

Reviews

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NEW TESTAMENT QUESTIONS OF TODAY, by Ernst Käsemann. *SCM Press, London, 1966*, 305 pp. 50s.

According to the blurb on the dust cover Ernst Käsemann's work 'has proved particularly congenial to Anglo-Saxon readers'. Whether this is because his essays are argumentative, clear, or simply shorn of footnotes, I do not know, but certainly this is his second collection to appear in English in recent years. The tone of this group is altogether more shrill, partly perhaps because many of the essays here were originally addresses delivered to widely different audiences, even youths at a YMCA anniversary. Only two essays are closed works of meticulous scholarship: 'The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel' (138-167) and 'Sentences of Holy Law in the New Testament' (66-81). E. Käsemann has never been an orthodox academic professor at the best of times. He tells us how he spent several years as a pastor and only came back into academic circles with a very purposeful sense of mission (276). Thus he has little time for the 'guerilla warfare of the specialists' (207) and is determined to bend all his research to service the facts of modern life, where he sees the vast spread of atheism and complete indifference to Christ. He sees himself as being the pepper rather than the salt to his coreligionists (282). For although he explicitly proclaims his role more than once as that of a Protestant theologian with a passionate adherence to the principles of the Reformation, he has some very disagreeable things to say to Protestants, and some rather sarcastic ones to Hans Küng as a representative of the Roman Church (250, note I). Although these provocative and militant expressions appear quite openly in the last three essays, 'Unity and Multiplicity in the New Testament Doctrine of the Church' (252-259), 'Thoughts on the Present Controversy about Scriptural Interpretation' (260-285), and 'Theologians and Laity' (286-299), the sentiments are not far below the surface in the majority of the essays earlier in the book.

These are divided between essays on the Gospels and on St Paul. The introductory essay which gives the book its name clearly indicates E. Käsemann's camp in Form-Criticism. There follows a long essay entitled 'Blind Alleys in the "Jesus of History" Controversy' (23-65), in which he unceremoniously

washes his hands of Jeremias as a member of a different camp. He gets down instead to Bultmann, whose pupil he was; he is now paying homage to his master by picking large holes in his theses. Like several other Form-Critics in recent years, E. Käsemann allows a great deal more value to history in the New Testament. He goes as far as to say that in preaching it is even necessary to 'recall' the historical Christ within the framework of the Gospels. Otherwise, he says, we are abandoning ourselves to Docetism, and airy enthusiasm (64).

Even so E. Käsemann goes on in the essay on 'The Beginnings of Christian Theology' (82-107), and 'On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic' (108-137) to assume that the basic ideas of the original Gospel are irremediably obscured from us. For, in his opinion, the primitive form was one of Apocalyptic. But this became smoothed out into salvation history and theology generally. The real villain of the piece is early Catholicism which pushed the tense expectancy of the end into the background and got down to organising the here and now.

'Early Catholicism' turns out to be so early that St Paul can be counted as its forerunner. A lively description of the man from Tarsus makes him out to be 'a possessed man . . . pursuing a feverish dream' (241), a spectacular failure, who planned things that did not endure (240). But this irrepressible genius came to be domesticated by the Catholic Church as one of its doctors, and thus the truth of what he really said has been partly lost. The purport of 'Paul and Early Catholicism' (236-251) and 'The Righteousness of God' in Paul' (168-182) is to show that to listening and Protestant spirits it is not entirely lost. Although E. Käsemann is highly displeased that Küng could suppose that 'Catholicism' is evangelical, he admits that Catholicism can actually be detected in Paul. Paradoxical as this may sound it is the inevitable result of Paul's life-long effort to get between the extremes of 'enthusiasm' and 'legalism', which Käsemann believes to have been the warring forces of the time.

It will be evident that the writer is a provocative figure. He does not make a virtue of getting on with people. He has some very hard things to say about one of his earlier masters,

Adolf Schlatter, and we should have to believe, despite the impression we gain to the contrary, that he still has a high admiration of Bultmann. He is a lonely spirit, sometimes haunted in his exegesis by the fear that someone may have thought of his solution before. Perhaps it will win him footnotes all to himself in future commentaries. But perhaps he will simply be lumped under 'Bultmann; with variations'. Like some other scholars who have recently

climbed the public rostrum, E. Käsemann's manner can be rather tiresome. But when he is really on the track of the truth about the Gospel and Christ, he writes moving and stimulating pages, reiterating his basic point that Jesus did not come to save the pious, and was at war on all forms of phariseeism. The vigour of these utterances is well conveyed in the English translation by Canon W. J. Montague.

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THE TRINITY, by Karl Rahner, S. J. *Burns & Oates/Herder and Herder, London, 1970. 112 pp. 30s.*

Books on the doctrine of the Trinity are relatively rare. This is not because publishers are afraid that such books would not sell but because theologians themselves feel uncertain when they have to teach, or worse, have to preach on the doctrine of the Trinity. This small book by Karl Rahner will convince many readers that their uncertainty and fear are exaggerated.

Karl Rahner has never had any doubt that the doctrine of the Trinity is the core of Christian belief and that no renewal of theology can be complete without a real revision of the average textbook theology of the Trinity. The 'death of God' theology which generally did not give any attention to the Trinitarian concept of God seems to have confirmed this point of view. Christians can only speak about the Trinity or they have to remain silent.

The English edition of this work by Rahner is the translation of chapter 5 of the second volume of *Mysterium Salutis*, a modern German handbook for dogma, published in 1967. Partly it is a revision of articles published in *Theological Investigations*. The reader has to bear this in mind because he will, for instance, miss a section on the doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture and meet with some repetitions, though always in a different context.

The important contribution of this book to a renewal of the theology of the Trinity is that it does away with a lot of questions which gave rise to lengthy discussions with subtle distinctions in the theological handbooks. Karl Rahner shows convincingly that many of these questions are bound up with a certain type of theology which has been very useful in the past but now fails to conceptualize for modern man the good news of the gospel.

In the first part of his book, Karl Rahner outlines the method and structure of a new treatise on the Triune God. He wants to link

the theology of the Trinity with the Christian way of life. He shows that it is impossible to separate questions such as 'whether God exists' and 'whether God is one' from the question 'who God is'. It is not possible any longer to speak about God without speaking about the Trinity. The theology of the Trinity is not an intellectual game but a mystery of salvation. We believe in the Trinity because God has revealed himself in the life and death of Jesus. Questions such as whether another person of the Trinity could have been incarnate are meaningless. We have to stick to the facts.

The second part of the book gives the main lines of the official Trinitarian doctrine of the Church. Like Karl Barth who has clearly influenced Karl Rahner's theology of the Trinity, Rahner wonders whether the term 'person' is still a suitable word to be used in the doctrine of the Trinity. This term has now acquired shades of meaning which cannot easily be reconciled with the Trinitarian doctrine.

This consideration plays a great part in the third part of the book where Karl Rahner tries to give a systematic outline of a new Trinitarian theology. This part may be less appealing to English readership because the terms used are rather technical. The book concludes with refuting the classic 'psychological' doctrine of the Trinity.

This book opens up new possibilities of talking about the Trinity. One may wonder, however, whether Karl Rahner is not too worried about the unity of the Trinity as if we knew what unity in a merely human context means. Can the word 'person' really be avoided? One cannot help thinking that for Karl Rahner the doctrine of the Trinity remains something of an embarrassment and this should not be necessary.

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