

EDITORIAL

THE SCOTTISH JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY is born of the conviction that theology is a task urgent upon the whole Church. Few people to-day would pretend that the Church is seriously engaged upon this task. It is to be feared that many even of the ministry would be profoundly surprised by the suggestion that their business should be with theology at all, that their training in divinity did not give them all the theology they were likely to need, and that theology was not rightly left to the professors, savants, and theorists, who might be accorded a hearing when what they said happened to be of general interest.

Few conceptions could have a more disastrously weakening effect upon the work and witness of the Church, of which all are called to be members, and in which some are specially called to be servants and ministers. The Church to-day is charged with being irrelevant to life by those who have ceased to think its message either important or interesting. It is charged with irresolution by others who in differing degrees love and honour it, and deplore its ineffectiveness. There can be little doubt that these charges owe what validity they possess to an underlying uncertainty in the Church of what the message of the Gospel actually is, and how it should be expressed for this day and generation.

It is equally true that this fundamental uncertainty is not removed but only concealed by the endeavour to come to terms with other disciplines and systems of thought, whether the terms arranged be those of loan, concession, compromise, accommodation or surrender. Within their own limits and limitations, other disciplines are sure of themselves; but theirs is not a certainty that can be borrowed by Christians, and substituted for inherent certainty in matters of faith.

It is therefore of supreme importance that the Church should call in its vagrant thoughts and make sure of its own convictions. To do this imposes upon the Church a task which is theological. Theology is essentially the completion of the movement of faith in the sphere of thought—a completion which is necessary, since

our service of God is not with hand and heart alone, but also with mind; and which is imperative, since only so can the mind of Christ receive clear articulation in thought and word.

This theological task is in no sense an end in itself; and if it is understood as a matter of "truth for truth's sake," it is misunderstood. Manifestly the Church must discipline and direct not only its thought but its action, so that in both understanding and obedience it may grow into conformity with Christ. It cannot otherwise be in any real sense the "body of Christ." It is because Christ lives in the faith and life of the Church that theology becomes the unfolding of the truth in its thought and life, and is, at the same time, that strenuous act of understanding and obedience which constitutes the Church's service of God. Hence theology cannot properly be the pursuit of the dilettante or the recluse or the scientific specialist; it can be practised only by the active members of a living Church, for its growth in grace and knowledge, for the edification of its faith, and for the better proclamation of that faith in face of a world which has long since learned to ignore at its convenience any serious matters which are not resolutely and comprehensibly presented to it.

The Church is both *ecclesia audiens* and *ecclesia docens*, and the Word of God is the object of both activities. The Church is *docens* in that it proclaims the Gospel, and *audiens* in that nothing may be proclaimed which has not first been heard. If this is so, we may never be afraid or ashamed of the words *reformation* and *dogma*. A Church that really listens to the Word of God has already accepted in principle the possibility and need of reformation, and in fact continually exposes itself to the Word of God in order that its life may be perpetually brought under review and judgment, and at the same time receive correction and renewal. Thus theology takes on the character of a humble enquiry whether that by and for which the Church lives is really that by and for which God would have His Church live.

Submitting thus to the action of the Word of God upon its inner life, the Church discovers what must be said to the outer world. Though this may be distinguishable from what is said to the Church itself, it is not different from it, and must be grounded wholly upon it. The Church engages in the discipline of dogmatics in order to make sure that what is said in proclamation has its origin and basis in the Gospel. The word "dogma"

is for many distasteful. Yet it would be impossible to deny that many who turn away from Christian dogma with distaste are soon observed to be flirting with dogma of another complexion, and quickly fall victims to the concealed influence of a *Weltanschauung* incompatible with Christianity. Men cannot do without dogma, and they revolt from one, only to fall into the arms of another. When the inherent antipathy of the natural man to the Gospel and its claims has been taken into account, the remaining distaste to Christian dogma is seen to be less antipathy to dogma as such, than the entirely understandable disinclination to submit to formulations of Christianity which are antiquated, or to be persuaded by a monotonous persistence that will not take the trouble to translate the unchanging truth of Christianity into current forms and language. This can be accomplished only by having constant recourse to the living Word. It is in listening here that the Church will be able to mint out of broken human language and antiquated categories the new coinage which may convey more effectively to a needy world the unspeakable riches of Christ.

Such a theological task is the concern of no single class or clique within the Church. It is the duty neither of the professoriate of Divinity Halls alone, nor of any group of experts. It is the concern of the whole Church. The response appropriate to this concern is given as the whole Church grapples seriously with the theological task of interpreting the Gospel message, and of hammering out the terms for its proclamation and application to men of to-day. Hence exemption can be granted to no section of the Church, just as exclusive responsibility may be laid on none, though of course there will be distinction of function among the different sections. Elders and church-members, preachers and professors, all have parts to play in the high but also humble theological task of rediscovery and of proclamation. As it is achieved, the Church will be able to make known with greater clarity, conviction and unanimity, the things that belong to our peace.

It is clear that open and frank discussion on the part of the Church is necessary for the achievement of this end. What is needed is a deeply serious engagement with the issues of the day, and a real wrestling with them, and a refusal to let them go until we are granted blessing. There is need, therefore, for some

venue where theological discussion can take place. It is the hope of those responsible for its appearance, that the JOURNAL may provide both a place for such discussion and a stimulus to it. It need hardly be said that no theological position is represented exclusively by the sponsors of this project, and that their one desire is that where difference of opinion exists truth may prevail.

Primarily the JOURNAL is intended to be an organ through which the ministers and members of the Church of Scotland may bring the life, thought and work of their Church to the test of Word and Spirit. Hence the exegesis of Holy Scripture and the presentation of Biblical theology must clearly occupy a central place. Along with these must go the discussion of the unfolding of the truth in the historical Church, that is of dogma. Because this is a catholic activity, contributions will be welcomed from members of every branch of the Holy Catholic Church, and invitation is hereby extended to all who care to join in this humble waiting upon the Word of God.

The intention is that the JOURNAL should carry articles of three distinguishable types: Dogmatic Theology, Biblical Theology, and Applied Theology. It is evident that each section is related to the others, and that a Church Theology can afford to neglect none. For while dogmatic theology is the extension of Biblical theology under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, both find completion in the life of the Church; for all the practical problems of the Church involve theological issues.

Nothing but good can come from fruitful debate concerning the central tenets of the faith. For the promotion of such discussion the JOURNAL is designed, and to the service of Him Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life humbly dedicated.

THE EDITORS