

ON HERESY (*Quæstiones Disputatæ*) by Karl Rahner; *Herder Freiburg – Burns and Oates, London, 10s 6d.*

In this sixty page booklet Fr Rahner discusses, with characteristic thoroughness, heresy in our own times within the Church, more often than not latent and unformulated in the attitudes of those whose orthodoxy is externally manifested but on certain points at least, tacit and held, if held at all, notionally and without real assent.

Fr Rahner begins in chapter 1 by showing how a certain relativistic attitude to truth, which results from a gradual deterioration of concept in regard to it in the world we live in, is tending to undermine the very basis of the Christian revelation. It is of paramount importance therefore that the fundamental sense that truth, as such, is here on earth so vital that it must be accepted in heart and mind, if salvation is to be found at all. He touches briefly on the complex problems of the salvation of the atheist and agnostic and the objective consent of truth needed for the minimum realization, in a human life, of a saving faith. He concentrates mainly on the necessity for truth in the subjective acceptance.

This fundamental Christian tenet explains and makes intelligible the harshness with which Christendom in the past has reacted to heresy. It does not of course justify it or authorize it for the future, nor does it mean that we should defend the terrible chapters in Christian history which include persecution, the evils of the Inquisition and the cruelties of the wars of religion. It does mean that we must be on the look-out for and on our guard against the relativism of the contemporary outlook.

Chapter 2 is a close analysis of the traditional concept of heresy as an aberration within the Christian family, and is concerned to distinguish heresy from apostasy. Chapter 3 deals with the changing pattern of heresy within Christendom, and how it has become latent and largely unrealized. Fr Rahner attributes this changing pattern to the means employed by the Church's magisterium against this danger. It has been tempted more and more, and especially since the Reformation, to suppress heretical systems of

ideas by formal acts of authority, without making sure that they are overcome on principles relevant to each particular case.

Putting books on the Index, dismissing suspect professors, imposing silence without at the same time saying or allowing to be said what positively needs to be said, and this in such a way that it is not only true, but really enters into the minds and hearts of men: this is to combat heresy by administrative means. It is powerless against a heresy that only makes correct assertions and is silent at points that do not suit it; it can do nothing against the heresy of indifference and of theologically sterile integritism.

The battle against this implicit heresy of attitude is a task for the individual conscience, with the fullness of the Church's magisterium as its background. Fr Rahner keeps strictly to his subject and does not deal with the how of the problem. It is not difficult to deduce however that the renewal, the lines of which are now being laid down by the Vatican Council, will be the effective means of eliminating such latent heresy as exists and of preventing its growth in the future. Education through liturgy and scripture, through preaching and teaching which is truly the announcing of God's Word, the increasing maturity and responsibility of the laity, as members of Christ, for the living of the faith in its fullness, and for learning by living it. This points the way too to the ecumenical apostolate of encounter as it concerns us as Catholics. Here especially the possibility and danger of heresy is a warning and a challenge. A warning that we must know our faith and see it in the context of the faith and practice of our separated brethren; the context is a context of love and sympathy, in which the integrity of faith is preserved and grows. A challenge and an encouragement, because we shall all find that in our encounter with other Christians we receive as well as give, and what we receive is a deepening appreciation of the truth as it is in Christ.

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