

Reviews

LOVERS OF DISCORD : TWENTIETH CENTURY THEOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES IN ENGLAND by Keith W. Clements. *SPCK*. 1988. Pp. x + 261. £8.95.

Lovers of Discord could sadly serve as a title for many different aspects of Christian history in many different centuries. The subtitle defines its particular application in this book. But its scope is somewhat more restricted than even that might suggest. It is concerned with theological controversies in the specific sense of controversies over the nature of God and Christology. It does not include disputes on ecumenical, ethical, liturgical or sacramental issues. The main issues discussed are R.J. Campbell and 'the New Theology'; *Foundations*, Hensley Henson, and the Girton Conference; T.R. Glover and Bishop Barnes; *Soundings and Honest to God*; *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Don Cupitt and David Jenkins. It is thus primarily, but not exclusively, a tale of Anglican discord. The author, himself a Baptist, tells it with a proper appreciation of the differing standpoints of those involved; he does so moreover in a very readable style with a pleasing lightness of touch. To anyone who has participated in the more recent controversies, the overall impact can hardly fail to be a reminder of how little has changed during the century with either the issues or the animosities of the disputes.

Only in the last few pages does the author emerge from his engaged but largely self-effacing stance to comment briefly on the lessons to be learnt from his story. The controversies, he opines, have had less effect on the life of the Church, for good or ill, than their protagonists have been inclined to claim for them. He approves the suggestion of Stephen Sykes that such conflict ought to be seen as an inescapable element in Christian faith. But the corollary to that is what is needed is to give more serious attention to theology, while allowing it a lesser role in determining Christian identity and Christian unity. That, I believe, is sound counsel. But he is anxious to distinguish between such allowable conflict within Christianity and conflicts which separate Christianity from something else. Here the determinative issue is defined as the need to exclude any view which says that 'for Christians, Jesus is not definitive of God, and that trust for life and salvation can be placed elsewhere than in Jesus' (p. 238). But the distinction may prove harder to sustain than he suggests. Is the 'Jesus' of that definition the Jesus of history, the Jesus of the gospel presentation(s), the Jesus we can know from historical research, the Jesus experienced by the believer(s)? And for Jesus to be 'definitive of God' must other sources be discounted? If on such issues 'the tension must be endured' (to quote the final chapter heading) within the church, is it not likely than an equally intractable tension will also prove to exist across the Christian boundary as well?

But that is to indulge in reflection suggested by this clearly and attractively written book. The story it tells can hardly fail to engage the interest of anyone concerned with English church life and its periodical irruptions into states of passionate theological dispute.

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