

## IN THE STUDY

We are often reminded that the child is father of the man. The connection between the children of today and the Church of tomorrow is not so clear. In 1976 a British Council of Churches Working Group produced the report "The Child in the Church". Five years later, a smaller and somewhat different group has taken the enquiry a stage further,<sup>1</sup> with particular concern for some of the more significant loose ends earlier identified. We are given chapters on Christian nurture, Christian childhood, Christian parenthood, worship and Christian nurture. At frequent intervals a "summary" paragraph is inserted to ensure that the thread of an argument is not lost and the essence of the conclusion to it not obscured. It is a helpful and clarifying procedure.

What is not so clear is the nature of the readership in mind. We are told that "popular appeal" is not intended; and the appearance of sentences such as "The heteronomous believer follows an Apollinarian Christ..." seems to validate that judgment. Yet the discussion of Christian parenthood - arguably the Report's most valuable and successful section and deserving of the widest possible attention - is couched in such terms that he who runs may read, and is careful to point out that "Not all of us are blest with very great intelligence. Not all of us have had the benefits of an advanced education".

The discussion of worship and nurture, which adopts an improving stance in the matter of children's full participation in the Lord's Supper, is tenuous, predictable and, on the whole, lightweight. The casual reader could too easily assume that differences between adults and children in worship expectancies and worship practices are all cultural and that a proper "give and take" points the way through. In reality, the "substance" of the Report lies elsewhere. It offers the bones of a theology of Christian nurture. It sketches the initial shadowy contours of a theology of childhood. It is to these areas that questions must be directed.

"Critical openness" is the preferred key to effective Christian nurture. On the one hand, such openness is "a central feature of Western education". On the other hand, it is a basic New Testament mark of the eschatological life of the Kingdom. It is related to autonomy and thereby stands firmly over against authoritarianism. Nurture moulded by this criterion can never be confused with indoctrination.

All this is worked out and worked through with a wealth of painstaking argument. The barrage of sweet reasonableness suggests that an approach is being urged that will not find immediate favour. Well, maybe. What then becomes bothersome is the sense that the hand is overplayed and that the argument is conducted with conventional counters that need more scrutiny than they get. It is hardly reassuring to find set over against a large-scale projection of the approach of critical openness a terse, almost throwaway, single paragraph on the balancing

"element of dogmatism". Equally it is hardly reassuring to find our old enemy "authoritarianism" bludgeoned smartly out of the path with a theological truncheon ( - the choice is between critical openness and a dictator God ~) without any clear recognition of the possibility that the ferocity of the current reaction pro-autonomy and anti-authority is heavily bound up with failure to cope with proper dependency. Not thus, I fear, are battles won.

So to the theology of childhood. Here, amid many illuminating and thought-provoking points scored, the question of terminology threatens to become dangerously confusing. We are told that all children may be "Christians" and that there is every likelihood that some are. Where a child or infant is the object of the divine initiative, stands within the sphere of a particular historical expression of the divine self-giving, is under address by the symbols of that divine calling, is marked by that covenanted relationship, there (we may believe) is a child of grace, rightly designated "Christian". Such are "in Christ", sharing the life of the Spirit, included within the body of Christ.

Now, read *in meliorem partem*, all this is unexceptionable. It carries no necessary corollary, I judge, on issues of baptism and salvation. Defenders of the ark(s) may have their own shrewd suspicions about the hidden implications waiting to be drawn; but rise in blood pressure would be premature. The real question may be whether the net is constructed so loosely that *all* the fish escape. Says the Report in one place, "In this broadest of all senses of the word Christian..." Indeed to goodness, yes; you can say that again!

So what really is at stake? The Report boldly affirms: "The process of Christian nurture depends upon the validity of the idea that a child can be a Christian and hence a member of the church from his earliest days". True or false? "In this broadest of all senses" - true. If you define your key terms differently - false. And there's the rub - and the consequent danger that the needed debate between those who congenially fit into the perspective offered and those who do not will prove aimless and barren. I fancy that the canny will pause long before capitulating to the apparently ruthless logic of this attempt to establish that to deny that children may be "Christians" is to be left with evangelism or education but not nurture. Too many terminological conjuring tricks are being performed. But the canny will turn stupid if they fail to pursue a common search for the cash value of diverse sets of counters. And the ultimate betrayal would be to draw stumps and retreat in a huff to the safety of the pavilion.

The shortness of the step from nurture to education prompts a move from the B.C.C. to John Ferguson. Unfortunately, the symposium<sup>2</sup> he edits never quite makes up its mind what it is doing. It is sub-titled: "Robert Raikes, Past, Present and Future" and is obviously prompted by a desire to mark the bicentenary of Raikes's inauguration of the Sunday School Movement. So it is that three contributors survey Raikes in his historical setting.

The trouble is that this involves the over-ploughing of limited ground, with no little repetitiveness to which the editor in his introduction adds further underlining. It is in harmony with this that three further contributors offer bits of research in connection with the nineteenth century developments of the Movement. Worth chronicling; but the result is a mixture of the fragmentary and the starkly factual. With a move into the twentieth century, however, the plot thickens, and any anticipated unity of intention and drive substantially evaporates. A survey of recent directions in prison education echoes a Raikes "interest" but is not primarily concerned with children. Other essays are; but otherwise they make odd bedfellows. Westerhoff writes about church education controversies in the United States and concludes, hardly surprisingly, that both nurture and evangelistic models have a claim. Kathryn Copsey draws attention to the familiar environmental and societal pressures upon children in the urban industrial setting and usefully reminds us that we need to love them and start where they are. Ottoson takes Education and Society as his theme, accuses education of promoting the conformist, the competitive, the divisive, rather than the truly "human" dimensions of existence, and seeks some radical recognition that society exists for people made in the image of God.

It all gives the impression of a garden planted out by a variety of hands, with no special directive but permission to use each vacant plot as seems best. The overall result may not be impressive, but on the law of averages there is likely to be some triumph. In this case it is brought by Philip Cliff whose survey and discussion of twentieth century Sunday School and Family Church carries the perceptive authority that only he could bring. Transplant it to within sight of the French windows, and gaze on it often.

Perhaps we must now learn to say that the child is not only father of the man but also mother of the woman. Certainly Women's Lib currently ruffles the Church. Sexism has become as emotive a word as racism. Right-thinking men hasten to do penance for the sins of their past. The air is filled with appeal to high and self-evident principles. Slogans tend to do duty for a more probing and perchance more agonising re-assessment. Into this volatile miasma an American Roman Catholic enquiry,<sup>3</sup> now available in this country, marches with measured tread.

It is sub-titled "An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences". Thereby it is made clear that a double probe is being operated. Scripture must be intensively tested so that the details of its stance may be revealed. Soundings must also be taken in psychology and sociology so that the stubborn givenness of the contours of our humanity may be unveiled. Scripture rules. From its directives there is no valid appeal. Yet a certain confirmatory undergirding is recognisable when we find that not only the centuries-old traditions of the Church but also the clear findings of the contemporary social sciences interlock

with the biblical witness to produce an almost exact fit. Once again modernity is found to speak with a forked tongue.

Put thus baldly, it is easy to judge the conclusion as yet another example of male chauvinism mixed with purblind conservatism and topped with fundamentalist cream. Yet it may be wisdom to put righteous indignation into temporary suspense and allow a little rigour into an area not renowned for careful delineation or incisive thinking. If we plant one foot firmly in scripture and the other firmly in the social sciences, we may find the view an intriguing one.

As to scripture, the popular wisdom goes something like this. The rôt set into Judaism after the Exile and steadily distorted the attitude to women down the years. Jesus opened the windows and initiated a transformation. Paul, having glimpsed the vision ("neither male nor female... all one in Christ Jesus"), quickly recoiled and slammed the windows again at Corinth. The Pastoral Epistles put women in their place. Subsequent church leaders battened down any hatches that showed the slightest signs of quivering.

As to society, a similar tale unfolds. Judaism and Christianity were born amid patriarchal cultures. A woman's place was in the home, her function - to produce heirs, preferably male. Only with the Enlightenment did there gradually come the recognition of the innate equality of the sexes. But, as with all depressed classes, emancipation was slow and bitterly resisted. Only in the twentieth century has there blossomed in western civilisation the precious bloom of female self-fulfilment.

Stephen Clark, of course, tells a different story on both fronts. With careful exegetical investigation of the New Testament material against its Old Testament background he uncovers constancy of attitude and harmony of conclusion. Inevitably, we hear a good deal about subordination. Similarly, a wide-ranging examination of the fruits of investigation by the social sciences underwrites a substantial part of the inherited wisdom of the ages and suggests that modern technological society threatens to distort the man/woman relationship to the point of disaster.

The paramount strength of this study does not lie in its debatable conclusions. Its prescriptions for the present and the future perhaps constitute its weakest point. It is the careful displaying of the variegated evidence and its fruitful interpretation that impress. Clark may doggedly shield scripture from the substantial darts of cultural relativity, but he cannot be accused of interpretatively applying scripture in that simplistic fashion which so often marks today's radicals as it did yesterday's fundamentalists. He is also alert enough to distinguish social "structure" from social "expression" and not blithely lump them together as either culturally fleeting or scripturally eternal. And he has grasped the controlling fact that when society moves from a relational to a functional

model you cannot translate "principles" from one to the other as though nothing of moment had happened.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the current ecclesiastical hang-up over women priests and ministers is peripheral to this book's agenda. I am however provoked to comment that the argument at this point will remain barren and unreal until the embattled contestants wake up to the fact that half the time they are discussing, under a common verbal label, realities that are probably incommensurate with one another and doubtfully interchangeable with anything in scripture. Meanwhile, in a time when role confusion among the sexes is perceptibly fraying humanity, we can be grateful for someone who at last asks the right questions.

Personality disorders cannot really be convicted of sex discrimination. They touch our common humanity; and with such force that fresh insights are always welcome. Since the launching of the Clinical Theology movement in 1961 and the appearance in 1966 of that extraordinarily forbidding work *Clinical Theology*, the name of Frank Lake has become widely known in the field of pastoral counselling. Now he returns to the fray in a mercifully slimmer volume.<sup>4</sup> It is a confessedly disorganised set of studies. It wanders over a wide field. It will disappoint those who prize coherence. What redeems it is the down to earth sanity of its author and his singleminded capacity for pressing to the limits a fruitful conviction.

When do things start to go wrong for the human psyche? The tendency has been to push the critical point further and further back in the years of infancy. Dr Lake, on this issue, decisively trumps all conceivable Freudian aces. The really critical period is the nine months between conception and birth and, in particular, the first dozen weeks in the womb. All the major personality disorders root back to this point. Clinical work provides the evidence. Healing begins as access is facilitated to primal experience and basic foetal feelings. Memory is there. It has only to be reached.

In many respects, of course, the diagnosis is frightening, particularly for the caring mother. It is her emotional pain, distress, anxiety, anger, frustration that invade the foetus and trigger the hurt. Not that horrifying implications are an excuse for disregarding evidence; and the broad contours of Dr Lake's intra-uterine map are neither wholly new nor obviously out of harmony with a good deal of contemporary understanding. When he presses on to draw straight lines from his controlling conviction to issues of violence, homosexuality, infatuation, we are wise to listen with openness.

Yet just here the complexities remain, and an uneasy feeling of being short-changed begins to emerge. Violence of recent years has reached new levels in society, we are told. Agreed. Behind this situation lies foetal disruption, it is suggested. Plausible. But why is this particular period marked by an upsurge? Dr Lake sees the problem but is unwontedly hesitant in

his answering. More expectant mothers quickly returning to employment? More forceps deliveries? Or is it rather that a single key is being credited with turning in too many locks?

Lake is insistent that the ministry of personality healing should not be jealously confined to professionals. The emphasis is a fair and necessary one. Yet his own positive but critical reactions to "Renewal" groups within the contemporary Church should serve to point up the corresponding danger of the immature and the ill-informed playing with fire. It is arguable that the imprecision of so much of the current use of the term "counselling" has unhelpfully fostered the idea that it is virtually a synonym for effective pastoral care and, as such, the hub of ministerial operation. That way lies danger. It is above all *self*-knowledge that the pastor needs. In so far as the scattered insights provided in this book assist the reader towards Christian maturity it can and should be widely if discriminately welcomed.

How then should the mature live and act? "Lecture Fragments" is the descriptive qualification given to a tantalisingly incomplete offering of the Barthian ethics of reconciliation.<sup>5</sup> While it is true that a broad understanding of the plan, perspective and presuppositions of the Church Dogmatics will add immeasurably to the appreciation of these 300 pages, it is even more important to root them in their own immediate context. In intention, Vol. IV, Part 4 would have contained four distinguishable sections. First, a general presentation of ethics as implicate of the doctrine of reconciliation. Secondly, a discussion of baptism as foundation of Christian life. Thirdly, an exposition of the Lord's Prayer as guide to life under the command of God the Reconciler. Fourthly, a presentation of the Lord's Supper as renewal of Christian life. The second section was made available to us in 1969. The present work contains the first section and initial parts of the third.

The collecting of Barthian memorabilia is currently a thriving continental industry; and over it some will enthuse. In terms of significance, however, it may be permissible to draw a firm distinction between the barrow-load of dogmatics and the baskets of occasional fragments. From the first, a multitude may be fed. As to the second, even the Gospel writers were not quite sure what to do with them. The point is that the material before us, fragmentary or no, belongs unmistakably within the barrow.

So is this the ethical guidance our confused generation requires? It all depends on where you stand. In his ranking presentation and assessment of Barthian ethics published a decade ago, R. E. Willis ventured kindly questions as to the adequacy of the significance granted to the complex givenness of the historical context of living and as to the clarity of moral judgment about empirical realisations of the divine command. Yes, indeed. The impatient reader will wait a long time for this theological Concorde to emerge from the stratosphere and connect with the specifics of the landing strip,

and even then may wonder a little at being confronted with fundamental human "disorder" in the shape of feminine fashions, masculine beards, and neutral traffic jams. Small comfort that the "church presumptuous" is seen as extending not only to the more stately denominations on the right wing "but also on the left wing, even down to the Baptists, though only on the margin".

