

Reviews

NEWMAN ON DEVELOPMENT: THE SEARCH FOR AN EXPLANATION IN HISTORY, by Nicholas Lash. Sheed and Ward, London. 1975. 264pp. £11.00.

This is the second book in which Nicholas Lash is at grips with the pressing problem of doctrinal change and continuity in the christian tradition. In *Change in Focus* (1973) his main concern was to show that in our time history is understood more realistically than in the evolutionary thinking of the 19th century and with greater attention to the very real problems of discontinuity. On the basis of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* he offered a new and rewarding approach to the classical 'theory of development'. In retrospect it seems clear that Dr Lash's first book traced the framework for his study on Newman, the result of research at Cambridge since 1968.

Obviously *Newman on Development* is a far more scholarly book. About a third of it is filled with notes (tantalizingly put together at the end of the book), a bibliography of teutonic proportions (is this really just a 'select bibliography?') and indexes. And the text is a thorough analysis of Newman's *Essay on Development* according to various aspects, set in the proper context of Newman's other writings. But in this book too, it is the general problem of christian identity throughout history which is the author's concern.

After a short introduction in which Lash states his intention (ch II), he first considers Newman's personal aim and purpose in writing the *Essay* (II). In this chapter one of the main motives of the book is introduced. The *Essay* is basically apologetic, not in order to prove the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, but negatively to answer objections against it ('a hypothesis to account for a difficulty'), which deny that it is the true continuation of the original 'idea' of Christianity. Next the 'key features of Newman's general method of argument in "concrete are considered (III): his attempt to verify a hypothesis from historical evidence, a method which contains both historical and theological components. The next two chapters seem to me to form the body of

the book, one of them dealing with the 'development of an "idea"'. (IV: development presented as an alternative to the dilemma of immutability/corruption, with special attention to the ideal of 'homogeneous evolution' and connected problems), the other chapter being its 'hermeneutical counterpart': 'Interpreting the "earlier" by the "later"'. (V: literary criticism as an analogy of Newman's procedure, his limited use of Scripture, his stress on the unity of the 'idea', the concept of revelation implied in his argument). Finally the 'normative standpoint' adopted by Newman's *Essay* is analysed: The actual function of the historical data, the notion of 'true development', the relationship between Scripture, tradition and church authority, and Newman's hesitation to specify an essential 'idea' of Christianity. By way of epilogue a short chapter (VII) considers 'the *Essay* in 20th century theology'. This section certainly justifies Dr Lash's painstaking analysis of what Newman himself really meant, and naturally leads on to the new approach towards history already indicated in *Change in Focus*.

The reader of *Newman on Development* soon finds out that he will have to work very hard if he wants to finish the book properly. Not only is the argument often elaborate and subtle, frequently in discussion with other interpretations, but also there are numerous references between brackets to other parts of the book, or to Newman and other authors, which prove to be a severe test of one's endurance. Nevertheless I am convinced that it is a very creative and stimulating book. The key to this somewhat paradoxical conclusion is probably the author's confession that he is 'a theologian rather than a historian' (p 3). Because, via Newman, he is aware that he deals with a contemporary and very urgent problem (admirably put in *Change in Focus*) he succeeds in transforming Newman from a somewhat shadowy intellectual into a realistic and committed theologian; part-

icularly, perhaps, through the many asides scattered in the book such as: 'Newman never believed in progress' (p 62) or 'Newman's illustrations are his worst enemies' (p 104). He shows convincingly that the *Essay* is remarkable precisely as a (complex and severely honest) apology, which makes Newman's stress on the force of historical evidence, on the role of the whole church in the 'reception' of

developments and on 'orthopraxis' all the more impressive. And at the same time Lash (and, through him, Newman) makes one think constantly of present day solutions for the problematic of christian identity, which is as urgent as ever. It is this kind of historical study which marks a real advance in theology.

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KARL BARTH, HIS LIFE FROM LETTERS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS, by Eberhard Busch. SCM Press, 1975. £10.00.

This enthralling volume gives one a vivid idea of what made Barth Barth, of the formation of this great theologian and Christian. It is refreshingly free of that gossip which is the special pitfall of biography.

Barth's schooldays were apparently spent in getting involved in street-fights, writing poetry, and paying insufficient attention during periods of religious instruction. In his early manhood, as a pastor, Barth was a devotee of just that kind of liberal theology, inspired by Kant and still more by Schleiermacher, which he was soon so decisively to reject. Later he feared that much of what he said to his flock at the time might have scandalised them or led them astray. However, there are occasional broad hints of what was to come in the material which survives from this period, which stick out from their surroundings like erratic blocks. A crucial factor in the change was Barth's friendship with Thurneysen; 'we did not know what great changes were in store...; we only knew that we had to look for decisive, compelling words, more substantial than those which we heard around us' (73). The final straw for Barth was the fact that his revered teachers identified themselves with the war policy of the Kaiser; this moral failure seemed to demonstrate that all could not be well with the underlying exegetical and dogmatic presuppositions. It became more and more obvious to Barth that what was needed was 'something beyond all morality and politics and ethics. These are constantly forced into compromise with "reality" and therefore have no saving power in themselves' (84).

Reading this book, I was confirmed in my puzzlement that it was ever supposed that the so-called 'dialectical theologians' had much in common with one another, apart from their repudiation of

that liberal Protestantism, represented by men like Harnack, which had been in the ascendant for so long. As Barth saw it, there were three main tendencies which characterised the theology of the twenties; a continuation of the old liberalism, a return to the great Reformers, an existentialist tendency deriving from Kierkegaard. He himself was still searching for the basic direction which his theology ought to take. Particularly revealing, to my mind, are Barth's comments on his relationship with Gogarten. Gogarten's fundamental question to Barth was when would he get his presuppositions clear; Barth's to Gogarten, when would he get down to business. As one might expect from this, Gogarten was preoccupied with questions on the boundary of theology with philosophy and ethics; Barth, with the history of theology and dogmatics (192-3).

Barth's ultimate determination of what he was about, and the beginning of its implementation in the *Church Dogmatics*, coincided with the rise of National Socialism and the capitulation to its aims and ideals by many Christians. Barth saw this latter disaster as symptomatic of a process of corruption which had been going on in the Church for centuries. The main problem for theology at the time, as he saw it, was not so much to get rid of the 'German Christian' nonsense, as to form a front against the error which had devastated the Evangelical Church for so long. The same error was attributable also to the Roman Catholics and to the enthusiasts at the time of the Reformation—the assumption that man had a legitimate authority of his own over the message and the form of the Church (236).

After Barth returned to Basle, he remained a notable public enemy as far as the German authorities were concerned;