

Reviews

IN BREAKING OF BREAD by P.J. FitzPatrick. 1993, *Cambridge University Press*, Pp. xxiii, 405. £40.00

Dr FitzPatrick undertakes in this book to provide a critique of both old and more recent ways of giving a philosophical account of the Eucharist, and to make some suggestions towards an alternative approach. To say that much, however, is to understate the range and depth of the questions he raises, which bear on method in theology as a whole, on ecclesiology, and on liturgical theory and practice.

FitzPatrick's criticisms of various traditional accounts of transubstantiation are made at two very different levels. Most obviously, he points out the incoherences in the traditional formulation of the doctrine, which, though papered over by the more careful qualifications offered by some writers, are never satisfactorily resolved. He rightly points out the tendency to reify the conceptual distinctions customarily made, and the failure of the tradition to avoid the pitfalls inherent in removing terms from the philosophical context in which they made perfectly good sense in order to apply them in ways which simply undermine what sense they ever had. If theologians 'do choose to adopt philosophical distinctions and words, they must be quite clear what they are doing, under penalty of falling into the very confusions which made philosophers draw the distinctions in the first place' (p. 92). More profoundly, FitzPatrick argues that the all too frequent attempts to insulate philosophical and theological terms from science, or from our ordinary experience and our everyday understanding of terms, leads to a profound theological scepticism quite contrary to the writers' intentions.

While it might be thought that more recent discussions of the Eucharist by such theologians as Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg, this time employing phenomenology as the philosophical tool, would at least manage to avoid the problems which beset older accounts, FitzPatrick makes a cogent case that they do not. Paradoxical as it may seem, the same disastrous dichotomy between experience and reality reappears in these recent theories, for the same reasons, and with the same sceptical result. I found this one of the most interesting parts of the book. The argument is clear, devastating, fair-minded, and leads in unexpected directions.

The philosophical back ground against which FitzPatrick himself writes is, at least in a rather broad sense, Wittgensteinian. One of the implications of this is that he insists on taking philosophical and theological theories as comparatively seamless wholes. It is, he argues, no accident that older theories of transubstantiation went hand in hand with belief in weird eucharistic miracles, with absurdities such as the first

retraction which was forced on Berengarius, and with the more outré speculations of both popular piety and medieval theologians. It is simply not possible to maintain that the sound core of Christian faith can be detached from the absurdities which can be regarded as accidental accretions. He insists that the history of eucharistic doctrine and practice is and must remain both our cherished tradition and our inescapable embarrassment. He accuses of historical naïveté or worse those who would seek to ignore, or discount, or explain away the embarrassing features of the past, while retaining just those features of traditional teaching which inevitably led to those features. Here, as elsewhere in the book, he offers several examples (including the debate on infallibility between Rahner and Küng, recent Vatican guidelines for the running of ecclesiastical universities, the treatment of the Jews, and many others) of such abuse of history and tradition. On this he is surely right. FitzPatrick is well aware that his criticisms of both old and new accounts of the eucharist, and in particular his strictures against the contrast between appearance and reality which they alike invoke, seems to leave him with no possibility of providing an alternative account of his own which is both philosophically acceptable and orthodox. Is some version of the appearance/reality contrast not absolutely central to any orthodox account of the Eucharist? He cautions against expecting too much from his own solution. Perhaps, though he does not say so in so many words, he would remind us that there are mysteries both about our human selves and about our relationship to God whereof we cannot speak and therefore must remain silent. He suggests that the 'Way of Ritual' leads to a more fruitful approach. The heart of the Eucharist is not a 'commodity', produced, carried around, analyzed, but a rite to be engaged in and shared. To participate in this rite is to engage in an activity which puts us in touch both with the past (the Passover, the Exodus, the Last Supper, the continuing Church with all its embarrassments) and with our future in the risen Christ. He argues that older styles of celebrating the Eucharist were all of a piece with a somewhat distorted view of the Eucharist itself, and that newer styles (as yet inadequately developed) can function as a way of expressing and deepening a faith which cannot be adequately verbalised. Ritual is an activity which is both part of our experience, and points beyond that experience, but which refuses to divorce the two.

The book raises very large and intractable issues. To what extent, if at all, can philosophy, or theology for that matter, talk about what is part of the mystery hidden with Christ in God? Is it possible to adopt a thoroughgoing holistic view of meaning (thereby avoiding scepticism) without thereby embracing some kind of fideism in religion, or relativism in philosophy? I would have wished for a more explicit discussion of such problems than FitzPatrick offers. But this is a very courageous, trenchant, good-humoured, and beautifully written book, whose main arguments are surely beyond refutation. It is such a pleasure to read theology written with such religious commitment and philosophical acumen.

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