

ST LUKE THEOLOGIAN OF REDEMPTIVE HISTORY, by Helmut Flender. Translated by Reginald H. and Ilse Fuller. *S.P.C.K., London, 1967. 179 pp. 32s. 6d.*

To disapprove of St Luke as a theologian has been fairly customary among German protestant scholars. Recently, however, there has been a swing towards a positive appreciation, for example, in the writings of Ulrich Wilckens. Flender's important book, originally a doctoral dissertation presented at Erlangen in 1964, continues this work of Lucan rehabilitation. He argues that we should value Luke as 'an independent theologian in his own right, alongside of Paul and John' (p. 164). Flender's study contains much well argued criticism of previous views, such as Conzelmann's triple time division for Luke-Acts. His chief contribution is a thorough-going attempt to interpret Luke's thought dialectically: the old world is set over against the new divine world, past

redemption against present salvation, the Spirit's action against the responsible decisions of men, the heavenly against the earthly sphere, the revelation of the kingdom against its concealment, the Church's earthly, worldly dimension against its openness to the divine work of salvation. Repeatedly Flender brings out Luke's ability to join a straightforward narrative in a single dialectical whole with an appeal to faith. At the time he writes Luke faces the 'theological problem posed by the fact that redemption has become an event in the past. . . . His solution is to give simultaneous expression to the supernatural mystery and the earthly visibility of Christ and his history' (p. 167).

GERALD O'COLLINS, S.J.

SALVATION IN HISTORY, by Oscar Cullmann. *S.C.M. Press, London, 1967. 352 pp. 55s.*

'To the Secretariat for Christian Unity as a token of thanks for the invitation to take part in the Second Vatican Council as a guest and observer, and as a contribution to the dialogue between Christians of different confessions, in the faith and hope that even what separates us may contribute to the fluctuating and circuitous progress of salvation history.' This faith and hope in which Dr Cullmann dedicates his latest book might alert the Catholic reader to mark interconfessional differences. In fact this book could only confirm our choice of salvation history as the common basis of ecumenical dialogue, and show that with its author we are not only talking the same language, but saying the same things. This is all the more poignant since the separation which comes to light here is the yawning gap within Protestantism between the proponents of a salvation-historical theology and the dominant attitude of Bultmann and his followers. It seems to be presented as an essay in reconciliation with their position, but it is unlikely that

they are talking the same language, much less saying the same thing. Those who are interested in the dialogue between confessions cannot be unconcerned about the success or failure of intraconfessional dialogue, and yet it is doubtful what contribution this will make to closing the gap between the salvation-history view and existential self-understanding. The conviction that the Christian lives now in a period which has its meaning from a past in which God chose Israel as his people and among whom he worked to the fulfilment in Christ, has to meet the objection that free decision is excluded by a plan.

In *Christ and Time* Dr Cullmann outlined the linear conception of history which he considered to be tacitly assumed by the NT writers; here he tries to account for the origin of this salvation-historical perspective, its development in the NT and its importance for early Christian faith, thought and activity. The call to decision as the basis of a new understanding of ourselves is seen by Bultmann as the essence of the NT

proclamation, but this does not exclude salvation history as a secondary element, foreign to decision and self-understanding; the decision in faith can be an alignment with this special history. It is not a new difficulty that such a history is felt to be offensive; the significance of the Church's struggle with gnosticism in the second century is that the historical character of the Christian message is affirmed as an element not to be excluded, even as something distinctive of Christian and Jewish faith. Decision is demanded of us by the NT because our Christian existence is situated in a divine salvation history relating past, present and future. The coming of the kingdom involves a tension between 'already' and 'not yet' which is denied by the consequent eschatology of Schweitzer, the realised eschatology of Dodd, or the inaugurated eschatology of Robinson; the kingdom was proclaimed by Jesus to be at once present and future. Bultmann's interpretative eschatology effectively eliminates linear time and makes the situation of decision independent of futurity. The salvation-historical viewpoint of Luke, with its periods of time, then appears as an 'early Catholic distortion', while Paul and John see Christ correctly as the end of all continuous history. So Conzelmann's analysis of Luke's theology is welcomed as an unintentional supplement to *Christ and Time*, and the writings of Pannenberg's group, despite their subordination of salvation to revelation, appear as a promising opening towards salvation history. The unashamed insistence on a faith in events goes with a rejection of the hermeneutical objection to a biblical history which can be unfolded apart from an encounter of faith. Of course, the author has to recognise that 'salvation history' is not itself a biblical term, but 'economy' is its NT counterpart. In radical distinction from all other history too, it selects events in contradiction of the law of continuity without even depending on any philosophical principle.

