

A THEOLOGICAL CHRONICLE

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IT is surely no accident that the two most important books to be discussed here are products of the ecumenical debate; they are important, that is, not merely for professional 'ecumenicists' but for theologians generally. The point made by Père Congar many years ago, that Catholic theologians have something to learn from non-Catholic theology, is being verified in particular examples of constructive theological work, in a response to the insights of faithful dissident Christians which takes those insights seriously and positively and seeks critically to assimilate them into a fuller Catholic theology rather than to controvert them merely from what can now be recognized as often too narrow a basis. How intimate the debate has become abroad may be seen from the remarkable collection of studies offered to Otto Karrer on his seventieth birthday, edited by Maximilian Roesle, o.s.b., and Oscar Cullmann.¹ In this large volume of nearly seven hundred pages, Catholic and Protestant writers pair off with each other to study in turn topics which have for centuries been regarded as purely controversial; Catholic writers include Vögtle, Schlier, Geiselman, Küng, Jedin, Mörsdorf, Fries, Alois Müller, Sartory, and among the Protestants are Asmussen, Stauffer, von Allmen, Stählin, to mention only names known to me. The long study of Peter and the 'rock' text by the Protestant Johannes Ringger is particularly striking; it is an extraordinary fact that Catholic theologians, even since the appearance of Cullmann's *Peter* (recently published in a revised German edition), have been much more interested in the apologetic case for Peter than in his theological significance, which is not, after all, exhausted in the Vatican decrees which define it. Ringger, by studying the texts in the light of the 'history of symbols', helps us to see some of that richer significance; the use of texts from Qumran is especially illuminating (I QH 6, 19-31).

Hans Asmussen, in a study of Luther's *De Captivitate Babylonica*, shows that the young Luther's rejection of transubstantiation was based on a view that the metaphysical statement of the presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist was too *weak* an expression of the

¹ *Begegnung der Christen*. Evangelisches Verlagswerk Stuttgart and Verlag Josef Knecht Frankfurt.

mystery. Eugen Walter, writing from a professedly pastoral point of view, draws attention to the separation of faith from sacrament in the ordinary Catholic consciousness. This is a point of the utmost importance; even in the striking little book by Henry Bars, *The Assent of Faith*,² which seems largely to be directed to Catholics, the personal, existential aspect of faith is considered without much reference to the sacramental context in which faith is exercised, though there are some good sections which deal with this (notably 'Frequentatione mysterii', pp. 109-13).

The special merit of Louis Villette's *Foi et Sacrement*³ is that it provides a patient and painstaking analysis of the interpenetration of faith and sacraments, baptism in particular, from the New Testament to St Augustine. The starting point of the work was the discovery, in the published reports of the discussions at the Council of Trent, of the evident concern of the Conciliar Fathers to formulate a statement of the Church's teaching on the sacraments which would take fully into account the manifold riches of Scripture and Tradition. Villette felt the need to explore these riches himself, and presents the results of his investigations in this first volume; a second volume will continue the inquiry up to the Council of Trent. The whole investigation was presented as a dissertation to the Institut Catholique at Paris in 1954 (a fact which might have been pointed out in the preface); the reader will notice that only two or three studies written after 1950 are cited in the bibliographies, and it is not clear how much use has been made of them. But it is perhaps only in the New Testament section that the lack of reference to more recent work is likely to be felt; there can be no doubt that the long detailed analyses of the patristic tradition constitute the permanent value of this first volume: its reconstruction of a whole Catholic mind and consciousness in the formative period of the Church's teaching on the sacraments, almost exclusively in this book the sacrament of baptism. The author's two main conclusions, in so far as they can be detached from the material he presents, are firstly that an essential, 'ontological' connection holds between the sacramental organism and faith; and secondly, that the theological explanation of this connection must depend on a third term, common to both—the Church. The subtitle of this book is 'Pour un dialogue entre les Eglises'; and it is to be hoped that it will be studied by theologians of all confessions.

