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Theological Observer

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

THE FIVE MINIMUM DOCTRINES OF NEO-ORTHODOXY

In *Religion in Life* (Autumn 1961) Deane W. Ferm of Mount Holyoke College, in a symposium on "Existentialism Reconsidered," offers what he regards as the five minimum doctrines of neo-orthodoxy. Just as Unitarianism (Modernism) had five minimum doctrines: the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, the progress of mankind onward and upward forever, and as Fundamentalism is characterized by five doctrines: the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, the virgin birth and complete deity of Christ Jesus, the resurrection of the same body that was three days buried, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus for the sins of the world, the second coming of Jesus in bodily form, so neo-orthodoxy may be said to have five minimum doctrines: the unity and authority of the Bible, the uniqueness of the Christian revelation, the deity of Christ, the sinfulness of man, the transcendence of God. But William E. Hordern of the Garrett Biblical Institute, in a critique of the article, asks the question whether it is not a "post-neo-orthodoxy," which is here described. He says: "When we consider that such men as the two Niebuhrs, Tillich, Brunner, and Aulén also have been called neo-orthodox, it becomes evident that the term ought either to be defined more precisely or dropped." He suggests as a substitute for the term "the new reformation theology," believing that today we have entered into a "post-neo-orthodox" era. Among his criticisms we note that "it is misleading to refer to the doctrine of Christ without mention of the Trinity," and he asks: "And when has neo-orthodoxy forgotten the Holy Spirit?" He agrees with Ferm that "we must constantly seek fresh answers to age-old

problems," but adds the caution "that we must not let this become a parochialism of the twentieth century which assumes that an answer is wrong if it happens to be old."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THE SACRED SCRIPTURES IN ROMAN CATHOLIC AUSTRIA

Pius Parsch († 1954), an Austin Canon of Klosterneuburg-bei-Wien and the energetic and profoundly evangelical founder of the liturgical movement in Austrian Roman Catholicism, began his "Apostolate of the Bible" in 1951. When the Apostolate celebrated its tenth anniversary last year, it reported that 370,000 copies of the New Testament and 20,000 copies of the Old Testament had been sold and that a single poster appeal to Viennese Roman Catholics in the fall of 1960 to acquire Bibles had resulted in the almost overnight sale of 7,000 copies of the New Testament. The Apostolate likewise sold 60,000 copies of Parsch's popularly written tract *Wie lerne ich Bibel lesen?* (*How Can I Learn to Read the Bible?*) and 8,000 of an instruction manual designed primarily for parish priests, *Wie halte ich Bibelstunde?* (*How Do I Go About Conducting Bible Class?*) In early 1958 out of 122 Viennese parishes 54 were conducting regular Bible classes, mostly at biweekly intervals, with the average attendance ranging between 30 and 50. Although the last three years have seen a general decline in attendance, it is becoming increasingly common for Catholic Action groups to begin their activities with the reading of a section of the Sacred Scriptures followed by an explanation of the portion read. A number of conferences on Bible study have been held, and Parsch's periodical *Bibel und Liturgie* continues to provide practical instruction and stimulation. Norbert Höslinger, also a

Klosterneuburg Austin Canon, is the present director of the Apostolate of the Bible.

At the Apostolate's anniversary celebration, the Right Rev. Erwin Hesse of Vienna spoke on the subject "The Biblical Movement—Today." He began with the encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, with its assertion that "the authentic liberty of God's children on the one hand binds them loyally to the teaching of the Church but on the other hand gratefully receives every contribution that the secular sciences make." Since then a fresh breath of air has been blowing in Roman Catholic Biblical science. Roman Catholic exegetes were encouraged to address themselves to the uninhibited consideration of all the problems that the Sacred Scriptures raise, a phenomenon that Hesse called reverent Biblical criticism. As Chalcedon did in the case of Christology, it has put an end, he said, to "Biblical monophysitism" and has begun to stress that the Sacred Scriptures are both the work of God and as authentically the work of men. Even under the influence of inspiration a man remains a true historical being, inasmuch as God has no desire to destroy his particularity and his personality. The human authors of Sacred Scripture wrote history the way history was written in their times and not as we write it in the 19th and 20th centuries. As the national literature of the Jewish people, the Sacred Scriptures also include poetry, fables (*Märchen*), and myths. The genre research that Pius XII commended attempts to identify the literary type of each part of the Sacred Scriptures; thus the Creation account makes extensive use of mythical language and contains mythical elements.

At the same time, Hesse pointed out, modern research has disclosed with greater precision the meaning of divine inspiration. It demonstrates that all the Sacred Scriptures are tracts (*Tendenzschriften*), filled with kerygmatic and sermonic passion. The kerygma, understood as the divinely directed

proclamation and crying out of God's herald, to which we are to attend as it resounds in the Scriptures, is the principle both of selection and of formulation. As St. John's Gospel (21:25) reminds us, a selection had to be made among the words and deeds of our Lord, and the early church selected those things that stood in the foreground of her situation and that the needs of her congregations demanded. There is thus a two-dimensional character to what we read in the gospels; one dimension refers to what our Lord said and did in His lifetime, the other refers to the events and problems of the period from the 60s to the 90s of the first century, when the gospels were written down. Again, the words of our Lord are not recorded with a stenographic kind of precision. The evangelists write with a pastoral rather than a historical concern; a case in point is St. Matthew's modification in 19:17 of the logion of which St. Mark has given us the obviously original form in 10:18. Side by side with this freedom we have an almost servile reverence for the Word of God in such passages as 1 Cor. 15:3 ff., where the quoted language suddenly becomes thoroughly un-Pauline. At those points where the kerygma was not fixed, inspiration gave the disciples and evangelists the authority to adapt Christ's words.

With the increased reading of the Sacred Scriptures by priest and people Roman Catholicism enters upon a new situation, Hesse observed. In the past the Roman Catholic Church was related to her membership as the rock of faith and as the proclaimer of dogmatic certainties. Now her people are entering an area where the church has pronounced finally and definitively upon only a very few passages of the Sacred Scriptures, where in general everything is fluid, and where the opportunity for the free expression of opinion arises. (Source: *Herder-Korrespondenz*, XVI, No. 10 [October 1961], pp. 6,7.)

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN