

A THEOLOGICAL CHRONICLE

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IT is probably true to say that there is no form of intellectual life more unfamiliar to the educated English Catholic than theology. If he were asked to name some topics which he supposed were discussed by theologians he would probably refer to the proofs of the existence of God, transubstantiation, the sacraments—the first of these in the context of ‘Thomism’, the second of apologetics, in school and pulpit, the third in the context of ‘liturgy’. The reference to the pulpit is a considered one; for if lay Catholics are open to the charge of naivety, the responsibility is by no means wholly theirs; can the clergy, and even the professional theologians among them (with some embarrassment I include myself, if only as a theological columnist, in this sub-category), really claim to be practising theology with energy, fertility, learning and insight? Is there (to go further) a single English Catholic theologian of an intellectual eminence comparable to that achieved, not by non-Catholic (let us not take refuge in the outworn myth of the English Catholic Remnant), but by Catholic scholars and professional men in other fields than theology? There is danger of a vicious circle here: it can hardly be expected that young men with an undefined sense of vocation and a more sharply defined sense of their own powers should turn their attention to anything so vague, so flabby, so impoverished, so tediously academic or so brightly well-meaning and fuzzily hortatory—ultimately so *nondescript*—as what ordinarily passes for Catholic theology in England. Excellent work is being done by *The Catholic Gazette*, for instance, under the general slogan of ‘Know Your Faith’; but surely there is need for something less circumscribed than the pastoral activity implied by such a slogan, some manifest exhibition of the mind at the full strength of its powers, of a sensibility engaged and enriched by the creative variety of Christian experience, disciplined and informed by the coherent multiplicity of the Christian tradition, and open, *open* to the contemporary world and contributing to the definition of its very contemporaneity.

These somewhat sombre and splenetic reflections are prompted by a recent collective work from Germany on questions under discussion in theology today, *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, in particular by the preface to this work, which declares that it is meant not for specialists but for the pastoral clergy and for laymen with theological interests. Similar claims are made for the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, the

third and fourth volume of which have now appeared.¹ That these claims are taken seriously outside Germany as well may appear from the fact that a Dutch translation of the first work is already in course of publication. In contrast I found myself forced with the utmost regret to advise two English publishers against the publication of an English translation, and similar advice was given to a third publisher by his reader (perhaps some other publisher has taken the plunge; I do not know). With the utmost regret: for this collection of studies, unequal of course, and variously conceived, can fairly be described as monumental, in the sense of furnishing a monument to the seriousness of a concern to re-apprehend Christian Revelation: a concern not restricted to a conscious minority but socially and culturally acknowledged (if hardly 'popular'), for the authorities who contribute the several studies have been able to count upon an audience with a confidence justified by the need for a second edition.

The contributions fall under three heads: 'fundamental' problems, i.e. problems of fundamental theology, to do with the sources of theology and its methodology, its selfconsciousness, so to speak; dogmatic theology; and 'practical' theology, this including as well as moral theology such topics as the theology of preaching, of the liturgical revival and of 'earthly realities'. It is obviously impossible to consider any of these studies in detail here, though I hope to be able to return to some of them on a later occasion, particularly the studies in practical theology. A simple list of the studies in dogmatic theology, however, is itself revealing: 'Nature and Grace' (Karl Rahner), 'The Origin, the Primordial State and History of Man' (Feiner), 'On the Portrait of Christ in Modern Catholic Theology' (Grillmeier), 'Problems and Prospects of Modern Mariology' (Alois Müller), 'On the Unity of the Concept of the Church' (Semmelroth), 'Church and Churches' (Sartory), 'Sacraments as Organs of Encounter with God' (Schillebeeckx), 'Eschatology' (Balthasar). It is not so much the choice of topics, materially considered (Church, grace, sacraments), which may seem surprising, as the aspects under which they are considered. Even 'eschatology', it might at first be supposed, would be an up-to-date version of the 'last things'—resurrection, judgment, hell.

And yet it is here, perhaps, as Balthasar shows, that the most profound upheaval of all is taking place in the Christian consciousness.² Speaking quite generally, there can be no doubt that the

¹ See BLACKFRIARS, May 1959, pp. 226-8, for an account of the first two volumes.

