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Editorial

RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATION

“SOME OF YOU, I hope, will already have read that deeply sincere and profoundly courageous book by the Bishop of Woolwich, *Honest to God*.” These words, spoken by Canon Max Warren in the Royal York Hotel, Toronto, during the 1963 Anglican Congress, were received with vociferous enthusiasm by some of his hearers and heard by others in stony silence. No doubt this episode is symbolic of the mixed response which Dr. J. A. T. Robinson’s work has elicited from its readers, and it would be easy to succumb to the temptation to write one more review in one of the obviously possible moods: “Hurrah!”—“To the stake!”—“Yes, but!” The aim of this editorial, however, is not to decide which of several schools of thought—or better, perhaps, of emotion—is to be awarded a prize. Rather, it is to air a question which has been nagging at the Editor of this *Journal* ever since he listened to Canon Warren’s speech. The question is this: Are “deep sincerity” and “profound courage” pertinent criteria for the evaluation of a theological work? Or are these virtues, however desirable they may be in a Christian theologian, insufficient (to say the least) as marks of a commendable piece of Christian theology?

The Christian past, whose lessons may not be altogether irrelevant to the problems of the Christian present, would seem to have answered our question with an unqualified “No.” Athanasius was not demonstrably more sincere than Arius. Leo was not spectacularly more courageous than Eutyches. Nestorius may well have been no less sincere or courageous, as well as more rigidly ethical in his behaviour, than Cyril of Alexandria. Yet St. Athanasius, St. Cyril, and St. Leo are honoured as “Doctors of the Church,” while Arius, Nestorius, and Eutyches stand condemned as heretics by the judgment of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon.

If we could ask the Fathers of these Councils what it was, in their opinion, that the “Doctors” had and the “heretics” lacked, their reply would (I think) be prompt and simple: fidelity to the substance of the gospel. It may be granted that the principal concerns of Arius, Nestorius, and Eutyches were not unworthy concerns. There is a biblical ring to the definite Arian distinction between the uncreated God and the totality of his creatures, an evangelical truth in the Nestorian insistence on Christ’s true and full humanity, a Christian fervour about the Monophysite affirmation of the divine identity of the Saviour. But the conclusions drawn from these premises were deemed insufficient and unsound, because they left out of account other equally weighty points of Christian truth.

This bit of history may conceivably have something to say to the contemporary frontiersmen of Christian communication, so many of whom find their major prophet in the Bishop Suffragan of Woolwich. No one can doubt the sincerity of their endeavours to speak a meaningful Christian word to the world around us. No one can question their courage in seeking out radically new ways of expressing Christian faith and hope. But in view of the revolutionary tendencies of their theologies, it is not unreasonable to wonder whether they have really asked the right questions. They should have asked: How can we communicate the gospel in this age? How can we help our generation to see the point of it? But too often they seem instead to have asked: What can we find in the gospel that is readily communicable to our generation? What can we find that makes sense to us as we are now?

Arianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism were simple and communicable enough to rally entire nations against the Church of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. They were simple because their inventors passed over whatever elements of the gospel they could not readily assimilate. But such a partial communication of the Christian faith is not genuinely responsible communication. It is irresponsible towards God, whose gospel is proclaimed; it is irresponsible towards man, who needs the whole gospel. In all our essays in Christian communication, we must surely be at pains to fulfil our responsibility to both.

E. R. F.

ANNUAL MEETING

THE ANNUAL MEETING of the *Canadian Journal of Theology* will be held at Huron College, London, Ontario, on Wednesday, May 12, 1965, at 4 p.m. All subscribers and friends are welcome.

NORMAN E. WAGNER
Secretary