

RECENT TRENDS IN REFORMATION STUDIES

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DURING 1960 interest in Reformation studies continued to grow. A number of volumes appeared to commemorate the fourth centenary of the Scottish Reformation, including Dr. Burleigh's authoritative survey of Scottish Church history.¹ Evangelicals can only regret that the Church of England did not join with their fellow Reformed Church in the rejoicing. Unfortunately the comments made by Dr. A. M. Ramsey at the time only served to underline the lack of sympathetic and historical understanding of the great sixteenth-century movements current among the Anglican hierarchy. Recent Reformation publications have included works by authors of all schools of thought. At one end, Archibald Robertson's *The Reformation* concludes, 'Scientific advance, stimulated by capitalist pro-

duction and at the same time necessary to its development, has rendered both the Catholic and the Reformed theologies obsolete'. After this striking conclusion, which terminates his attempt to stuff the whole Reformation into a Marxist straightjacket, he rightly pinpoints the real issue at the Reformation as the interpretation of Scripture, and argues that the battle today has shifted from this to 'the interpretation of nature and human institutions'.² If Luther, Cranmer and Calvin were not casting biblical light on man's plight and make-up, and the very nature and function of Mediaeval institutions, we do not exactly know what they were doing! At the other extreme comes a translation of a further work by the ex-Lutheran Roman Catholic priest Louis Bouyer. Apart from the *imprimatur*, nobody could mistake Bouyer's standpoint. In *Erasmus and the Humanist Experiment*, he seeks to free Erasmus from the nineteenth-century Liberal coat of paint the French scholar A. Renaudet gave him. Instead Bouyer wants him to be an orthodox Roman, but he has to admit that the Renaissance Catholics could not penetrate the humanist spirit of enquiry.³ The ultimate significance of this admission is seen in history though not in Bouyer in the fact that so many of the great Reformers moved through a humanism attached to the Roman church into Protestantism. Such men were Melancthon, Calvin, Peter Martyr, etc. On the Roman side the few enlightened prelates like Cajetan who sought to reform Rome from within found it impossible, and were crushed by the Tridentine sledgehammer.

Two further Roman works have recently appeared. The thousand pages of Joseph Lecler on *Tolerance and the Reformation* traces the idea of tolerance from Old Testament times through the Reformation and beyond. This is a massive undertaking, and represents the author's life work. Lecler seems to feel that tolerance in religion in the sixteenth century only arose where Protestants became a relatively large body. Thus he is able to bypass Italy, from which Peter Martyr had to flee in terror of his life, and Spain where the ruthless cruelty of the Inquisition almost defies description. Yet these two volumes are important for their erudition and thorough documentation. Lecler is also refreshingly free from the idea that the Reformers overthrew mediaeval authoritarianism to replace it by religious freedom. The tendencies that were at work for tolerance came from the outskirts of the Reformation, from the various sects, and occasionally from politicians. Even Sebastian Castellio, who is often made out to be the great pioneer of tolerance and free thought, considered it wrong for anyone to be allowed to be an atheist. The fact is, though we may regret it from our twentieth-century standpoint, that complete freedom of conscience, a necessary precursor to any real doctrine of toleration, simply was not considered during the crisis years of the Reformation.

Another Jesuit, Francis Clark, has examined the Eucharistic controversies of this period.⁴ One reason for the importance of this book is the author's correct stress on the vast gulf that separates Protestants and Romans on the vital issues. Also he is critical of certain Anglo-Catholic attempts to explain this difference away. This is a timely work in view of the way certain influential voices are following up the Archbishop's visit to Rome.

We shall not attempt here to cover the volumes on the Scottish Reformation, nor to explore Luther scholarship, which is still largely confined to the Continent and Scandinavia.⁵

Another large work to appear was the second volume in the new *Cambridge Modern History* series. On the religious issues this is, in the opinion of the present writer, a doubtful advance on its predecessor. This is not the fault of the contributors so much as the editor, who seems to have a strangely unbalanced sense of historical proportions and importance. Calvin and his work at Geneva are confined to seven pages, admirably though Professor Rupp uses them. But Agriculture gets twenty-eight pages, and Antwerp twenty. The editor reveals his own predilections when he commits himself to the precarious and questionable judgment that 'the real mainspring of the [English] Reformation was political'. This work has been exhaustively and deservedly criticized for its anti-religious bias in the *JTS* by Basil Hall, and readers are referred to that article.⁶