The difficulties of ecumenical debate for a Catholic theologian are illustrated by the recent addition to the Library of Constructive

² Burns Oates; 21s. With an introduction by Mgr H. Francis Davis.

³ *Travaux de l'Institut Catholique de Paris*, 5. Bloud et Gay.

Theology by the Charles Lewis Gomph Professor of Christian Apologetics at the General Theological Seminary in New York.⁴ Professor Pittenger is an American Episcopalian and a 'Catholic Modernist'; he hardly ever uses the word 'orthodox' without deprecatory inverted commas, he is guarded about biblical theology, and he is a fluent practitioner of a robust rhetoric and a virile vocabulary ('thrust', 'channel' as a verb, 'energize' intransitively) which often take control of what he wants to say. He is 'Antiochene' in his theology of the union of God and man in Christ, an upholder of 'process-philosophy' and consequently regards Christ as an 'emergent' of the evolutionary process, sees the persons of the Trinity as 'modes' of the Being of the Godhead, rejects the Fall, the Virgin Birth and the empty tomb as 'legends', claims that 'pantheism' is the only satisfactory way of formulating the relationship between God and creation, and so on and so on. And yet his motives in all this must claim our respect; they appear most clearly and creditably, perhaps, in a footnote about Professor C. C. J. Webb and others like him, who 'made it possible for countless educated persons to retain with intellectual integrity their faith in Christianity' (p. 267). Of course it is easy to say that the Christianity so retained is attenuated almost beyond recognition, and further, that most educated non-Christian persons are hardly likely to be attracted by a Christianity presented in such terms (the trouble about 'modernism' is that it is never modern enough); but the seriousness of the motives and of the situation which provokes them remains, and is not often given more than apologetic consideration by Catholics, at least in England.

There are two Christological themes in Professor Pittenger's book which deserve our special attention: firstly, his 'Antiochene' account of the union; and secondly, his insistence that the Incarnation must not be considered in isolation from other relationships between God and the world. As regards the first theme, it may be said in advance that no Catholic theologian could allow the Antiochene tradition in Christology to be used *against* the Chalcedonian formula; but this should not mean, as it has often meant, that the Antiochene elements in the Chalcedonian formula should be played down in such a way that the Christology presented as orthodox would tend in practice to be monophysite. The Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart, as presented in Pius XII's striking encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* (1956), is a valuable corrective to this tendency, too much ignored by professional theologians. Professor Pittenger is perfectly right to criticize 'Chalcedonian' theologies in which ontological personality

⁴ *The Word Incarnate*, by W. Norman Pittenger. Nisbet, 25s.

which is conceivable' (*ibid.*; author's italics) is one of indwelling of God in man and manhood's free response in surrender and love: in fact it is not an ontological union in the person of the Word, but at best (in view of Professor Pittenger's repeated insistence on God's *activity* in Jesus) a union of operation, a stable one, no doubt, but one in which the Man Jesus, in his personal humanity, 'expresses' the purposes of God by surrendering himself wholly to them. That this is inadequate for an *orthodox* (without inverted commas) Christology is plain; but we should not for that reason shut our minds to Professor Pittenger's valuable insistence on the full humanity of Jesus Christ, sustained in being, we believe as Catholics, by the person of the eternal Son. St Thomas, following Damascene and through him the Alexandrian tradition, continually recurs to the idea of the humanity of Jesus as the *instrumentum divinitatis*; and his theology of redemption and the sacraments depends upon it.

