as a significant figure in the Church in Asia Minor in the second century.

It is a far cry from Melito of Sardis to Anselm of Canterbury. But if we enter a new world, it has its own importance and appeal. For in any traditional list of proofs of the existence of God, the so-called ontological proof will be found in the forefront, and coupled with it the name of Anselm its originator. Probably there will be reference to allied arguments to be found in Descartes and Leibnitz, and some discussion of damaging objections advanced by Immanuel Kant. But what if all this is beside the point? And what if Anselm's thought moves on a quite different level to that which so many both of his assailants and his defenders have supposed? For this is Barth's thesis in a book produced some thirty years ago but of sufficient enduring significance to merit the admirable translation of it which Ian Robertson has now given to us.[2] An examination of Anselm's theological scheme, and a discussion of his immediately relevant presuppositions, lead on to a detailed commentary upon the famous chapters 2-4 of the Proslogion. The demands made upon the reader are a working knowledge of ecclesiastical Latin, and a willingness to take theology seriously.

To us there is given the revealed Name of God: "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." From this foundation, the proof of the existence of God can be decided. The concern is not in the end with a potentiality or an abstract existence, but with an existence that is in reality as well as in thought and conception. But there is more than this. For the question at issue is the existence of *God,* of that which is unique, of that which is no part of a general problem of existence. When we speak of God, we speak of the One and only One which cannot be conceived as not existing, which has reality in itself, which is thus independent of the general antithesis between knowledge and object.

Throughout Anselm proceeds with faultless logic; but the nature of his approach and presuppositions must never be forgotten. He works within the circle of belief: his watchword is *credo ut intelligam.* The words of Scripture and direct inferences from them are absolutely valid. To reason he allows full sway—but always within the limits of faith. For the purposes of proof he will leave the

[2] Anselm: *Fides Quaerens Intellectum,* by Karl Barth (S.C.M. Press, Ltd. 25s.). 1960.

question of God's existence open; but as he argues this question he will stand upon the other articles of faith and make use of them. This is the work and method of the Christian theologian, and is therefore begun in obedience and dedication, continued in prayer, and ended in thanksgiving. For to "understand" means for him to see the necessity of one article of faith whilst presupposing all the others.

So he writes as theologian to theologian, as believer to believers. He is not first and foremost the apologist. But clearly he cannot evade unbelief, must reckon with the fool who says in his heart: "There is no God," must come to terms with the impossible possibility of the unconvinced. And he will do this as one who knows that he himself stands on the borderline of unbelief, and therefore as one who knows that his certainty is the gift of God who confronts believer and unbeliever alike.

All this is challenging restatement. It tells us a great deal about the thinking of Anselm; it tells us something vital about the joy of theology; and it tells us not a little about Karl Barth.

During the last decade, thought and discussion relating to the doctrine of the ministry has clearly and decisively entered a new phase. The problems remain in ecumenical confrontation, and in many ways they are still the same problems. But increasingly they are seen from new perspectives, framed in fresh and more flexible terms, thrown into fructifying disarray as a result of cutting back behind their static and traditional formulations. And all this is surely due to two promising features of the contemporary situation. The one is the return to a genuinely theological understanding of Scripture; the other, the growth of experience of and movement towards reunion.

It is from this background that a recent and important study in the theology of the Ministry[3] derives. Canon Hanson finds his necessary starting point in an examination of the Remnant in the thought of Old and New Testament—though perhaps he judges it to be more central and pervasive than the facts allow. He proceeds to investigate St. Paul's belief about the apostolate, and the Pauline doctrine of the ministry as most clearly manifested in the second letter to the Corinthians. Brief reference to the early developments heralding theological separation of Church and ministry by the time of Cyprian prepares the way for some attention to the 16th century reappraisal and the modern debate. The whole is a selective enquiry that attempts to break new ground.

The conclusion reached is that the ministry is the pioneer Church. The apostles were the faithful remnant, the bridge between Christ and the New Testament communities, the nucleus of the emerging

[3] *The Pioneer Ministry,* by Anthony T. Hanson (S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 21s.). 1961.

