



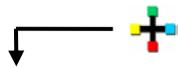
A Review of "God's Order: The Ephesian Letter And This Present Time," by John A. Mackay. New York, Macmillan, 1953.

1954

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Theology Today 10, 4 (January): 543-547.

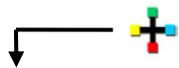
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Here is a noble and stirring statement of the evangelical faith, interpreted for our day by a great missionary theologian. The book is a notable example of that combination of intellectual power with missionary passion which characterizes Dr. Mackay's speaking and writing. I can never forget that in my own student days a sermon from John Mackay was one of the things that made me understand for the first time the grandeur of the Gospel; and many others will be grateful, as I am, for the disclosure he here gives of the way in which he was himself laid hold of in his youth by that Gospel. He tells us that it was in this Epistle to the Ephesians that he first found and still finds the supreme exposition of that which God has done for men in Jesus Christ. "To this book," he says, "I owe my life."

It follows that his exposition is something very different from the coldly scientific dissection of an ancient document which is sometimes offered to the Bible student in place of the living Word. Dr. Mackay insists at the outset that this is a realm "in which, in the deepest sense, subjectivity is truth," because "apart from the experience that came to me through the Bible and the vision that met me in the Epistle to the Ephesians, I am nothing and my life has no meaning." A colleague of mine once told me that he had spent the whole of one term at one of the ancient universities studying the Epistle to the Galatians, that he had achieved a thorough mastery of the North Galatian and South Galatian theories in all their ramifications, but that it was not until years afterwards that he discovered that the doctrine of justification by faith had anything to do with him personally. We have become painfully familiar with that kind of Bible study, and one can only be thankful for this work of a powerful and fearless mind which knows that the expositor has failed in his work if he has not brought the living word of God home to the mind and conscience of his reader. And yet, having said this with much gratitude, I must add that I could wish that the movement of Dr. Mackay's thought had been more strictly controlled from step to step by the thought of the Epistle. But the book is the product of a lifetime's wrestling with the actual issues

of Christian living in this world in the light of the faith set forth in this Epistle, and it is cause for gratitude that, even if this sometimes results in a movement of thought which is not quite that of



the Apostle, it means that we are dealing all the time with real, living, and indeed burning issues.

At every point Dr. Mackay has clear, trenchant, and yet soundly balanced judgments to make. One of the finest things in the book is his dealing with the issue raised by the movements of what one may call the Pentecostalist wing of Christianity. On the one hand, he speaks with burning vehemence, a vehemence arising from a true pastoral concern, about the "the diabolical craft which regards schism as a virtue and the manifestation of Christian unity as apostasy." On the other hand, he acknowledges the peril in which those ecclesiastics stand who fear the Spirit, and would "stifle fanaticism at the cost of extinguishing faith." What he has to say about the ethical consequences of conversion is well said and needs saying, and many will be thankful to him that, in a time when Christian thinking is far too much dominated by the fear of Communism, he reminds us that there are also other tyrannies abroad in the world, and in particular that he will not allow the Western democracies to forget the shame of their betrayal of Republican Spain. "The unity which has been established between Church and State in Franco's Spain is one of the most terrifying things in the history of civilization."

But the real significance of this book lies in the fact that it is a wrestling of evangelical faith with the issue of corporate and cosmic salvation-with God's order amid the disorders of the world. Protestants have traditionally found in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans the central stronghold of their faith. But Dr. Mackay's life in Christ has been nourished from its beginning on the Ephesian Epistle, which he even describes as "the sublimest communication ever made to man." In other words, the basic pattern of his thought about the life in Christ is in terms of God's purpose to sum up all things in Christ and of the Church as the global and indeed cosmic instrument of that purpose. Here is one evangelical faith nurtured on that Scripture which is the stronghold of Catholic thought about the Church. And this means that Dr. Mackay has to wrestle with the question which is central for the whole future of the ecumenical movement, "What is the visible form in history of that new and eternal order which God has established in Christ?"

Few men can bring to the answering of this question comparable qualifications. Dr. Mackay knows at first hand the living issues involved. He knows also at first hand that gigantic and fundamentally heretical answer to the question which is Roman Catholicism. He has much to say about that answer which needs saying-though he is not just to the Roman Catholic doctrine when he asserts (p. 109) that it absolutely guarantees a man's final salvation simply on the basis of loyalty to the institution.



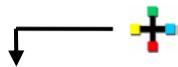
And yet after twice reading the book I cannot feel fully satisfied with his interpretation of the teaching of the Epistle on this question.

He begins his chapter on "The New Divine Order" by stating that it is "apparent" that Paul deals with the Church under two aspects, which he describes in traditional Protestant style in terms of the Church invisible and the Church visible. This dichotomy governs his whole exposition of the central part of the Epistle. I could have wished that Dr. Mackay had told us where in Ephesians he finds the basis for it. In speaking of the Church invisible he quotes Deut. 32: 9 ("Israel is the lot of His inheritance") in exposition of the Pauline phrase, "God's inheritance in the saints"; but the "Israel" referred to in the quotation from Deuteronomy is precisely the visible and concrete community known to history by that name. I cannot find in Ephesians, or elsewhere in St. Paul, the division which forms the basis of Dr. Mackay's treatment. On the

contrary, it seems to me that any expositor of Paul's teaching on the Church must wrestle precisely with the fact that Paul addresses his great words concerning the Body of Christ, and his words of warning, counsel, and rebuke, to the same people, the one Church which is both sinful and – by God's mercy – holy.

