

THIS IS MY BODY

by

F. J. LEENHARDT

PREFACE

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to forestall all the misunderstanding to which this short study will give rise. I fear that it will not be read calmly. What might be called its catholicizing tendency, or even its Romanism, will be denounced immediately without further reflexion. It will be said that it was scarcely necessary to have a Reformation in order to end up with this. In certain Protestant Churches the author perhaps would be called to account for heresy, with an anathema thrown in.

However, an author can invite his reader to accept the duty of quiet reflexion before passing judgment on his words. That at first reading the viewpoint expounded here should cause surprise is natural enough. But further examination should reveal that the course of my ideas has remained faithful to the fundamental principle of the Reformation. I have simply tried to answer a question, which cannot but be asked; and I have replied, taking Scripture as my sole basis, investigating its teaching in its own light. *Sola scriptura. Scriptura scripturae interpres.* The Reformation is comprised entirely in this double rule. So I have sought from the Bible the subjects of my interpretation and the substance of my conclusions. Even those reflexions which have a slightly philosophical aspect are intended to be no more than an elaboration close to what may be called the Biblical metaphysic, and Aristotle's substantialism has really nothing to do with it!

If the honour and joy are accorded me of having my study discussed, it will be necessary to accept the method that I have adopted, in conformity with the authentic inheritance of the Reformers. I would even point out, to those whom it might interest, that I have sought to explain the words of Jesus, which are the subject of this study, without recourse to any other evidence than that presented by the Synoptic Gospels.

I hope therefore that, in the discussion, arguments from authority,

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of which Protestant thought unknowingly makes such generous use, will be avoided. We must refrain from invoking the Protestant Tradition, for it was scarcely necessary to break with the tutelage of a tradition which was at odds with the Scriptures in order to place oneself under the tutelage, younger perhaps but no less severe, of a new tradition which establishes itself as equally impervious to the teaching of the Scriptures when that does not agree with what it has itself so far accepted. As Protestantism grows older, it runs the risks of all human organisms. It becomes oppressive by reason of its own past. It is overtaken by sclerosis. When Vinet said that the Reformation has always to be begun again, he expressed a need which Protestants will have more and more difficulty in satisfying. Even their fidelity to the Reformers will carry a constant threat to fidelity to the principles they have received. It is necessary to grow old carefully.

The question is whether these pages are faithful to the fundamental principles laid down by the Reformers rather than to the actual form of words in which they expressed their own application of them. This is the central point with which those who seek to contradict them should concern themselves. But it is also possible that these pages will receive some approval from those who will perceive here the demonstration of the fertility of the Reformers' attitude. By not establishing the principle of an authoritative definition of dogma and of limits to doctrine, the Reformation has run many risks. It must often have paid dearly for this confession of the Church's weakness in apprehending and comprehending the object of its faith. But therein was the courage which was one of the forms of its faith. It left open possibilities which it could not then suspect. By refusing to make itself master of its present, it avoided seeking to determine its future. It gave to Christ alone an authority which belongs only to Him. And by this very means, it enabled Him to exercise a rectifying and corrective action on its development. Fidelity to the Reformers consists in holding that the Reformation of the Reformation must always continue.

If the recent past is considered, it will be thought that the thesis presented here is quite new. But the foundation of the thesis is not in fact so. Not only did the Christian Church profess a similar faith for many centuries before the Reformation, but even after the Reformation the faith of the Protestants lived by the same certainties that I am expounding here. It is true that the language of the Reformed theologians broke with traditional terminology. It was essential at that period, because the Roman theology had become unduly subject to the

categories of Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy, so that its vocabulary could not be preserved without inconvenience. Deplorable perversions followed from this, both in the thought of the clergy and in the piety of the faithful, and these prompted some of the faithful to action. God then raised up powerful voices to proclaim the reformation not only of the morals of the clergy, but above all of its theology, its faith and its piety. The opposition which they had to face is well known. But the rupture which followed did not evacuate the faith of these men of its authentic substance. Hastily and not without mistakes—for improvisation is insufficient in these matters—they forged a language and uttered old ideas in new words. The authentic Protestant theology was not, as far as the subject treated here is concerned, as far distant as many imagine from the Roman theology, at least in certain of its manifestations. This is true to such an extent that I was able to read the first half of this study, which includes what follows it, to a group of some thirty ministers without arousing a radical protest. This is indeed surprising. . . . And if Luther had been there, he would have expressed himself more in favour than that group of Reformed theologians!

