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BOOKS IN REVIEW

THE MODE OF THEOLOGICAL DECISION MAKING AT THE EARLY ECUMENICAL COUNCILS: AN INQUIRY INTO THE FUNCTION OF SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION AT THE COUNCILS OF NICEA AND EPHESUS

RALPH E. PERSON

The author is a Presbyterian minister. Born in Texas, he studied at Austin, Aberdeen, and at Basel where the Lutheran scholars Cullmann and Ebeling were among his teachers.

The study, he says, represents an effort to fill an important gap in the history of doctrines. The historical focus is the formula of Scripture and tradition at the councils of Nicea and Ephesus. The doctrinal focus is to be seen in the evaluation of the formula to the ongoing ecumenical discussions (p.1).

The two ancient councils referred to did not make any pronouncements about the relative authority of Scripture and tradition (p. 215). No sharp division was observed at that age. At Nicea the faith of the Apostles was referred to as tradition and the faith of the Fathers as Apostolic (p. 217). Both were viewed as authoritative. Scripture was regarded as the first witness in the historical sense, tradition as secondary, interpreting the Scriptures and pushing the church back into the Scriptures, for in the process of history Scripture needs some new formulations (p. 221). The word Trinity may not be found in the Scriptures, yet was accepted as a valid interpretation of the relation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit mentioned in Scripture. But this does mean that whatever the church teaches in the future is reliable tradition. The first is a decision about the present situation in the light of the past while the second is a decision about the future (p. 226).

As may be seen, the volume is of real importance for the study of church history as well as for a proper evaluation of the ecumenical movement.

Otto W. Heick