It will have been noticed that Professor Pittenger sets as a limit to the theology of the union what is 'conceivable'; and this is the less creditable aspect of the 'modernist' motive, that starting from assumptions about the world usually derived without critical analysis from the popularized science of the proximate past, it will allow only that in Revelation to be true which is not in conflict with these assumptions. One unfortunate consequence of this is that 'modernism' is always dated; it ceases to be open to the future and even the present because it is so anxiously trying to catch up with those simplified versions of scientific theories which circulate some years later as popular myths (and in this form react on the scientists themselves; see the extremely interesting discussion of Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* by Marjorie Grene in 'The Faith of Darwinism', *Encounter*, November 1959, pp. 48-56). This restriction of free thought (what Wittgenstein used to call the 'everything goes to show' fallacy) by what is 'conceivable to the modern mind' affects Professor Pittenger's Christology again in what would otherwise be a very proper demand that we should not so isolate the Incarnation from the rest of God's dealings with the world that it appears as an irrational irruption from without. The procedure is all too simple; starting from 'modernist' assumptions of what is conceivable, we demythologize biblical Revelation, in particular what it has to say about the cosmos; we make the assumptions explicit as far as we are able in terms of 'process-philosophy', 'panentheism' and so on; and Christ is then assigned a role in this agreeably modernized cosmos in such a way that he becomes a function of a desacralized world, desacralized himself or, even worse, invested with the pseudo-sacredness of a private mys-

tique. Readers of Professor Pittenger's book will find, to their surprise, perhaps, how many forerunners he has among non-Catholic theologians for this kind of 'modernism', especially for Christologies making use of the theory of Evolution. The conventions of the procedure are of particular interest to Catholics today in view of the extraordinary success in many quarters of the writings of Teilhard de Chardin. The success would seem to be due mainly to Teilhard's remarkable capacity to hypnotize his readers and communicate to them his private mystique, so that they do not notice how a Christ who merely fulfils a function in a cosmos apprehended as *nature* and satisfies its intrinsic finality cannot be the Christ of Revelation, the Christ of God's unexacted grace, who is not merely an 'emergent' novelty of the evolutionary Process but is incommensurate with it in so far as it is supposed to provide a universal scale and common measure for the entire cosmos.⁷

Are we then to abandon all hope of a single vision in which God's gracious intervention in the Incarnation, his manifold mercies in other ways, and the processes and values of the natural world (including the inventions and insights of human intellect and imagination), can be simultaneously celebrated and hierarchically ordered? The only appropriate answer to this enormous question would be at the very least a complete book (which the present writer feels would be well worth writing). Such a book would concern itself above all with the starting point, the *principium*, of such a vision; it would examine the initial demythologization of the Scriptural Revelation and conclude that the New Testament witness to the cosmic role of the glorified Christ must be taken seriously and not merely reduced to the conceptual categories of 'modern' philosophy and science, that *new* conceptual categories need to be worked out (and have to some extent already been worked out); that this *principium* is the ineffable *mysterion* of God's saving purpose, disclosed in Revelation, existentially adhered to in faith, articulated in the creeds and elaborated in theological speculation; that this *principium* makes possible an analogy of Being which measures and is not measured by the grades of Being as these are accessible to the non-theological metaphysician or scientist; that the *sacrum secretum*

⁷ It is not of course my business, nor is it within my competence, to discuss the scientific validity of the claim that evolutionary theory furnishes an adequate account of the organic world, let alone the cosmos. As regards man, I merely note that, if I understand him, Dr Bernard Towers's rather cryptic suggestion, in *BLACKFRIARS*, September 1960, pp. 351-2, that there is no need to appeal to a direct intervention of God in order to explain the transition from the 'Biosphere' to the 'Noosphere', is unacceptable to Catholics; as *Humani Generis* reminded us, *all* human souls are immediately created by God; and this of course is meant by the language of 'infusion'.

of all that is *only* yields itself to and is realized in a human existence which is the expression of a divine life of faith, hope and charity in the Church, for the *principium* of this vision is the living, loving, active *origo* of all that is in grace and nature (*origo*, though not the cause, as Father, even of Son and Holy Ghost). Such a book would in fact be a theological epistemology; and, odd though it may seem, a Thomist one; for surely the metaphysical theologian who began his life with the incessant question 'What is God?' and whose unfinished work partially realized the task of declaring how all things come from and return to the God of Christian revelation would sympathize with and give his patronage to all such investigations (there could never be a definitive one).