Words should not impede us. I do not believe that I ought to let myself be frightened by them. They say what I want to say. Am I obliged to banish them from my vocabulary because they are familiar to Roman theologians? In that case it would be necessary to get rid of the whole theological vocabulary. I shall be told that these words are ambiguous, as they are invested with a different sense according to the presuppositions of those who use them. No doubt, but then it would be equally necessary to give up the word "Church"—Luther did indeed dare to do so, but that does not provide an encouraging precedent—or the word "grace", and even the word "God", if it is definitely true that the Reformation discovered in the Bible an idea of God which Aristotle had obscured. All words present a certain ambiguity.

But there is something better to be said about this. I see a positive advantage in the use of expressions which Protestants were once obliged to repudiate because of the times in which they lived. That reason is precisely that we no longer live in their times. The meaning of words evolves. It is not only amongst Protestants that thought engenders an evolution of words and ideas. We are very disposed to reproach Roman Catholicism with its immobility, the *Syllabus*, even *Humani generis*, etc. But at least let us be logical with ourselves and honest with it, and let us learn how to be attentive to the changes which it manifests, when there are any. Why think that Roman

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Catholicism has made no progress in certain sections of its thoughts for four hundred years? I shall be told that its dogma has not altered; that is true; but the interpretation of dogma allows a margin of liberty of which Protestant theologians should not always say—and not without some self-conceit—that it is a mockery and an illusion. We ought to examine each case on its merits. It is true that St. Thomas remains the great patron of their theology; but he is not the only authority; those who depart from him on philosophical matters run a risk, but they are not silenced for that reason alone. I know certain Roman theologians who work with a sincere ardour and not without effect to remove from historical Catholicism its inexact expressions and its choking overlay. Some of them react against certain errors which the Reformers condemned in the papist mass and against eucharistic superstitions. Working for authentic Catholicism, their efforts come to some extent into contact with those of the Reformers. We have not the right to doubt their complete sincerity, nor to prophesy pedantically that their efforts are in vain. Such an attitude would reveal a lack as much of charity as of perspicacity.

The Roman theologians provide us here with a useful lesson. They are unfortunately not many, but there are enough for us to learn from their example. They have the will to reinterpret the deposit of faith which constituted the essential strength of Christianity at the dawn of the sixteenth century. Who can say what would have been the attitude of our Reformers if they could have found, to reply to their disquiet concerning fidelity to the Word of God, men such as these who today run a risk in an attempt to rediscover what is authentic Catholicism? Why then, in the face of these men, do we display immobility and ill temper? Speaking to those who had rejected the preaching of the austere John the Baptist and who now refused the good news of salvation, Jesus Christ said that they resembled children in the market-place whom no suggestion could induce to play; if you offer them a dance, they want to utter lamentations; begin to lament, and they want to dance. This preface is addressed also to those who always turn a sombre and surly face to Catholicism, whatever the proposals it puts forward. To be always wearing a frown is to be in the wrong. It is important to see that the face of Protestantism does not, in this matter, assume a grim look of bad humour, which is sometimes also the look engendered by a bad conscience.

At certain times and in the face of certain reactions, more serious questions arise. One wonders whether the reactions of many Protest-

ants are not dominated by some sort of a panic-stricken disquiet. I have some difficulty in saying this here because it is better to wash one's dirty linen at home. But no one is ignorant of it, and a public laundry is none the less useful for being public. Sometimes our reactions are false and even our freedom of thought and action is impaired. The presence of Roman Catholicism by our side imposes on us certain defensive attitudes. We fear everything that seems to be a catholic infiltration. Is this a really valid concern? In its intention perhaps; and I should applaud it, if it were discerning. I do hope that we shall be vigilant and discerning with regard to certain pitfalls which may await the evangelical faith. But there is also a concern which has really nothing to do with the safeguarding of the essential values of authentic Protestantism. We allow ourselves complete freedom when they push us far from Rome. But we do not always consider what price we are paying for this useless and sometimes harmful security. As long as there is no suspicion of Romanism, we are tranquil and that is enough. This serves to explain a number of odd and peculiar things we accept, which we prefer to endure rather than surrender. A theologian who advances to the extreme limits of theological liberalism still compatible with the Christian faith, however diluted, is not suspected of departing from the norms of Protestantism. But as soon as there is any mention of responses in the liturgy or of kneeling for prayer during public worship, then the charge is made of crypto-Catholicism. This disproportion between the reactions reveals something both grotesque and dangerous. We have allowed ourselves to indulge in absurd behaviour.

How many of such reactions are injurious! One cannot deny that Roman Catholicism has inherited the thought and experience of fifteen centuries. But that, so it is said, is too much and the inheritance is too mixed. No doubt; it is therefore necessary to remain discerning in order to examine everything. But it is also necessary to know how to retain what is good. Because we wish to keep ourselves at a distance from its secular riches, we find ourselves deprived of goods which belong to us as our own, and we should profit from them if we conducted ourselves with full liberty of mind.