Two lectures by Professor Gordon Rupp are published under the title *Protestant Catholicity*, and their value far outweighs the rather slight appearance of the book. In the Cadoux lecture Dr. Rupp shows that Refor-

mation studies are an important field of historical and theological research in their own right, and also that today they can open up ways to new assessments. In the Scott Lidgett lecture he demonstrates the latter point by applying some lessons of the sixteenth century to ecumenical problems. (He is able to debunk some of Dr. Mascall's misconceptions about the Reformation, as he goes along.) There was a remarkable degree of doctrinal harmony between the great Reformers. Indeed it is not too much to say they never thought of a Lutheran church, a Calvinist, or an Anglican one. These conceptions grew up later, but Luther, Calvin and Cranmer — and Knox too — would have conceived of themselves as re-establishing under God a church based on the forgotten truths of the Bible and the Fathers, which had become so immersed under mediaeval Romanism. The Roman church was in fact no church at all, since it failed the key test on both points — the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments (*cf.* Article XIX). Questions of the indispensability of episcopacy were far from any Reformer's mind.

On the Continent Calvin would not have taken any objection to bishops provided they were not of the Roman sort,⁷ but with Beza a definite hardening sets in, and Calvin's successor is a convinced Presbyterian as far as church order goes. The same hardening process may be traced in England. So far was Cranmer from countenancing a rigid view of episcopacy (to the discomfort of a certain type of Anglican!) that on one occasion he even suggested the laity could ordain ministers, or under certain circumstances a ruler could decree that selected persons should take on the ministerial tasks and functions.⁸ It is only when extreme Puritans like Cartwright claim divine sanction for Presbyterian forms of church government, and this sets off a reaction, that Anglicans claim the same for their episcopal polity. Even when this happens, it is significant (for modern discussions) that Anglican divines right on into the next century still refuse to let this unchurch their Reformed sister churches in Scotland or on the Continent.

The concern to preserve unity among the Reformers can be further seen in Calvin's grave disturbance when the North German Lutherans refuse to receive as brethren John à Lasco and his congregation fleeing from persecution. Again Calvin is most upset at the vitriolic attacks of the Lutheran Joachim Westphal of Hamburg on the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Westphal's attacks were more abuse than theology, but that such a thing should have happened cut deep into Calvin's heart. Cranmer's expressed willingness to 'cross ten seas' to confer on church unity is yet another example of the concern for agreement.

A half-forgotten Reformation giant who is only just beginning to emerge from the shadows is Martin Bucer, the Strasbourg Reformer. A schoolboy might remember him for the strange distinction of having been buried three times over, twice by Protestants and once by Romans, with a symbolic burning added in the middle for good measure. But Bucer was a key figure in more serious ways. First, in the 1520s and 1530s it was Bucer whose translation work kept the German tracts of Luther flowing westwards into French-speaking territory. Second, he was a gentle and peaceloving man — too much so when it led him into timidity and compromise — but he was able to win back a number of Anabaptists, and also to preserve the unity of Protestantism when sacramental controversies were tending to flare up with certain Lutherans. Third, as Calvin himself recognizes in his Preface to Romans, it was Bucer from whom he learnt a great deal. Bucer befriended him during his three years of exile until the Genevans had got into such chaos that they had to beg Calvin to return. The exact amount is disputed by scholars, but some influence is certain in those vital years when Calvin launched his series of commentaries and undertook the major revision of his *Institutio*.⁹ Fourth, there is the contribution of the Strasbourg Academy to post-Reformation education in Europe — and beyond. Whilst the school is usually associated with the name of its Rector Sturm, we ought not to dissociate Bucer from it. It was the model for Calvin's own Academy at Geneva, which rapidly became the leading university in Europe in its day.

Constantine Hopf (his name is now Hope) has found further evidence to support his thesis that Bucer's influence is to be found in the Prayer Book. His *JTS* article¹⁰ is one more piece of evidence in the overwhelming case that now exists for extremely close relationships between England and the

Continent during the Reformation period. The notion that the English Reformation proceeded along lines theologically different from the Continental is a bogey that can now be safely laid to rest.

