

'How can you believe in Jesus Christ and let things stay as they are?' So, a woman in Costa Rica. As part of a World Council of Churches project, Ian Fraser has been pursuing this question round places, mostly in the 'third world', where Christians *are* trying to change things. He has been listening to peasants who have taken common responsibility for their land, to shanty town dwellers fighting for drainage, land rights and a popular assembly, to hard pressed workers sharing their food with people sacked for starting a trade union.

The significance of these groups is that they have sprung up 'from below'. They are coming alive by their own efforts, seeking their rights and their own way of life. While they struggle they have discovered that Christianity gives them a kind of hope and wider vision. By contrast the Churches themselves, when they are not plainly against the poor, have generally acted 'from above', encouraging the poor to give up their birthright in the lifeless acceptance of other people's efforts to help them.

Fraser does not analyse these emerging groups in any great detail. He uses them and their relationship with the Churches as illustrations. What he has to say is for the Church as a whole and in particular for Western Christians. The initiative has passed from them. Christianity has shifted to the poor—and moreover to the poor who are away out on the fringes of our system. In this book—which is really an extended sermon, often trenchant and inspiring—the Western Church is called upon to change.

So Fraser points out Western theology is no longer the norm—the place where other people's insights are assessed and assimilated into the West's 'universal' tradition. Other histories and cultures generate equally valid theology. It is in their own context that black theology, liberation theology and the rest are actually happening. Besides, they have rediscovered that Christians as a whole are the theological community. Theology, even a certain withdrawal to reflect, is something that is done in the middle of people's struggle to transform the world. The mental journeys of the Moltmanns of this world are too far removed from such a source to be of much use.

So, too, Church organisations must stop acting as patrons dehumanising the poor but offer what they have to people making their own decisions their own way in their own time. It is more human to make mistakes than to have good decisions made for you. Just so missionaries should only go to places where they are wanted by the indigenous Christians and only if their contribution is made as part of the whole Church.

This is the point really—to rediscover the community of Christian faith. After all, what people in the third world are asking for is justice and they are entitled to the support of the whole Church, including their fellow Christians in the west. Why do we expect gratitude for 'aid'? Why did the European Churches suddenly discover they were all pacifists when (and only when) the World Council of Churches gave grants to combat racism in Africa? Why, when people ask for truth, have we started playing 'the knave card Reconcile'?

Clearly the real mission field is at home. It is not just a question of getting off the backs (economically and otherwise) of those in the third world, but of learning from their rediscovery of Christianity. (Not copying them or stimulating our jaded palates with their theology—as well as a relationship with them we have our own situation: liberation theology and peasant communities cannot directly be a model for us). Fraser ruthlessly clears away some of our customary evasions. Preaching is about sharing human concerns, not proselytizing and Christian distinctiveness. There are Christian arguments for violence as well as against it, and so on.

These are not new points but they are worth reading again in Fraser's vigorous words, for we still evade the message. Perhaps, as he says, prophecy must sometimes be knowingly futile—that people may not hear or understand. He ends with a summons to see and hear what is happening, to take risks and engage in controversy. And if it seems unrealistic to hope for a change in the Churches here (as frankly it does) it is better to be confronted by the situation and opt for parochialism than to be neither hot nor cold. Prophecy remains to make sense of the inevitable catastrophe.

In responding to one's fellow humans,

why bother with the Churches anyway? Ian Fraser is a believer. He has seen that in some places the Church is moving (moreover, he is mistaken in saying the Catholic Church in Chile condoned

the coup against Allende) and he has seen these new groups finding their inspiration in Christianity. He means to bring this good news.

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**STUDIES IN TUDOR AND STUART POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT: Vol. I. Tudor Politics/Tudor Government; Vol. II Parliament/Political Thought, by G. R. Elton. Cambridge University Press, 1974. xii + 401 pages, and x + 267 pages. £10.80.**

The collecting of a number of Professor G. R. Elton's papers and reviews into two hardback volumes by the Cambridge University Press is not just the offering of a conventional florilegium to a local Fenland luminary: these dense pages contain some of the weightiest and, potentially, most revolutionary contributions to English history-writing in this century. Elton's achievement may be put quite briefly. He has transferred to Tudor and Stuart history the methods of T. F. Tout's *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England*, seeking to draw out from the vast and rebarbative resources of the Public Record Office precisely how the political process, that continuous adjustment of needs and demands by governing and governed, was actually carried out in the Council, Exchequer, Chancery, king's courts, sheriff's office and the rest. The results claimed for this massive research may be seen by turning to a 1969 paper, 'The body of the whole realm' and the 1965 essay, 'The Stuart Century'. There Elton outlines, in half a hundred pages of lucid and elegant writing, what he has called 'the Tudor revolution in government', that definitive replacement of personal and household administration by national and bureaucratic; he prefaces this with an account of its mediaeval precedents and conditions of possibility and appends a piece on the Stuart incompetence that failed to sustain its smooth operation in the next century. This work incorporates some, but by no means all, of the criticisms levelled by mediaevalists at his early writing that in setting up the early Tudor period as the great divide in administration, Parliament and theories of sovereignty, a period of quite unparalleled novelty, Elton betrayed his false belief that mediaeval institutional life was static. But it is his reading of the Stuart period which has really shaken a tradition of historiography

from Hume to S. R. Gardiner. The familiar seventeenth century of struggle between crown and country parties, equipped with their increasingly incompatible ideologies, Elton would dissolve, mirage-like, into insubstantial wraith. The wand airily waved over giants like Trevelyan and Gardiner (and more recent writers too) is 'realism about parliamentary business'. The depressing weight of American learning has woefully reinforced the Whiggish error that all that matters in parliamentary history is the ambition of elected representatives to limit the executive. Why assume, Lorenz-like, the naturalness of conflict, the sham and nakedness of co-operative virtues in politics? Look at the evidence. Parliament is an instrument of action, whose ends regularly become apparent in legislation passed, to the satisfaction of public and private agents. The crisis of the seventeenth century was that when bungling political management dried up the flow of statutes the whole purpose and function of Parliament became problematical.

Insofar as all this is a corrective to vulgar Marxism it is welcome enough. That this is indeed part of his meaning is clear from a passage in *The Practice of History* where he writes: 'After a little close acquaintance it becomes difficult to see the period characterised by a simple, socially-based transformation to which all dominant events, and in particular the Reformation, can be referred' (p. 54). (For a consonant afterthought from Engels see Dona Torr's *Selected Correspondence of Marx and Engels*, p. 477.) In some ways Elton's approach is a return to a Weberian view of the distinction between society and polity, seeing the life of institutions as possessed of a large autonomy from their social base, setting new ends and creating fresh loyalties for their members. His discussion of the antecedents of the Civil War shows him as