One of the inadequacies of Professor Pittenger's treatment is, in a more limited sense, precisely this matter of epistemology, to which he gives a good deal of attention in his earlier chapters. Since for him *all* experience is, without significant distinction, 'subjective' and 'psychological', he has no difficulty in using terms like 'impact' to describe the difference between the brute fact of the 'historical Jesus' and the 'Jesus of faith'; for faith registers such an impact of the historical Jesus on the Christian community. But this is not 'objective'? No matter, for all human experience is a profound interrelationship of the subjective and the objective. This account is only a little unfair, since once 'knowledge' has been assimilated to 'feeling' in a general mess of 'experience' there is not much hope left. We may say, in a fashionable way, that the concepts of 'knowledge' and 'feeling' have a different logical grammar; or more conventionally, that they are different metaphysically.

But any objections we may make to Professor Pittenger's epistemology are mild compared to those which (if literary convention did not forbid it) we would like to make to the views expressed by Peter Munz, in *The Problems of Religious Knowledge*, which is one of the worst books, both inept and pretentious, which the present reviewer has ever had to read.⁸ There would indeed be no point in discussing it at all if it were not published in an influential series with acknowledgments to influential people. The problem proposed is familiar: there is a scientific picture of the world which leaves no room for religious knowledge; where then is the latter to find a place? A quite sensible first chapter briefly reviews and criticizes reductive accounts of religious knowledge; then the author offers his own, which is unfortunately not only reductive but nonsensical. For Munz proposes a new way of using the word 'symbol': in his use a symbol is no longer to stand for something that is symbolized, there

⁸ Library of Philosophy and Theology. S.C.M. Press; 25s.

is no longer to be any 'one-to-one correlation between the symbols and the things symbolized' (who would have thought it possible that in this day and age a philosophical writer could think that there was a 'one-to-one correlation' between the word 'sheep' and the woolly animal, and that this 'correlation' could be spoken of indifferently as 'meaning' and as 'standing for'?). In the use proposed by Munz a symbol stands for or means nothing at all; it merely incorporates or gives definition to, 'realizes', a 'feeling-state', also confusingly called an '*essentia*'. Hence the world can function in two ways: as yielding a scientific, descriptive picture (and the vagueness of 'yielding' is the best I can do with what Munz says), or as concretizing feeling-states in a symbolic picture (not a picture strictly of anything, though loosely perhaps 'of' the feeling-states). This second picture is the world apprehended *sub specie essentiae*—Munz's own inflated and misleading terminology; and 'revelation' is such an apprehension (non-cognitive, of course). The rest is easy; science interprets the scientific picture in terms of the category of causality; theology interprets the symbol-picture in terms of the category of eternity, though it is not clear how there is anything to *interpret*, since the symbols don't really *mean* anything. The one tiny spark of insight in this dreary book is the advance on the usual reductive account of religious knowledge in terms of feelings, since Munz's 'feeling-states' are not determinedly accessible except by way of the symbols which concretize them (the reader may be reminded of T. S. Eliot's early essay on *Hamlet* and the 'objective correlative').

The manifest objection to all this is that it disposes of the 'problem of religious knowledge' by making religious knowledge *queer*, so queer that by definition it only *begins* to be knowledge at all *after* 'interpretation'; and it is hardly surprising after this that Munz can go on without apparent discomfort to reduce the 'old theology' of God and gods and so on to his 'new theology' of eternity. It is depressing to think that this sort of naïve hatchet-work, with its solemnity, its impertinent abuse of tags from the traditional religions, its violent arbitrariness, should be offered for our serious attention today, after (say) Cassirer and Evans-Pritchard, after millennia of serious religious life and thought, in a world where serious religious life and thought are still conducted. There is something very wrong when the stance of 'seriousness' is so diversely assumed, and something very odd about the publication of such a book by a Christian publishing-house. Ecumenical debate isn't easy.