Church. It means a dynamic doctrine of the apostolate which thinks together a continuing apostolic ministry with a continuing apostolic task. The ministry must be understood in a functional and representative way. It is "given in the Church by Christ to be the Church, to be and do that which the Church, following it, must be and do."

Clearly this allows to the Free Churches a great deal of what they have always claimed. Perhaps it allows altogether too much. For my own part, I should find at least two important questions to put to Canon Hanson. I should wish to be more certainly convinced that he has given sufficient weight to the precise scriptural relationship between the local church and the whole *ecclesia,* and to the emphasis upon the ministry as representing the whole Church to and in the local fellowship which may follow from this. I should further wish to be more satisfied than I am that he has done justice to certain unrepeatable aspects of the original apostolate. That the apostolic band are to be understood in terms less of office than of task may be readily agreed. But I wonder whether the interpretation this book advances is the truth rather than the whole truth, and whether for an adequate theology of the ministry a wider frame of reference and some finer brushes are not required.

Nevertheless, here is an invigorating breeze blowing over some dry and parched ground. Those who are ready to do the next ecumenical mile will be wise to expose themselves to it—and pay deep attention to the second letter to the Corinthians before they resume their journey.

It seems then that all contemporary roads lead at length to Scripture, to the historical Jesus, to the contextual background of ancient Israel, to the life of the New Testament community; and appositely enough the series of Black New Testament commentaries continues with a study of the Second Gospel by Dean Johnson.[4] This is such a well-ploughed territory that a new commentary has achieved a great deal if it can but justify its existence. Probably the most interesting and significant of the recent developments have gone along two lines. On the one hand, renewed attention has been given to the question of sources, especially in connection with the composition of the Passion Narrative. On the other, a deepening understanding of the primary importance of arriving at some initial decision as to the purpose of the Evangelist has carried with it an increasing preoccupation with the problem of the structure of his Gospel. It is just here that the work of such scholars as Farrer, Lightfoot, Marxsen, and Carrington becomes relevant—though we must acknowledge with Professor Johnson that as yet their stimulat-

[4] *The Gospel according to St. Mark,* by Sherman E. Johnson (A. & C. Black, 25s.). 1960.

ing suggestions have not been sufficiently assimilated and examined for a definitive verdict upon them to be pronounced.

Nevertheless, this commentator is a shrewd enough judge both of theory and of evidence. His translation is always helpful and illuminating; and his introduction concentrates on the issues that are really of importance to us. The commentary itself is a model for this whole Series. It does exactly what it is supposed to do, being at once "reliable in scholarship," "relevant to the contemporary Church," "full enough for serious academic work." It contains a wealth of learning, and ample reference to those technical studies upon which it inevitably and heavily depends. This is a welcome addition to the extensive Marcan literature; and it merits unreserved praise.

But in all our study of the Gospels we may not forget that of recent years the quest for the historical Jesus has taken a new turn. There is and can be no going back upon the insights of form critical scholarship, for the Gospels remain kerygmatic documents that reflect the history and experience of the apostolic church. Yet the *kerygma* is not to be detached from its historical foundations, and the exalted Christ is not to be severed from the humiliated Jesus. To attempt once more the biographical sketch or the psychological interpretation would be futile. But to seek a historical understanding of the tradition about Jesus may yet be an indispensable task laid upon us. It is this road that a disciple of Bultmann has skilfully trod. He has given us a book[5] whose importance could scarcely be overestimated.

It will be as well to trace carefully the progression of this study. Bornkamm begins with a brief but crucial discussion of the problems of faith and history in the Gospels. These pages should be read and read again, for they present an acute and balanced and discriminating interpretation which is determinative for what follows. Subsequent delineation of the Jewish background of the times leads into a brave if tentative sketch of the personality of the historical Jesus. Thus the way is opened and prepared for substantial chapters upon the Kingdom and Will of God, and briefer sections on Discipleship, the Journey to Jerusalem and Crucifixion, and the Messianic Secret. The story is necessarily carried on beyond the Tomb, and the indissoluble connection between the historical Jesus and the *kerygma* of the community is displayed. Concluding appendices on critical issues provide much relevant material, and might most usefully be read and mastered even before the main text is begun.