² See also, in the *Lexikon*, the articles on Eschatology (Gross, Schnackenburg, Rahner, Schierse) and on Basileia (Schnackenburg). Schnackenburg has recently published an important full-length study of the notion of 'the kingdom of God', *Gottes Herrschaft und Reich* (Herder).

problem of human destiny has taken on what is quite often an agonizing acuteness since the turn of the century; at any rate, there is now a widely diffused sense that there ought to be such a problem and that one ought to feel it. There is no need to labour this point; what is more profitable is to respond adequately as Christians to the needs of the time. And part at least of that response is to rediscover in the Christian message of salvation the sense and meaning of the historical process in which God intervened and manifested his glory in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the death of the Cross. Here surely, here above all, here in the glory of the Resurrection, in the antecedents which it summarized and fulfilled, in the prospects of which it is the pledge and the sacrament, here is the real, concrete, ontological answer to our present anxieties. We have to learn once again to apprehend the Resurrection as the chief of those anticipated realizations of God's purpose for man and the cosmos, other instances of which punctuate the course of the saving history witnessed to in the Old and New Testaments. It must once again become the sensitive forward point of our faith as it was for the faith of New Testament times that God *has* fulfilled his promises and yet only so as to fulfil them utterly and without remainder in the consummation of all things yet to come, such that the Resurrection is a 'proleptic parousia' of the Son of Man.

Balthasar does not himself place very much emphasis on the eschatological significance of the Resurrection: like many German theologians he is more interested in Christ's descent into Hell. But he does bring out very clearly the interaction of historical and cosmological modes of thought in the development of the Church's reflection upon the last things. What in the New Testament was *primarily* historical and then by expansion and interpretation cosmic, became in the middle ages almost exclusively cosmological, almost in the sense of a supernatural geography—the supreme example of this is the *Divina Commedia*, the end *events* fitted into a supernatural *space*. It is still true for us, surely, that we tend to see human history, including saving history, as taking place *in* the world, rather than to see the world as a function of history; and yet the latter is precisely what we must do if we are to take the sense of the New Testament writings. The coming of the Christ in the flesh and his victory over sin and death in the *pneuma* are the *epoche*, the turning-point, of history, in which the whole cosmos is involved and proleptically transfigured. And reflection and meditation on this datum brings St Paul, for instance, to see that this event is the concretization of a mystery of God's purpose resolved upon before all history, before the creation of the world.

Considerations of this kind are developed in a recent study, remarkable from many points of view, of Karl Barth's theology of justification, by the Catholic author Hans Küng. It is at least comforting, from the ecumenical point of view, to find that Barth himself has written a characteristic foreword to the book, in which he unqualifiedly underwrites Küng's presentation of his views, and goes on to say that if Küng's account of Catholic teaching is correct then he, Barth, will be glad to find the Catholic Church in agreement with him! By now Barth must be satisfied that Küng's account is at least one possible Catholic theology of justification, for none of the Catholic reviewers of the book has suggested that it was against the defined teaching of the Church or even not in the spirit of that teaching, though one or two writers have had strong reserves to make about Küng's theological approach.³ And for what it is worth, I add my own testimony to this consensus. But Barth's sally raises interesting and important questions, which Küng himself discusses in his book (pp. 114 sqq.). In order to discover what Catholic teaching on justification was, Barth turned not only to the Council of Trent but also to one of those manuals of theology with which every Catholic cleric is to some degree acquainted, in this case a textbook of dogmatic theology by Bernhard Bartmann, not (according to Küng) a specially remarkable instance of its kind. Obviously this is a reasonable thing to do: if some non-Catholic wants to find out 'what Catholics believe', he might reasonably expect to find it in the formal utterances of the teaching Church and in some more or less 'standard' work the professed intention of which is precisely to set out the beliefs of Catholics, in some more or less comprehensive form. And yet, can this be all? Can the most recent edition of Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum* together with a standard treatment of dogmatic theology offer the whole of what Catholics believe, and offer this whole in its proper proportions?