But wait a moment! If everything begins and ends with the determinative encounter between God and man, then any suspicion of legalistic or casuistic ethics will be ruled out no less firmly than will timeless moral truths or general ethical principles. What is left is directive guidelines which attest God's constant yet ever new Word to man. To say reconciliation is to say covenant of grace. To say covenant of grace is to say Jesus Christ. To say Jesus Christ is to be pointed to that material centre which not only reacts backwards to creation and forwards to redemption but which also moulds the command of God and the obedience of man in and for freedom. And, for Barth, the basic meaning of every divine command and therefore of every obedient response is the expectant "invocation" of God in gratitude, in praise, and supremely in petition.

That is why the ethics of reconciliation proceeds via the exposition of the Lord's Prayer - though the "fragment" gets no further than "Thy Kingdom come". It gives us enough for the plotting of the essential directions that the discussion will take. From one point of view, the two words that sum up the crucial perspectives are "correspondence" and "modesty". God acts in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Man's real yet reflexive task is always to correspond to and reflect in human fashion the divine deed and determination. The mode of that correspondence is modesty precisely because it is reflexive not initiating. So the qualifiers may and must be put against stridency in evangelism, imperialism in prophetic witness, doing injury to the worldliness of the world by being either "monk" or "crusader", and a host of other current enthusiasms.

In the deepest sense this is devotional literature. It is to do with the formation of the "man in Christ", set within the context of all Christ's People, all humanity and all the world, set more profoundly still within the gracious command of the Father and the faithful obedience of the Son; set between the baptism from which he comes and the Supper towards which he journeys, set more profoundly still between the coming of the Christ from which he lives and the coming of the Lord towards which he joyfully and expectantly hastens.

... towards which he joyfully and expectantly hastens. Surely a fitting epitaph for the old man of Basel. This is the last instalment of the Barthian heritage. There never was "The Doctrine of Redemption". The day of definitive assessment is not yet. Meantime, the sword is sheathed. And yet we must believe he wields it still. No tears for him, that happy warrior. Only a roll on the drums, a clutch of Te Deums, and a flurry of Hallelujahs!

## NOTES

- 1 *Understanding Christian Nurture*. British Council of Churches. £3. 1981.
- 2 *Christianity, Society & Education* ed. J. Ferguson, S.P.C.K., pa. £5.95. 1981.
- 3 *Man and Woman in Christ* by S. B. Clark. T. & T. Clark. £7.95. 1981.
- 4 *Tight Corners in Pastoral Counselling* by Frank Lake. D.L.T. £4.95. 1981.
- 5 *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics Vol.IV, Part 4* by Karl Barth. T. & T. Clark. £7.95. 1981.

NEVILLE CLARK

## REVIEWS

*Philip Doddridge: Nonconformity and Northampton* edited by R. L. Greenall. Department of Adult Education, University of Leicester. 1981. pp iv, 90. £1.50 (incl. postage).

These five lectures, given to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the commencement of Philip Doddridge's pastorate at Castle Hill Independent Church, Northampton, in 1730, present a lively portrait of this influential dissenting minister and teacher, thus adding to the volume of essays published in 1951 by Dr G. F. Nuttall. It is he who from the wealth of his non-published researches contributes the article "Philip Doddridge and his Letters". "Doddridge writes so well, so sensibly, elegantly, vividly and sympathetically that one feels no surprise at his gaining and holding a great number of correspondents from many walks of life and representing a variety of interests".

Fortunately, Dr Ernest Payne had written his lecture "The Hymns of Philip Doddridge" before he died, and this valuable survey was read by Dr Barrie White. It sets in context a much wider range of hymns than is available in current hymn books.

Victor Hatley's contribution, "A Local Dimension", reveals Doddridge's involvement in Northampton politics, while Professor Alan Everitt demonstrates him as a herald or harbinger of the evangelical revival which flowered after his death. Doddridge's sensibility in religion and genuine piety was "destined to unlock new reservoirs of human energy". "If the Church still acknowledges that humanity and compassion are as much a part of the divine message as righteousness, enthusiasm and truth, it perhaps owes more to Philip Doddridge than it knows".

Dr Stephen Mayor sets the eighteenth century minister in the context of the history of Congregationalism. Firm as were his convictions as a dissenter he was certainly no bigoted denominationalist. His liberal outlook, his wide influence through his academy, his friendship with Anglicans all add up to the presentation through these lectures of a truly great man and choice spirit.

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