

EDITORIAL

WE read in the Acts of the Apostles that on the Church's birthday, the first Pentecost of the new dispensation, the lately baptized converts were *persevering in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread and in prayers* (Acts 3, 42). From the first the life of the Church was based upon doctrine, authoritatively taught; it was the apostles' doctrine and the apostles were responsible for its guardianship and proclamation.

We are given more than a glimpse too of the kind of doctrine it was. It was centred in a person, the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, said St Peter in the peroration of his first sermon, preached that same day, *let all the house of Israel know most certainly that God hath made both Lord and Christ, this same Jesus, whom you have crucified* (Acts 2, 36). And a little later on he was even more explicit, quoting the words of Scripture: *This is the stone which was rejected by you the builders: which is become the head of the corner* (Psalm 117). *Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name given to men, whereby we must be saved* (Acts 4, 11-12).

This doctrine of salvation in the Christ was rooted in the nation's history. Long before it came to pass it had been shown them that it would come to pass: *But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Be penitent, therefore, that your sins may be blotted out* (Acts 3, 18). It needs only a superficial acquaintance with the early chapters of the Acts to begin to realize that this profoundly mysterious redeeming act of Christ upon the cross is the very heart and centre of the doctrine upon which the life of the infant Church was based. To this mystery, within that life, faith was the response, a response certainly not grounded upon human reasoning. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the gentiles foolishness, but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (I Cor. 1, 23-24).

The New Testament in many places makes a distinction between credence or belief *about* (*pisteucin hoti*), and personal trust and reliance, belief *in* (*pisteuein eis*). Both these elements have their place in the theological analysis of faith, and both are of high

importance. We cannot believe in Christ without also believing about him. But belief about him would be sterile and unfruitful, a kind of notional assent, were it not implemented by belief in him. This adds to faith an element of personal commitment in love and trust and so completes it and makes it living.

The theological approach to the mysteries of redemption, contained in God's self-revelation to the world in Christ, and proclaimed in the teaching of the Church, is concerned with the rational analysis, by philosophical thinking, of these mysteries. The object of this analysis is not to exhaust the mysteries themselves or to render them wholly transparent to the penetration of human thought. In their innermost essence they defy such treatment because they altogether transcend the powers of the human comprehension. It is rather to assist the limitations of the human mind in its partial penetration into the mystery, and to guide it in the process lest it should stray down ways of thought which would lead it into error.

The creeds and definitions of the Church and the dogmatic formulations of the theologians have this as their object. The doctrine of the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of the Word of God, which was laid down at Chalcedon, is not an end in itself; it is a means, and a safeguarding means, to enable us to penetrate into the richness of truth with which the Gospels present us in their delineation of the acts and words of the Redeemer. The theological analysis of the triune being of the omnipotent God contained in the Athanasian creed or the theological treatise, *de Trinitate*, is an aid, but only an aid, to our growing comprehension by faith of what the Scriptures tell us concerning the things done by the divine Persons in their in-dwelling life in the human soul. Similarly the doctrine of the Sacraments, and of transubstantiation in particular, forms guiding lines that in no way exhaust the fullness and richness of revealed truth, but which nevertheless mark out a secure basis for an ever deepening comprehension by grace of that fullness and enrichment.

Theology then is important because it is and must be the foundation of our spiritual life. The intellectual content of that foundation will vary according to the capacity of the individual. Many will be able to apprehend no more than simple catechetical formulations; others, with a higher intellectual capacity, will

need to go further. If not encouraged in this they may easily come to think of their religion as a childish and therefore unnecessary adjunct to their lives, which can be dropped, like an outgrown garment, when childhood is passed, since it has come to be thought of as unworthy of intelligent credence.

Teachers in our schools stand in need of at least some theological training in order that they may pass on an intelligent grasp of religious fundamentals to the boys and girls in their sixth forms. For this reason we shall publish from time to time articles on doctrine such as have been included in this number of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*. Our aim will be to assist them, and others who feel the same need, to equip themselves adequately for their responsible task.

One thing however must be borne in mind. Theology is only a foundation, and a foundation which is never built upon is useless. Parallel with and integrated into the study of theology must be a life of progress in prayer and with it a corresponding deepening in holiness. For it is principally by the action of grace, the virtues of faith, hope and charity, together with the complementing gifts of the Holy Spirit, that we penetrate into the mystery of faith with a knowledge that passes mere intellectual apprehension, a knowledge which alone can lead us to the love of God.



REFLECTIONS ON THE THEOLOGY OF THE BLESSED TRINITY

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THE reflections offered here have properly to do with the theology of the Holy Trinity rather than with the Trinity itself; their purpose is to consider how we advance in our theological understanding of the revelation of the Holy Trinity communicated to us by Scripture and Tradition, by pointing to those movements of our spiritual life which are especially relevant to our theological understanding of the faith. St Augustine, in the later books of his *de Trinitate*, was the first to adopt this procedure explicitly; and his has been the determining influence in