I fear that many Catholics (theologians, too) may find this question disturbing. Do we not tend to rely, explicitly or implicitly, on the *comprehensiveness* of the authoritative teaching of the Church and the magisterial omnicompetence of her theologians? We have all the answers; or at any rate, if we haven't personally got them, somebody has, over there somewhere, in Rome, perhaps, the Pope, the Sacred Congregations, the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*. . . . And yet none of these will do. The defined and infallible teachings of the Church do not exhaust the inexhaustible riches of Revelation; they provide a *rule* of faith in certain areas in which the faith has

³ I take this information from Karl Rahner's long discussion of the book in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 138 (1958), pp. 40-77.

been seriously questioned, or (as for instance in the case of the Assumption) where an urgent need for a definition, undoubtedly the work of the Holy Spirit, has been felt in the Church. But we have no reason to suppose, and in fact historical appearances are to the contrary, that the Spirit works *more geometrico*, developing the Church's understanding of Revelation by a logical progression from the general to the particular; so that the defined formularies of the Church need not be held to cover uniformly and entirely the whole of the Revelation of God in Christ which it is the Church's mission to preserve and proclaim. And it is upon this Revelation, in Scripture and Tradition, that our certitude relies: here it is that all the answers are contained, but not necessarily in a form suited to our understanding at any given time. Our Catholic faith is much more 'open-textured' than it is our habit to assume. If we want to know what the Catholic Church believes we must go to her defined teachings and to modern standard presentations, certainly; but we must also go to Scripture and Tradition: we must go to the *sources* of the Church's teaching, in a spirit of faith, and guided (where we are guided) by the infallible interpreter of those teachings, the Church *now*, the successor of Peter *now*.⁴ What we find in these sources, over and above what has been authoritatively defined to be there, and what we employ the whole of our philosophical equipment and insight to express in categories capable of systematic mutual engagement and under our intellectual control, may not *necessarily* be Catholic teaching; after all, any individual theologian may be wrong; but until he is shown to be wrong or authoritatively declared to be wrong, his theology has civic rights in the Church and can claim to represent part at least of her teachings.

A Catholic response to Barth, then, need not be looked for only in what has been defined or what is normally said in the textbooks; a response should be looked for in the whole body of the Church's teaching in the sources of Revelation. And in fact Küng proceeds in a series of chapters called 'Foundations' (pp. 127-94) to supply a context for a Catholic theology of justification through a re-reading of the Scriptures. This is in many ways the most interesting part of the book, in particular the two chapters on 'Jesus Christ the Saviour' and on 'Creation as a Saving Event (*Heilsgeschehen*)'. It is possible to have some reserves about Küng's exploration of the Scriptures here: it tends to be a little massive, to allow insufficiently for their genetic growth in a way which we have learned to appreciate from

⁴ See the study on *Tradition* by Geislmann, *Fragen*, pp. 69-108; also the articles on *Dogma*, *Dogmenentwicklung*, etc., by K. Rahner, J. Auer and others in *Lexikon III*, col. 438-70.

von Rad, for instance, in the Old Testament, or Dodd in the New. The *formgeschichtlich* or *überlieferungsgeschichtlich* investigation of the traditions and forms of Scripture would have helped to bring out more clearly the thesis at which Küng arrives at the end of his research: roughly, that the concrete order of creation, as it exists in actual fact, is even as a natural order founded upon Christ, the *Verbum Incarnatum* and *Incarandum*, so that even in its consistency as Nature the world is in fact 'Christian' though not necessarily so (cf. Rahner, art. cit. p. 67). On the other hand, Küng's merit is not to have remained at a purely exegetical level—one often feels with the professional exegete that the actual content of what the biblical authors say interests him less than the way they say it, the 'idea' of what is said rather than the reality, invisible inverted commas everywhere—Küng does take the biblical thesis as substantively as the definitions of the Church and the theology of justification proper to which he goes on in his final chapters.

