

Comment

One of the charges brought recently against Edward Schillebeeckx OP by his roman tormentors and other critics was that, particularly in his book *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, he seemed to be denying the objectivity of Jesus' resurrection, offering instead that liberal version of the resurrection which 'de-mythologises' it to a symbolising of the emerging faith of the disciples in what Jesus stood for. In his *Interim Report*, (which is a reply to his critics and a clarification of some misunderstandings of his Christology), quite rightly Schillebeeckx rejects with some indignation that he should be accused of such a view: "Anyone who reads this into my work needs his eyes testing". Rather, he points out that in the *Jesus* book he was trying to "steer between the two reefs of empiricism and fideism".

By 'fideism', as far as the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, he means concentrating on the objectivity of the resurrection in such a way as to neutralise it so that it becomes like any other mere 'fact' in the world, and in the process unhinges it from the individual's experience of faith. One thinks here of the way the resurrection of Jesus seemed to be part of Apologetics (to prove his divinity) rather than the heart of the Good News. By 'fideism' he means that reduction of Jesus' resurrection to a mere symbol of Jesus' disciples' renewal of faith in him, so that despite his crucifixion and death 'his cause lives on'.

Schillebeeckx rejects both positions by, in a sense, combining them, so that his interpretation of the Gospel resurrection narratives is that the knowledge of the reality 'Jesus is risen' is mediated to the disciples in their experience of personal renewal and conversion to Jesus; a personal renewal and conversion to Jesus which is none other than the presence of the risen and exalted Jesus with them. Without the resurrection of Jesus there is no possibility of experiencing personal renewal and conversion to him, (precisely because renewal *is* the *gift* of himself, his Spirit); without the *gift*

of his renewing Spirit there is no possibility of knowing of his resurrection. The knowing is part of the experience of being renewed. The reality of Jesus's resurrection is, then, much more than a cold 'fact', but is also the abiding presence of the risen Jesus, through his Spirit, in his community, the Church. "In and through the experience of this renewed presence among them, the disciples learnt that Jesus is risen. Resurrection is therefore both the sending of the Spirit and the gathering together of the scattered disciples in terms of the formation of a particular church, a brotherhood. Coming from the Father, Jesus is a living presence among his followers in a new way." (*Interim Report* p 79)

The attraction of this interpretation for Christian renewal is enormous. Renewal and deepening of our faith in Jesus' resurrection at Easter is so much more than acknowledging it as an apologetic fact. The celebration of Easter climaxes with the feast of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and invites us to make ourselves available for the gift of his forgiving and liberating and renewing presence within us. It also involves us as a community and as individuals in making ourselves available to become *bearers* of the gift of his forgiving and liberating presence to the world; to be, in fact, the sacrament of Christ. The Christian movement then stops being a morality but Good News, the pledge of the abiding presence of God's love in Christ for mankind; sharing and making present in our history his compassion for the weak and the sick, his forgiveness for sinners, his love for the poor and despised. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

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