

about eschatology at all, or just dovetail that concern into human history at the level of specific, political event and development. In the last issue of *Slant* Cunningham says: 'Clearly for some time to come the crucial question here (i.e. the working out of a theology of the world) will continue to be the understanding of eschatology'. And Terry Eagleton cautiously suggests that the main function of Christian Marxists in the future will be simply recruitment within the Church. Since Christianity in England is growing less important ideologically, there is more chance of socialist propaganda reaching Christians, but less chance of any significant structural intersection between Church and society.

Slant's function, then, was largely as a theoretical breeding-ground, an area of transition, much needed, however small the number of people it actually reached. Risking platitude I'll say that it raised vital issues—issues of a lasting importance for anyone still concerned with the relationship between theology and politics. In the touchingly antiseptic and passionless words of the valedictory address which *Sheed and Ward* appended to the last issue, it succeeded 'in stimulating discussion of many important and previously neglected questions'.

Its tendencies to verbalism and idealism—tendencies I've discussed at length—are understandable if you take into account the extent to which it was trying to actually *create* a theoretical tradition for itself. A tradition which would be directed to an unenviable task, for as one of *Slant's* editors plaintively pointed out to me, life's no joke when you are trying to mediate an idealist deformation of Marxism by intellectual argument alone through to a non-proletarian group within a reactionary institution. The wholesale borrowing from other traditions, the rampant eclecticism, have to be seen in this light as a mode of survival; the tenuously held connection between Christianity and Marxism did a great deal at least for the political consciousness of the Christian, even though it often failed to provide any enlightenment for bewildered, onlooking Marxists.

Christian Relationships

H F Woodhouse

This article is an attempt to sketch some salient features of the relationship between Christians. The Christian church is not a crowd, not even a crowd made up of devotees of a particular football club to take an example. It is a community and yet the persons who compose

it are persons, because of their interrelationship, and individuals, because often their particular qualities or gifts are intensified.

They are a community 'in Christ', the body of Christ and this fellowship is not so much horizontal between the different members as vertical because they are 'in Christ' or alternatively we could say they share a common life, that imparted by the Holy Spirit the Life Giver. This viewpoint, while not provable from the New Testament, receives support from it.¹

The members who share this common life remain persons, indeed their individuality is developed and enhanced. In relationship lies the differentia of being person; this has vertical and horizontal links, with the Holy Spirit and with other people, especially often Christians. Personality, growth to mature persons, is realised in response to Him, and in fellowship with life in all its varied aspects. Aspirations can be met, self-realisation achieved, self-expression maintained. For the Christian, becoming a person is the practice of divine sonship.

From one angle he looks upon himself as a receptacle into which the Spirit has been poured. But nouns and the passive voice are inadequate to bear an adequate weight. The Spirit fills and floods, He indwells so that He becomes immanent, one person in many persons.² In this connection we may suggest a practical and also a devotional application of a difficulty found in certain N. T. passages. These seem to speak loosely of Christ, of the Spirit of Christ, of the Spirit of God, of the Life Giver.³ While it may well be that the writers were not trying to formulate exact doctrinal statements, might it not also be true that the reality of a unique type of immanence within the life of the Trinity was reproduced, even if feebly, within the Christian Community?

Dare we bring in the word 'perichoresis' and talk of 'mutual interpenetration'; if so, we do not contemplate a human artifact but a divine gift, a new creation, an indwelling presence. We cannot speak of persons in isolation from each other, a fortiori we cannot speak of Christians in isolation. The justification for the 'a fortiori' is this element of mutual interpenetration and the mutual interpenetration is the Spirit, a Presence, a powerful living active presence, active creating a unique community.

The Spirit penetrates our spirit. The Holy Spirit creates, sustains and stimulates the fellowship, the fellowship expresses the virtues and the gifts He confers.⁴ One result is mutual enrichment; another is mutual concern—the bearing of each others' burdens. The words 'one another' used with different verbs in the New Testament exemplify something of this, we find the verbs accept, comfort, forbear, love and other phrases.

¹For a discussion see L. S. Thornton, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, Daere Press, ch. 3.

²This could be expanded by our exposition of biblical words like 'fill'; 'pour out'; see also Thornton, *op. cit.* pp. 89ff.

³e.g. Acts 16.7; 2 Cor. 3.17f.; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1.19 & Rom. 8.2, 9ff.

⁴Gal. 5.22.

We have spoken of the sharing of a common life, that might be called a unity in plurality, or, in more traditional language, participation in the communion of saints, it is the belonging to a family. It tends towards the consummation of individual personality, not that this implies increasing centrifugal tendencies nor divisive distinctions. The word separate scarcely seems relevant if read to imply distinctness in the sense mentioned in the previous sentence.

We may develop some positive aspects, borrowing ideas from a recent book by Lady Oppenheimer.⁵ We are seeking to describe a whole dimension of life, the spiritual dimension, life centred upon and flowing from the Life Giver. In this sphere human relationships often consist of an 'intimacy of diverse forms of concern for one another' but this not so much an abiding in one another as an abiding in one fellowship and in one Spirit.⁶ Here the Church, baptism and eucharist have important roles. Persons become 'very members incorporate' in a 'blessed company'. There is a bond of interdependence, even more a sharing in one Spirit. We become 'persons in relation' because partakers of one Spirit who binds Christians together.⁷ Also the Christian says 'I participate in Holy Spirit, therefore I am a recipient'.

Does what we have said provide some illustration, however feeble, of something more difficult and greater—the relationships within the Trinity? Here is the apogee of communion and of participation. In the Church, the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, we find, despite its all too human aspects that the personality of members does not impair unity, it rather enriches the unity, exemplifying multiplicity-within-unity. But also we affirm the unity of one body without impairing the person of any. So perhaps, though in a transcendent degree, we can affirm the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit within the unity of the Divine Life.

Here too we may highlight the operations of the Spirit. Often the Fathers speak of him as the bond of communion within the Trinity, the harmony of unity and linking the Trinity together for He is their common life. The stress upon the Spirit as the effective bond is plain.

We started with the word crowd, a low form of life; the progression of thoughts has advanced to the greatest and richest of all realities—the Godhead. Here is the 'transcendent and inclusive completeness' of unity in plurality.⁸ To such a reality, adoration and worship are the fitting response. Also the idea of unity in plurality sets a high ideal for the Christian in searching to fulfil his own responsibilities and relationships both in personal, ecclesiastical and social realms. The implications of these and of the whole contents (of this article) are not worked out. It merely indicates the basis in one area from which Christian strategy and tactics, words and actions in different areas of life should start.

⁵*Incarnation and Immanence*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.

⁶*op. cit.*, pp. 180 & 184.

⁷Title of a book by J. MacMurray.

⁸R. C. Moberly. *Atonement and Personality*. 1907 ed., p. 179.