The importance of the thesis can hardly be overestimated. It is customary to distinguish two Catholic answers to the question *cur Deus homo*. The Thomist view is held to be that Christ (only) came to redeem man from sin, the Scotist that he would have come anyway. In fact the central argument used by St Thomas (IIIa. 1:3) is that in matters depending solely on the divine will, beyond any claim of created nature, we must rely for our information solely on the revelation of that will in Scripture; now Scripture tells us everywhere that the reason for the Incarnation is the sin of the first man. It follows then that if there had been no sin the Incarnation would not have taken place. It is hardly necessary to add that St Thomas did not suppose that God somehow changed his mind and took a new decision: *non propter hoc vult hoc, sed vult hoc esse propter hoc*; the point he is making is that the objective order of divine purpose as revealed in Scripture shows a connection of dependency between sin and Incarnation. God, then, foreseeing that moral kenosis and denial by sin of the abundant being of creation and its order to the Creator, willed from all eternity a remedy for sin which would at the same time bring the creation to its consummation by uniting it hypostatically in Christ to himself. But the order for St Thomas holds objectively between sin and Incarnation; for the Scotist view (the so-called 'first and second decrees') between successive moments of God's will in itself. We might say that St Thomas's view emphasizes the *moral* (or 'existential') consummation introduced by the Incarnation, the Scotist view the *ontological* one. There seems to me no doubt that St Thomas is more in harmony with the primitive kerygma and the Creeds: *propter nostram salutem*. And yet we find

even in the New Testament (e.g. Colossians), and precisely as a growth out of the original Christian experience of redemption and salvation in Christ, a realization of new dimensions in which the echoes of the Christ Event are heard in the utterance of the primal Word of Creation, the pre-existent Christ, the first-begotten of all creation.

It is in this sense that we can allow ourselves to speak of the Creation as the *presupposition* of the whole economy of the Incarnation (we may remind ourselves here of the way in which the second creation-narrative in Genesis is seen as the beginning of a saving history of which the culmination in the Old Testament is the Exodus). Out of the concrete, immediate realization of redemption from sin in the death and Resurrection, of the pledge of the Spirit, there issues an awareness of God's all-embracing and comprehensive gracious purpose from the creation itself: an awareness that Christ's victory over sin and death was not only an *ad hoc* repair-job but the ratification and consummation of a mysterious purpose resolved upon from all eternity. Nature, human nature, in the present concrete order, is referred to grace in virtue of being the presupposition of an order of grace introduced by the economy of the Incarnation. God created a human nature *capax Dei*, capable of receiving God's gift of himself, his gracious self-bestowal. Such a nature is not *exigent* of grace: it precisely allows grace to be grace, free gift. The giver created a fit receiver and then qualifies him to receive the gift which is the giver.⁵ But, let us remind ourselves, the living centre of all this further speculation, the excision of which would make the speculation sterile, is the Paschal experience of redemption and salvation.

'Justification' (like 'predestination') is a word which rings oddly to the Catholic ear; there may even be Catholics who would be surprised to hear that both justification and predestination belong to defined Catholic teaching, though obviously not in the same sense in which they are maintained in heretical teaching. One of the difficulties of the ecumenical debate on justification (which Küng, I think, does not draw sufficient attention to—his work has very little intellectual, speculative force) is that Protestant discussion tends to be carried on in an idiom of 'person' and 'experience' while Catholic theology tends to approach the topic more 'objectively', in terms of the consequences for the 'nature'. St Thomas's splendid account of justification is instructive here (Ia. IIae: 113). The justification of the sinner, his restoration to God's friendship, is he

⁵ Rahner discusses these themes, and many others, not only in his reflections on Küng's book but also in his survey of 'Nature and Grace' in *Fragen*.

says a *transmutatio animae*. Shall we translate this 'a transformation of the soul'? Or 'a spiritual transformation'? The first translation is what corresponds to the whole later tradition of scholastic theology, and does admittedly preserve (if rather crudely) the Catholic emphasis on the *reality* of the change produced. But need a *spiritual* change be merely a moral one, a 'change of mind', 'subjective', merely an alteration of outlook? The fact is that 'soul' has become a special way of talking and not a concept with which it is any longer easy to operate creatively—Jaspers can call it a mythical expression. The word has gone dead, and if it is to be used for a theology of grace life must be restored to it—it must be 'reanimated' precisely. St Thomas used Aristotle *creatively*, and by that very fact embodied his Christian experience in his use: the failure of creativity involves the material 'objectivization' of theology and the 'subjective' trivialization of 'experience'.

I hope that one thing at least emerges from this theological table-talk, in so far as it gives any idea of the sort of problems theologians are dealing with: theology is demanding. But it is also, surely, magnificently rewarding.

Books discussed: *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, ed. Feiner, Trütsch, Böckle. Benziger Verlag.

Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, vol. III Colet-Faistenberger. Herder.

Rechtfertigung. Die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung. By Hans Küng. Johannes Verlag.