It would therefore be desirable if the readers of these pages were to put aside for a moment the oppressive custom, almost hereditary with us, of scenting an act of infidelity to the Reformation in every novelty which is not in part anti-Roman. It is necessary that the Protestant readers of these pages should be sufficiently Protestant to undertake a free examination with a true freedom of mind.

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These lines will also come before the eyes of Roman Catholic readers. I have no authority to address prefaces to them as I have to my Protestant brothers. But the Roman reader should know that he also is in danger of finding himself the prisoner of his habits. He may be led to rejoice with as much haste as the Protestant may be led to be indignant. But both would be wrong and for the same reason. There is here no more a flirtation with Roman Catholicism than there is a disloyalty to Protestantism. I trust that the Protestants will spare me absurd reproaches; and I trust that the Catholics will also spare me absurd praises. Both will be surprised in their habits of thought. But once the surprise has passed, they should ask themselves whether these lines do not present each of them with a question which each should understand according to his own position. In the historical form which they have assumed since the sixteenth century, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism stand face to face, and they are irreconcilable. But praise be to God that He has not abandoned His Church. The contingent factors which operated in the rupture between the two portions of Western Christianity, in the formation of their characters and in the evolution of their relations, begin to lose the abnormal importance that they have had for so long. In the bosom of Catholicism the attempt is being made to advance what must be called authentic Catholicism; that which weakened the Biblical essence of traditional Catholicism is being put aside. In the bosom of Protestantism a parallel effort is taking place, which aims at the same goal and should lead to the same outcome: the strengthening of the Biblical essence by the elimination of the philosophical or sociological superstructures. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have continued to read the Bible, despite their division, although they have read it in separation and differently. Is it possible that this common hearth of theological thought and living faith, of prayer and liturgy, will at length lead both to revise and to pass beyond previously held positions?

It is not a question of measuring the road already travelled, nor of estimating the road still to be travelled. From many points of view the road travelled is slight, and it is to be doubted whether routes along which some people advance with difficulty lead anywhere. The failure of so many efforts is deceptive. One would like to be able not only to distinguish authentic Catholicism and Romanism in thought but also in concrete fact. Unfortunately the Biblical renewal in the bosom of Catholicism has not impaired the sovereignty of a Tradition which has constantly drawn on the polluted sources of that religion which is

natural—and indeed too natural—to man. The theology of the laity has not at all modified the theology of the priesthood, nor called in question the prerogatives of the hierarchy. One would like not to have to raise troublesome questions concerning the confusion or collusion of the spiritual authority of the Roman Church with the powers of this world and their methods of action. It is true that all churches have their troubles, because man brings to God's work his impure collaboration. But Protestants remain astounded that the Catholic avowal of the weaknesses and troubles of the Roman Church still leaves them blindly obedient to the Roman supremacy. In a Church which claims such absolute power over souls, which pronounces definitions and anathemas, which arrogates to itself rights (not just duties) over some and excommunicates others, the gravity of human weakness grows to such a point that it becomes a contradiction and provides by the very facts a refutation of the theoretical pretensions. At the sight of so many checks and so many acts of submission, one begins to wonder whether a "true Reform"—which so few wish and hope to promote—can ever take place in the bosom of Romanism.

Nevertheless faith cannot allow itself to be discouraged by human failures. Faith turns to the promises of God and awaits from His strength for that which the misery of the sinner delays and perverts. God is faithful and His grace is at work in the Church. To such an extent that certain Catholics have become disturbed by what they label neo-Protestantism. Certain Protestants, on the other hand, are convinced that a catholicizing tendency is causing damage. Both ought to recognize that their conflicting complaints cancel one another out. They should calm themselves, since there is no exact similarity between one camp and the other. But God advances the Church of His love. Neither camp will triumph over the other. Each will triumph over itself, over its narrowness, its partiality, its omissions, its excrescences, its exclusiveness. . . . Each Church is feeling its way, and, should they converge, that is because they are advancing together towards the centre, towards Him who is the one and incontestable Head of His one Church. To Him alone be the glory.

Soli Deo Gloria

The question to which these lines will attempt to provide an answer is primarily this: What relationship did Christ wish to establish with us? Or more precisely, in order to limit this immense subject, the

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purpose may be formulated thus: since Christ wished His disciples to proclaim His Gospel, He has established with us a link which is the preaching of His Word: "He that hears you, hears me." The question is therefore whether or not He wished to establish, by another means than the spoken Word, a further relationship of a different kind.

SAMPLE