After these prolegomena the genesis of the salvation-historical approach is described. Event and interpretation stand in a mutual relationship throughout the Bible, so that there is a continual correction of the interpretation of past events of salvation in the light of new events, and the act of interpreting is itself part of the history. There is not a real alternative between event and kerygma as a decision for faith, although from a human point of view event has priority over word. The incarna-

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tional events, while they contain the entire salvation history that came before and comes afterwards, also align themselves with this history. The heightened consciousness of revelation in the NT and the stress on eye-witness is related to the decisive value of these events for faith. Through their faith in Jesus's self-revelation as the one who carries out the plan of God decisively through his work the NT writers are referred back to the working out of that plan in the salvation history of Israel. The biblical witnesses align themselves with a series of events; only a survey of the whole history of salvation could assure the early Church of its position as the new Israel.

In the third section of the book Dr Cullmann studies the phenomenological characteristics of this perspective. Here again his opposition to Bultmann appears over the relation of myth to history. 'Myths serve to *interpret* the connection of the various saving events. Demythologizing rightly understood is the correct recognition and definition of this *interpretative character* of the myths, in other words of their relationship to history' (p. 139). Myth is both an extension backwards and forwards of the historical process, and within the process it makes visible the connection created by God between the events. Even the central historical process is differentiated from history by the selection of events as part of a divine plan of election. The author's key to the understanding of NT salvation history, however, is the tension between 'already' and 'not yet', and in this regard he supplements the argument of *Christ and Time* on the mutual connection of all epochs and the influence of future on preceding events. He sees no break whatever between Jesus and the early Church over this tension and this, rather than eschatology, is the characteristically new element in the NT.

In the fourth section he attempts to support his view of a connection between the imminence of the end in Jesus's teaching and the 'early Catholic' writers' prolonged interval in a linear salvation history. He considers that the denial of the Bultmann school that Jesus could have identified himself with the Suffering Servant is arbitrary. This arbitrariness also appears in the decision over the secondary character of sayings proclaiming a realized or futuristic eschatology. The problem of the delay of the *parousia* cannot properly exist for Jesus since the kingdom is being realized in his person. In a valuable discussion of eschatology here he notes the exaggerated fear of attributing to

Jesus statements dealing with final cosmic events, particularly in the English-speaking world (p. 229)! He contends that the salvation-historical conception does not change because the interval before the end is no longer limited; the idea of a near end is not the innermost essence of the NT message. The detailed working out of this position is suggestive: salvation history is not merely a remnant from Paul's Jewish past, but the kernel of his theology. The Gospel of John, which might seem more intractable, so far from being the supreme example of demythologization within the NT, differs chiefly in its stress on the 'already' rather than the 'not yet'; even the emphasis on the need for decision is placed in a salvation-historical perspective, evident in the appraisal of the life of Jesus as the centre of history, and in its relation not only to the Church of the present, but also to history back to the Creation and to a temporary eschatology. Dr Cullmann promises a detailed commentary in the future (p. 274), and the exegete may well feel that the boldness of his picture calls for more detailed support than is found here.

In the final section he sketches some theological conclusions from the NT study. Although the revelation of the divine plan has been completed, he affirms that salvation history continues as the unfolding of the Christ-event. There are no longer eye-witnesses to the decisive event itself, and the canon of Scripture offers a total interpretation of all preceding history in which the fusing of two testaments raises salvation history to its position as the principle of the whole Bible, but a hidden development of salvation history continues. We cannot designate events of the present as saving events with the same certainty as biblical events, but the history continues. This issue of the continuation of salvation history is proposed as a basis for ecumenical dialogue. The Protestant position allows no norm of authority equal to the canon, and suspicion is aroused by the infallible teaching office of the Catholic Church that the 'not yet' has been suppressed by an institution which introduces an alien static element into the process of salvation. It is possibly only here that the Catholic reader will find inter-confessional differences coming to light. He will be grateful that Dr Cullmann's persuasive advocacy for salvation history is now available in a readable English translation, and await with interest the discussion it will provoke.

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