That Bornkamm's reconstruction can be challenged at many points will scarcely be denied. He is constantly in the position of

[5] *Jesus of Nazareth*, by Gunther Bornkamm (Hodder & Stoughton, 21s.). 1960.

having to make critical judgments about the Gospel material, and explicit justification for his verdicts is seldom provided. But this is to say no more than that this study assumes a vast mass of preliminary enquiry carried on not only by the author but also by his Continental colleagues. What is important is the approach that governs his presentation, the major emphases he makes, the significant conclusions that he reaches. Whereas Bultmann draws the dividing line between Jesus and Paul, Bornkamm places it between Jesus and John the Baptist who "stands guard at the frontier of the aeons." Whereas Bultmann denies that Jesus claimed Messiahship, Bornkamm will add that "the Messianic character of his being is contained *in* his words and deeds and *in* the unmediatedness of his historic appearance." The Lord does not obtrude his own person, but the Kingdom of God which is his pivotal concern; for the secret of Jesus is the making present of the reality of God. It is just here that there resides the essential and living continuity between the mission and message of Jesus and the mission and message of the apostolic church. There is but one message: the announcement of the dawning kingdom. But for those who live beyond the Empty Tomb, the crucified and risen Lord has become the centre of this Good News. The eschatological interpretation of Jesus becomes the christological interpretation of the Church.

Whether or not this be true, it cannot be denied that the story of Jesus demands as necessary context the story of the Bible. Many biblical works written primarily for laymen are most widely read and appreciated by the generality of the ministry; and a recent comprehensive survey of Scripture[6] may well have the same fate. Yet this book is unusual in that while most ministers desperately need to read it and few if any would fail to profit from it, the serious layman, prepared for some effort and study, would surely find it both an education and a liberation. And curiously enough, if he does begin to flounder it is likely to be in the sections treating of the New Testament rather than in those concerned with the Old.

This is a worthy production; and for three hundred large pages it is not expensive. It contains forty clear and wisely chosen illustrations, and adequate indices. It is written by experts who have, on the whole, mastered the art of communication. It is representative of all that is best and most fruitful in the modern scholarly approach to the Bible.

The reader will look in vain for much of the detailed material that belongs to the technical "introduction," for the minutiae of history, text, and canon. What he is offered is rather more important and significant. There is set before him with impressive competence the unity, sweep, and range of Scripture, and he is initiated into the

[6] *The Book of the Acts of God,* by G. E. Wright and R. H. Fuller. (Duckworth, 35s.). 1960.

self-understanding of a continuing community in whose midst God made history. Ernest Wright deals with the Old Testament with the masterly touch that we associate with our foremost contemporary English-speaking interpreter. R. H. Fuller bridges the gap between the Testaments, and carries on the story to its Christian fulfilment.

If there are problems and questions that remain, they are largely thrown into relief by the very strength of the approach that is adopted. The authors will never countenance the forcing of Scripture into a rigid alien mould, for they have too profound a sense of the uniqueness of the historical. But they do discern biblical unity and are concerned to portray it; and this inevitably demands directing perspectives and controlling centres, and seems to involve as practical corollary material that does not quite fit in. For in both the Testaments there is what may be described as a classic and normative period. In the one case we might delimit it as Exodus to Exile, and describe it in terms of Pentateuch and Prophets (former and latter). In the other case we might think of the half-century from John the Baptist out beyond the Fall of Jerusalem, and work in terms of Gospels and Epistles of Paul. And in each case we are left with canonical material with which it is difficult to come to terms.

So Mr. Fuller is least convincing in his concluding sections. Perhaps this is partly due to lack of space and partly to a certain tendentiousness. But is this the whole explanation? I do not know. But I do sense that Professor Wright faces a parallel if subtly different problem. What can he really make of the long tract of Israel's history after the Return from Exile? Is there a Protestant blind spot somewhere? We used to speak as if the Holy Spirit went underground at the end of the first century, only to emerge again at the Reformation? Do we still think that God went off duty about 400 B.C., not to return until Jesus? And if so, are we right?

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