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On the Origins of Peter's Primacy: Peter and the Church

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ON THE ORIGINS OF PETER'S PRIMACY

PETER AND THE CHURCH. An Examination of Cullmann's Thesis. *Quaestiones Disputatae*, 8. By Otto Karrer. New York: Herder and Herder, 1963. 142 pp.

This small book by Otto Karrer is a translation (by Ronald Walls) of the third part of his *Um die Einheit der Christen* (first published in 1953), the section wherein Karrer discusses the well-known and very important *Petrus* of Oscar Cullmann. James McCue, reviewing this work in its English translation (in *Theological Studies*, 24/1963, 676-8) said that "surely it is now the best [Roman Catholic study of the origins of the primacy] in English."

Karrer marks out the points on which Cullmann and many Catholic scholars agree, and then discusses the principal points of disagreement.

There is no need, at this late date, to sum up in detail what Cullmann's *Petrus* thesis is: Mt. 16:16 is examined with an admirable thoroughness. Its historicity and authenticity are accepted. The text supports the primacy of Peter. It is a personal and unique primacy. Peter is the foundation of the apostolic Church, the bond of unity and the source of strength for his brothers in the apostleship. The rest of the New Testament supports all this.

But Cullmann disagrees with Catholic exegesis on at least two major points. (1) This primacy extended only to the first beginnings of the Church. When Peter left Jerusalem to give himself over to missionary work, James took over his position as leader of the primitive Church. (2) Peter's primacy was personal and unique, and was not (it could not be) passed on to successors. Brevi: Peter was the *primus* of the apostolic community, but no conclusion about the papacy follows from this fact.

K. examines the evidence Cullmann adduces for his disagreement with Catholic exegesis and holds that the scriptural texts cannot sustain C.'s main argument, i.e. that James replaced Peter as leader of the primitive Church; that when C. relies on the Pseudo-clementine sources to back up his thesis, he leans on very poor support indeed.

K.'s main effort is to discuss the keystone of C.'s work: there can be, really, no such thing as the Roman Catholic notion of apostolic succession: as apostles, the Twelve have no successors. The same holds true for Peter and his primacy. The self-same apostolic-Petrine foundation remains throughout the succeeding centuries of the Church's existence. Peter is the foundation of the Apostolic Church;

the Apostolic Church through its scriptural self-expression, is the foundation of the Church for all times.

The main lines of K.'s reply to C.'s *Petrus* are by now well-known to most: a fresh re-statement of the classical distinction between what is truly unrepeatable and non-transmissible in the apostolic function and what can be and is handed down. (Perhaps the term "apostolic succession", K. grants, is not entirely felicitous, yet Cullmann himself allows that it has a biblical sense: responsibility for leadership within the Church and for missionary work continues and is passed on to other men—something true from apostolic times onwards.) K. bases his critique of C.'s positions on the scriptural texts themselves, as well as on post-apostolic evidence

Regarding the Petrine succession as evidenced from a study of the scriptures and the apostolic Church, we may reproduce this key text from pp. 98-99:

If the church of apostolic times, although a fellowship of brethren bound in the Spirit of love, is at the same time characterized by a "holy order"—"hierarchy" in the original meaning of the word—, by a collegiate leadership in the same Holy Spirit; if this circle of authorized officials is given a primus who carries the keys and is a supreme shepherd of the "lambs and the sheep"; and if all this has been provided by the Lord of the church for the sake of the kingdom of God, so that the church, as God's special people, may be the instrument for inaugurating the kingdom of God, how then could the apostles have come to think that later on the church would no longer require the same order and structure. that they could change over, as they felt inclined, to some other structure, no longer having to be both charismatic and hierarchical, and yet, with its new form, still the same church as Christ conceived it,—arguing that it is, after all, a question of inner Spirit and not of outward form? Why then did Christ himself give it this form?

The church in the early centuries, the apostolic and sub-apostolic church, believed itself bound to this form, in the East as in the West.

(Cf. McCue's review, noted above, on this passage.)

One point, with regard to evidence from the post-apostolic Church: K. argues from the lists of bishops of Rome drawn up in the first two centuries, and from their use to bear witness to the continuity of apostolic tradition, that when the Christian communities confronted their adversaries they did not appeal to sacred Scriptures (the canon of the Scriptures was not yet definitively set), but rather to the tradition and the primacy of the See of Rome. K. holds that there is a

fair amount of evidence that the second century Church did recognize the primacy of the bishop of Rome as a continuation of the primacy of Peter. (On this whole matter, cf. James F. McCue, whose review of this book we have referred to above, in *Theological Studies* 25/1964, 161-196, "The Roman Primacy in the Second Century and the Problem of the Development of Dogma.")

Other excellent analyses and critiques of Cullmann's work have been written, by—to name only a few authors—Cardinal Journet, the Dominican exegete P. Benoit, A. Javierre, F. Sullivan. (Cf. R. Beaupere in *Istina*, 1955, 345-372.) Otto Karrer's book belongs with the best of these studies—scholarly, painstaking, alert to existing problems, eirenic in spirit. It has been, and remains, an indispensable piece in the continuing Protestant-Catholic-Orthodox discussion (of primary importance in the ecumenical movement) on the reality and meaning of the apostolic and Petrine succession.

C. G. ARÉVALO, S.J.

ON JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

SONS OF ABRAHAM. By James Kritzeck. Baltimore: Helicon, 1965. 126 pp. Annotated bibliography.

This brief but scholarly work deals with the elements common to Judaism, Christianity and Islamism in so far as they provide a basis for a dialogue leading to better understanding. It is characterized throughout by a discreet optimism and builds solidly on the wisdom of the past. Within a compass of 126 pages the author cites more than 150 writers, some in several of their works, who in the present century have dealt with some aspect of Islam. This assessment of opinion together with an open-minded independence in handling a large amount of historical and theological data makes the book a competent study of the problems of cultural interpenetration the topic implies.

The last chapter evaluates the threefold dialogue now in progress. It shows what is being accomplished by men of good will in all three faiths—more especially at the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies in Abbassiah, Cairo, and at the Benedictine monastery in Toulmliline, Morocco.

For each chapter there is an annotated bibliography. The list on Islam on pp. 118 ff. might well have included the survey of F. Pareja (*Islamologie*, Beyrouth, 1963) and that on Christendom and Islam on pp. 124 ff. the ironic book of L. Gardet (*Mohammedanism*, London, 1961) and the two fine studies of J. M. Abd-El-Jalil (*L'Islam et nous*, Paris, 1947, and *Aspects intérieurs de l'Islam*, Paris, 1949).