This initial dichotomy forces him to make others which are equally foreign to the thought of the Epistle. "As the individual is the ultimate unit of the Church Universal, the Body of Christ, so the congregation is the ultimate unit of the historic community called the Church." It would take a long time to follow up all the implications of that far-reaching statement, but it is surely clear that this contradicts the plain fact that in the New Testament *ecclesia* means equally "Church" and "congregation," because it is precisely that which God is gathering both locally and universally - really gathering on the plane of human history. Similarly, he writes that those who confessed Christ "formed themselves from the beginning into communities called Churches." But where, in the New Testament, is the record of such an event? Surely it was always that men and women were "called" into the fellowship of God's Son, and those who were so called were God's *ecclesia*.

This splitting tip of Paul's simple teaching on the Church produces further consequences. His great metaphors-the Temple, the Bride, and the Body-are ascribed simpliciter to the Church invisible, but said to be also "patterns and archetypes" of what the Church visible is and should become. Therefore, "the Church in history will fulfill its true mission in the measure in which it too aspires to be and succeeds in being, the Building, the Bride, and the Body of Christ." Surely St. Paul would have been horrified by this conversion of his plain indicatives into something so very different. "Ye are the Body of Christ." That is his teaching – unbelievable, and yet if it is denied we are yet in our sins. The paradox



and mystery of the amazing Pauline statements about the Church are to be interpreted in terms of the fundamental paradox of the Christian man, *simul justus ac peccator*. When we substitute for that Biblical paradox the quite unBiblical dichotomy of visible and invisible we destroy the real eschatological tension in which the Christian life is lived, and fall back into something perilously like legalism.

I cannot help feeling that it is because he is unwilling perhaps because he justly fears so much the terrible errors of Rome-to allow full weight to what Paul says of the Church as the place where God's grace is simply given, that he often seems to define churchmanship in terms that rely too much on our feelings and moral achievements. I cannot, for instance, feel happy about his definition of sainthood. Saints, he says, are "Christ's men and women." With that all must agree. But he goes on: "Feeling that they belong to Christ, they recognize the privilege and accept the obligations of carrying out in their lives the uttermost implication of being Christians.... A person is a 'saint,' in the New Testament sense, not by the greatness of his spiritual achievement but by the reality of his Christian devotion." This is surely nearer to Rome than to Geneva! A person is a saint in the New Testament sense-as distinct from the Roman sense-simply by the fact that God has called him, sinful as he is, into the fellowship of his Son, and of his Son's brethren.

The Roman misunderstanding of the Gospel leads Dr. Mackay to make a severe attack upon the view that the Church is an end in itself. When one thinks of the constant tendency of all Churches (not all equally successful) to aggrandize themselves after the manner of worldly corporations, one can only say that the attack is deserved. When the Church does this, it will certainly be punished by God, and the greater its corporate pride the greater will be its fall. And yet there is surely a very real sense in which the Church is both an end in itself and also an instrument. It is not an association of people who have banded themselves together to achieve a certain end or to propagate certain beliefs. It is the first instalment, the earnest, and therefore also the instrument of that new divine order of which Dr. Mackey is writing. To be "in Christ" cannot be merely a means towards something further.

In wrestling with the perplexities which Marxism causes for the lowpaid mill-workers and villagers in my own diocese, I have often called to mind the dictum of a very far-seeing Christian friend who has himself been a Marxist. "The only Christian answer to Marxism," he said, "is the existence of a fellowship in which forgiveness is a reality." The Church in such a situation as ours cannot become an organization promoting any particular immediate solution to the economic and political issues of which the rise of Marxism is an expression. But the existence



of a fellowship in which righteousness does not become self-righteousness and in which peace does not become appeasement is – in itself – that which the Church has to offer as its answer to these issues. In a real sense "Let the Church be the Church" is a true watchword. The Church is not merely a means to an end. It is an eschatological reality in which the peace and holiness and truth of God's kingdom truly exist here and now in men and women who are at the same time involved in the sin and self-seeking and blindness of this age.

If I have ventured to offer some criticisms of this book, it is because it deals with what seems to me to be the central issue for the Church in our time, and because it is vital that the most earnest and serious discussion of this issue should go on. God has established his new order in Christ. That order is the inner meaning of all human, and indeed cosmic history. It is that in which all history is to be consummated and by which it is to be judged. But what is the visible form by which God intends that new order to be seen and to exercise its power within history? Rome is confident that it has the whole of the answer. The Ecumenical Movement is patiently and prayerful seeking an answer. Within that movement there are conflicting views – organic unity centered in historic ministry, federation, co-operation, and so on. There is danger lest our dissension should be rendered sterile by our persistent habit of attacking shadows in place of substance, and by carrying on ancient controversies while we fail to see that a quite new battle is actually being fought. We need to examine our actual Church life much more realistically, not asking how it is related to ancient controversies about episcopacy, presbytery, pope and congregation, but, more earnestly, how it actually functions today, how power is actually exercised, how money is used, how the actual working of our Church organization reflects or obscures the Gospel to which we bear witness. Such self-examination would prepare us for a fresh and more realistic approach to this central question – in what visible form does God intend his new order to exercise its power within human history?

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