Three small works have appeared on Calvin recently. All of them are translations of older works by A. M. Schmidt, Jean Cadier, and Emmanuel Stickelberger. The Cadier is probably the best of them, while the Stickelberger sets out with the intention of undoing the *odium theologicum* which the Roman Catholic scholar F. W. Kampschulte had thrown over Calvin's name in the latter part of the last century. The excellent series of new translations of Calvin's New Testament commentaries under the supervision of the Torrance brothers are, or should be, well known by now. Professor Rupp's Cadoux lecture stressed the contribution of Barthians to the revival of interest in Calvin. While this is true, we must not be misled into thinking Barthians have a monopoly of Calvin studies. The best theological work we have seen on the Genevan Reformer is the little known doctorate thesis of Professor E. A. Dowey, so far published only in America.¹¹ It is quite admirable, and grasps the Barthian nettle firmly, as well as exposing certain rationalizing trends in Warfield's understanding of Calvin. Dowey feels that too often the *duplex cognitio Domini* in Calvin's thought is overlooked, and that we must always think of God's double accommodation to man. First as a creature he is limited in his understanding; and then as a sinner since the fall, he has been radically incapacitated in his apprehension of Him. Dowey believes that this double accommodation of the Deity to man's need will explain the apparent divergences in Calvin's thought. We think he is right.

Little known in England, French scholarship, with its approach firmly rooted in history, has made an important contribution to Calvin studies. Emile Doumergue's labours still remain the classic on Calvin, and many of those who disagreed with him subsequently, have brushed aside rather than answered his evidence. On the historical side Doumergue is unsurpassed for sympathetic assessment and careful dissection of a vast mass of evidence. Two Strasbourg scholars, Francois Wendel and J. D. Benoit, have made notable contributions. The former, who has been instrumental in the rediscovery and republication of Bucer's works, has written the most recent general survey of Calvin. The latter's *Calvin Directeur d'Ames* has revealed, chiefly from his letters, the pastoral heart of the great Genevan. These Strasbourg Reformation scholars are in the great line of French Reformation scholarship — Lefranc, Lecoultre, Pannier, etc. The advantage of this group over against the Germans is that they have their historical bearing about them, and do not grab ideas from Barth and distort the balance of Calvin by exalting these ideas to a place Calvin never gave them. This is specially true of studies in Calvin's Christology. We may hope that Calvin studies will take a further step forward when we get the long promised new translation of the *Institutio*, which is said to be almost ready (S.C.M. *Library of Christian Classics*).

Even a brief survey of Reformation studies would not be complete without some mention of the Anabaptists. American scholars have been much interested in this field, but little is in print this side of the Atlantic, and so we shall concentrate on one of the main problems. Were the Anabaptists part of the Reformation or not? A prior and perhaps more difficult question is, who were the Anabaptists? Here we shall have to be content to state that they were an extremely amorphous group embracing free thinkers, anarchists, apocalyptic revolutionaries, pacifists, pietists, mystics descended from the Brethren of the Common Life, academically minded humanists with an interest in *Philosophia Christi*, those who rejected infant baptism, anti-trinitarians and so on — almost *ad infinitum*! Some of them were undoubtedly fine Christian men and women with a deep piety and a desire to practise their faith quietly and in peace. Some of them were subversive with their tenet that the State was pagan *in toto* and should be avoided by Christians as far as possible. Some of them were godless creatures who did not like Rome, but could not abide the strict standards of the Reformers and the Bible. Others had been among the ranks of the Reformers but felt they had gone far enough, and that they themselves must rather adhere to a strictly 'gathered Church' doctrine.

Despite this bewildering variety which makes all general statements difficult and precarious, we may list certain points shared by most Anabaptists

but not by the Reformers. 1. Denial of infant baptism. 2. Denial that Christians should be magistrates. 3. The 'gathered Church' concept. 4. Exaltation of the 'Spirit' above the Bible whereas the Reformers refused to separate the two. This is a sort of anticipation of the Quaker inner light notion. 5. Rejection of oaths.

Although the Anabaptist Conrad Grebel confessed that Zwingli had 'led me into this thing', we must not be misled into thinking the similarities between Anabaptism and the Reformers were too close. Indeed, as we examine some of the evidence, we may feel that Anabaptism is more accurately viewed as right outside the main stream of the Reformation. Roland Bainton has called it the 'left-wing' of the Reformation, and G. H. Williams 'the Radical Reformation'. Yet on such key doctrines as the Fall, Original Sin, Man and Justification, most Anabaptists' thought is at radical variance with that of the Reformation.

First, the Fall. The classic Reformation statement of this doctrine is to be found in Luther's reply to Erasmus in 1525, *The Bondage of the Will*. There total depravity is stated without ambiguity, and free will denied. On the other hand, among Anabaptists Sebastian Franck held, 'they hold freewill is self-evident', and Balthasar Hubmaier in 1527 wrote two tracts upholding free will. He was concerned to show that men freely accepted or rejected God's offer of salvation. Hans Denck and Menno Simons both held the same view. The stress in Anabaptist thought seems to be that of commitment to discipleship, and so also on the free choice of the potential disciple. Second, Original Sin. The phrase itself is rarely used, and we find Anabaptists disagreeing amongst themselves on this issue. Some wish to assert that children have no sin and are pure in heart. But others aver that infants are born in sin. This second group tends to distinguish between the spiritual and physical deaths which result from the Fall. After Christ's coming into the world, they say, there has been a radical change and children are free from the spiritual curse. Third, the doctrine of man. The upshot of this is that all Anabaptists agree that adults have a tendency to sin, and their anthropology is dualistic. Man's will is impaired and yet he is free to decide about his salvation. This must not be confused with Luther's view — *simul justus et peccator*, which was applied *only* to Christians. Other Reformers agreed with Luther on this. Fourth, Justification. Here the Anabaptists emphatically affirm that they agree with the Reformers, but in fact their agreement was not as close as they appear to have thought. They were accustomed to complain of the ethical inadequacy of the Reformation teaching. Again the actual term 'justification' is infrequently used by them, and they wrote and spoke more of conversion and discipleship. Their stress is not so much on God's sovereign act of forgiveness but rather on the personal individual commitment to the life of faith. From this it is easy to see how a doctrine of believers' baptism followed. It is sometimes asserted that the main differences between the two groups was their doctrine of the church, but it might be more accurate to suggest that the difference lay further back. There was a deep cleavage in the different understanding of the extent of sin. Thus, for example, as H. J. Hillerbrand points out,¹² the difference between Zwingli and the Zurich Anabaptists was at root a difference over the nature of Justification and only as a *result* a difference in views of the Church. Because Anabaptists felt Reformation teaching on Justification was ethically inadequate, they placed emphasis more on the believer's imitation of Christ, his response and his conversion.

G. H. Williams has well summarized.¹³ 'Common to the whole Radical Reformation over against the Magisterial Reformation was a basic commonsense confidence in the reality of a free choice before the divine offer of salvation'; and again Williams points out the individualistic note in Anabaptist teaching when he speaks of 'a relaxation of the sins of solidarity of mankind in fallen Adam'. Bergfried has gone so far as to make Pelagianism a leading tenet of Anabaptism. This may be an overstatement, but it does at least show, ironically enough, certain common denominators between the Anabaptists and the Papists. In conclusion, we note that though Anabaptists strongly denounced the human traditions, the sacramental system and the sacerdotalism of the Roman Church, they were in some ways closer to it than to Reformation theology. Without doubt, certain Anabaptists were influenced by mediaeval mystical and pietist traditions,

and all of them were touched by the theological upheavals of the sixteenth century Reformation. Nevertheless, we may be more accurate to say with Hillerbrand that if they are to be regarded as within the Reformation family, they must be called the 'illegitimate child' of the Reformation.

The major Reformers themselves regarded Anabaptists as quite as dangerous as Papists. In July 1527 we find Zwingli writing against them. As early as 1530 at least, Calvin wrote a tract against their tenet, that the soul sleeps after death. In 1544 and 1545 he again attacked them. In his *Institutio* he compares them to the Donatists, and disowns their doctrine of the Church. He also criticizes their outlook on the magistracy. In England Bishop Hooper criticizes their Christology, and a little later at least three of Cranmer's original Forty-two Articles are aimed at them — those on magistrates, a Christian's goods, and oaths. In Germany, Luther had been in controversy with Münzer over Baptism, Faith and Scripture. Their separation from the Reformation seems to be an established fact. One of their own number, Sebastian Franck, could write in 1530, 'There are already in our times three distinct faiths which have a large following, the Lutheran, the Zwinglian and the Anabaptist'.¹⁴ This seems to speak for itself, for Calvin was in no doubt either.

Notes:

- ¹ J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland*. (O.U.P.) 1960.
- ² P. 219.
- ³ P. 218.
- ⁴ *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*. (Longmans.) 1961.
- ⁵ Dr. Skevington Wood has done an admirable survey of English works in the *THB* No. 3, 1957. In English most Luther scholarship comes from the industrious scholars of the Missouri Synod in the U.S.A.
- ⁶ *JTS*, 1960, part 2.
- ⁷ See T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, p. 99.
- ⁸ *Works*. Parker Society II, pp. 116f. and G. W. Bromiley, *Thomas Cranmer Theologian*, pp. 50-56.
- ⁹ T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, p. 100.
- ¹⁰ *JTS*, 1960, part 2.
- ¹¹ E. A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*. (Columbia.) 1952.
- ¹² *Church History*, 1960, p. 411.
- ¹³ *Church History*, 1958, pp. 151f.
- ¹⁴ *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. 2, New Series, p. 214.