

Medieval studies are today a cult subject with a huge amount of research being done. English scholars have made a special contribution in combining attention to detail with an ability to break through accepted categories of thought. This book, like the honorand's own writings, fit well, in the opinion of this reviewer, into this tradition.

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PROBLEMS OF AUTHORITY IN THE REFORMATION DEBATES, by G.R. Evans, *Cambridge University Press*, 1992 pp. xv + 328. £35.

In the debates of 1546 at the Council of Trent Cardinal Michael Sylva considered the desirability of free consultation between those of opposing views. But Campeggio countered this by arguing that experience had shown that no good comes of allowing heretics to put their case before councils. In a sense Campeggio won the day not only at the Council but in the final analysis in the charged atmosphere of the sixteenth century in which positions became entrenched, mutual suspicion became a characteristic, and polarization became the reality. There were many reasons for this but certainly the increasing inability and reluctance of opposing parties to meet together was one of the more significant.

This very important, highly stimulating and closely argued book suggests and describes another area of confused assumptions that lead to conflict and hostility. The author suggests that much of the basis for debate, dispute and eventual schism lies in the monumental misunderstanding and confusion over authority questions throughout the sixteenth century. At one level this is not surprising. The role of the papacy and the exercise of its particular authority in christendom had been a question of increasing concern ever since the enthusiastic Gregory VII had initiated his pontificate in the eleventh century. The reformers, protestant and catholic, were taking to their logical conclusion a number of intellectual ideas that were present and influential in the late medieval church. Other authority roles were also debated and reflected upon in the pre reformation church. Indeed, the conciliar phenomenon of the fifteenth century opened up a wide range of ecclesiological issues that were to resound again in the sixteenth century: the authority of councils, of bishops, the significance of the *congregatio fidelium*, the power of the college of cardinals.

While the present book devotes a section to these issues its particular strength lies in its perception that the question of authority was far wider and more complex than the more obvious ecclesiological questions of church structure and order. It reached into virtually every contentious issue that separated the protestant from the catholic reformers. To take but one example. The author argues that even the cry of adhering to scripture alone was beset by the problem of deciding what actually was the text to be followed. Was it the Vulgate? Was it the Vulgate revised by the humanists? Upon what authority could textual changes be made? This led necessarily to concerns of textual

transmission and the collation of manuscripts in order that a text might be found in which a sense of security might be had in confidently proclaiming this as the genuine word of God. In other words, even the matter of genuine scriptural texts became enmeshed in a question of the authority to decide on them. Indeed the behaviour of words in debates and the logical framework from which they developed needs to be understood if we are to appreciate the past and see its relevance today.

Much the same basic problem could be seen in any number of critical reformation questions: justification, the place and authority of the sacraments, the priest as judge in penance, the priesthood itself, the theology of the Eucharist and of course the manifold practical problems of authority in the visible community. Clearly not all questions could be reduced to the problem of authority but the point is well made that this concept in its widest sense ran through the reformation debates as a particularly important substratum.

The book is full of subtle discussion and reflection with a wealth of argumentation about and reference to the contemporary sources. Its other particular strength is the fact that it is written with an eye to the contemporary ecumenical scene and a plea that contemporary ecumenical discussion should not suffer from the dilemmas of the past. The author makes an important point in underlining the fact that in the last analysis the sixteenth century debates failed in their attempts to convince and persuade opposing parties that there was a common truth upon which ecclesial bridges could be built because the actual urge to unity was not strong enough. Fortunately, the sixteenth century debates have not proved the final age and the plea not to remain captured in the prison of terms and frames of reference of this period is a view that all who are serious of the ecumenical endeavour can agree with.

BRIAN FERME

THE CHURCH AND THE ARTS: PAPERS READ AT THE 1990 SUMMER MEETING AND THE 1991 WINTER MEETING OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY SOCIETY, ed. Diana Wood (*Studies in Church History*, 28) (Oxford: Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1992). pp. xviii, 585.

From the sacramental images of pre-Iconoclastic Byzantium to the grey concrete vacuity of the Metropolitan Cathedral at Liverpool is the range of the thirty-four papers published in this volume. Not only the visual arts but also music and, perhaps less successfully, literature are represented. Very few of the papers are mere occasional pieces. Even in those cases where the subject-matter appears to be narrow, indeed parochial, the authors elucidate wider implications. A crude Romanesque font in an Oxfordshire church is the stimulus for an investigation of the Christian allegorical interpretations of the zodiac; the inventories of Lichfield Cathedral illustrate the exemplary care our forefathers devoted to the dignified performance of the sacred drama of the liturgy; and a biographical sketch of that neglected Tractarian virtuoso Henry Styleman