

BAPTISM IN THE THOUGHT OF ST PAUL, A study in Pauline theology by Rudolf Schnackenburg, translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray; *Basil Blackwell, 35s.*

It is a sign of the times that a book on baptism by a German Catholic exegete should be translated by a prominent English theologian. Dr Beasley-Murray, the principal of Spurgeon's College London, is well known for his writings on Eschatology. In 1962 he published *Baptism in the New Testament* which despite its denominational stand against infant baptism is probably the finest study of the whole subject yet to appear. Here he praises the work of Rudolf Schnackenburg on several occasions. In a preface to his translation, while disclaiming any leanings to the Roman Catholic interpretation of baptism he remarks: 'Inevitably I myself would find it necessary constantly to express myself differently from the author. Yet my first impression on reading this book remains, that no treatment known to me of Paul's teaching on baptism is so profound as that contained within these pages'.

Rudolf Schnackenburg's book was written in the years 1946-7 and published in 1950. The controversy over the 'Mystery Theology' of Dom Odo Casel was still raging. Schnackenburg devoted much space to the interpretation of Romans 6: 3-11 and quite rejects the Caselian thesis. In the controversy which ensued both sides showed a willingness to modify their positions. In this new edition of his work for English readers he tells us that he has learnt much from the rich literature that has appeared on the subject in the last fifteen years, and corrected many of his views.

It is divided into equal halves, one exegetical and the other theological. The first contains a detailed examination of all the Pauline texts which touch on baptism. First he takes those texts which envisage it as a bath either of purification (I Cor 4: 11; Eph 5: 8), or of regeneration (Tit 3: 5). Secondly he takes those which speak of baptizing in the name of Christ (I Cor 1: 13), into Christ (Rom 6: 3; Gal 3: 27) and of incorporation into the body of Christ (I Cor 12: 13). Thirdly he deals at length with the texts that describe the death, burial and resurrection

of the baptized with Christ, particularly Rom 6: 1-11. Finally he discusses some uncertain and derived baptismal texts, among them those which speak of the gift of the Spirit in which he does not find any reference to a sacrament of confirmation.

The results of the exegetical examination are exploited and co-ordinated in the following theological section. This has three chapters. The first treats of the salvation-event at baptism in general. Christ's act of salvation in his death, burial and resurrection is the foundation of the salvation-event in baptism through which the individual appropriates the salvation of Christ. There is no opposition between faith and sacrament; the two are inseparable. They belong together but at all times they are significant in themselves. 'Baptism without faith in Christ is unimaginable for the thoughts of the primitive Church', but 'baptism contains an inner salvation-event to which the outward confession is only a precondition' (p. 126). As to the 'sacramental' character of baptism, it is the author's view that St Paul valued the external sign element in baptism as it had been handed down; in a certain measure he sought to extend the traditional symbolic meaning and to deepen it, he threw into relief new figurative interpretations of the rite; but he is no mystagogue seeking a meaning for every gesture. He exercises reserve with regard to liturgical language of symbols and is more strongly motivated by his central theological conceptions than by the liturgical rite.

In a second chapter the dying and rising with Christ in baptism is given detailed treatment. He rejects the religious-historical exposition, since between the teaching of Paul and the pagan ideas of the mystery cults the similarities are so few and the differences so great; he criticizes the quasi-mystery teaching of Casel, and finds the hypothesis of the contemporaneity of the Christian with Christ mistaken. 'The basic idea of the sacramental dying and rising with Christ depends on a conception, peculiar to Paul yet explicable on the basis of Jewish presuppositions,

that Christ represented us as the second Adam and as our Representative took death on himself and attained to resurrection for our sakes. When we join ourselves in faith to the new Founder of the race and in baptism become members of the 'body of Christ', we gain a share in his death and resurrection and step with him from death to life. The event of grace and sacrament then becomes a task for moral effort on our part (death for sins, life for God) and a rule of our entire Christian existence' (p. 161-2). This statement forms the kernel of the whole book. As an interpretation it has the great advantage of simplicity. Many English exegetes have come to similar conclusions but many Catholic scholars on the Continent reject it. Perhaps the new modifications and the clearer exposition which the author has given it

in this second edition will command wider acceptance.

After an interesting excursus on the origin of the formula 'with Christ', the third chapter follows out the consequences from this baptismal doctrine for Paul's whole theology, for what is sometimes called his mysticism, for the relation of sacrament to ethics and for the salvation history and eschatology which characterizes the whole.

Dr Beasley-Murray deserves our gratitude for the fine workmanship of this translation. It is as light and readable as a technical work of exegetical and theological analysis can be. The book is furnished with good indices, six pages of bibliography and the whole is well printed and pleasing to handle.

*Paulinus Milner, O.P.*

THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH by Hans von Campenhausen; *S.C.M. (Studies in Historical Theology, 2), 12s. 6d.*

THE MEANING OF SANCTORUM COMMUNIO by Stephen Benko; *S.C.M. (Studies in Historical Theology, 3), 16s.*

'It cannot be disputed', writes Professor von Campenhausen, 'that the early Church, at any rate during its first few centuries, knew no real Marian doctrine, that is, no thematic theological concern with Mary's person and her significance in the scheme of salvation'. Unfortunately the few, sparse features of primitive belief about Mary in this case, about her virginity – have been overthrown by the enthusiastic but dubious accretions of later speculation. 'The aim of the present work is to open up a path through this scholastic wilderness, the so-called 'Mariology' of the early Church'.

The author first observes that the oldest traditions in the New Testament know nothing of the 'legend of Jesus' virgin-birth'. Paul nowhere mentions it nor do any of the later authors writing under his name. It is not to be found in the early synoptic material, nor in the central corpus of John's gospel. There is perhaps an allusion to it in Jn 1, 12-13 (strangely enough it is not pointed out that John's prologue is probably posterior to his gospel). But the only

two portions of Scripture which clearly propose the virgin birth are quite late: the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Each account has its distinct approach. Matthew's purpose is apologetic: the virgin birth is one more instance of Jesus' fulfilment of the prophecies. Luke's approach is more dogmatic: the intervention of the Spirit suggests the very mystery of Jesus' identity. These two views are traced through the early Fathers. Yet until the third century all tend to agree in drawing only Christological significance from the virgin birth: there is no question of extolling Mary as a virgin, only of glorifying the miraculous origins of Christ.

It is with the later growth of asceticism in the East that writers there begin to appreciate a moral value in virginity. As sexual abstinence comes to be a hallmark of virtue, Mary's virginity begins to draw attention and praise to herself. It is no longer so important that Jesus was specially conceived, as that he had an inviolate mother. And as virginity becomes more and more prized, divines conclude that Mary's virginity