REFLECTIONS ON A NEW EDITION OF THE DIDACHE*

BY

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The discovery of the Didache in 1873 has been acclaimed in many a eulogy, in many a language and by many a scholar. And rightly so. For this work has cast a spell over even the most cautious who, finding its magic irresistible, seek time and again to prise its secrets. For however else can one explain the unending fascination expressed in such an abundance of words for a work written with so few – a bibliography which exceeds any reasonable expectation?

The appearance of another text, translation and introduction in French, is both welcome and opportune. The editors have cited the majority of scholarly works, text editions, studies, monographs and articles, which this enigmatic document has occasioned since the Second World War. Little has escaped their notice.1 Tuilier is responsible for the chapter on the titles of the work, its text tradition, the critical apparatus, the pleasing French translation and that very useful appendix – the text of the Doctrina apostolorum, together with three indices: scriptural references (or N.T. parallels) Greek words from the Didache and Latin from the Doctrina. Rordorf has written the major part of the scholarly introduction which examines authorship, date, origin and destination of the document, its literary type and the contents in detail. He is also responsible for the valuable and extensive footnotes to the text and translation. The joint work of these two scholars is an excellent contribution to early Christian studies.

Authorship, date, origin and destination

Because the liturgical and disciplinary practices in the Didache were so far removed from their own experience, the fathers rejected the work from the New Testament canon. Its attribution to the apostles could not be accepted in terms of the twelve (14f., 127). Rordorf suggests that an unknown author (A)2 compiled this treatise from existing written (and oral?) sources adding his own instructions. He begins
with the two-way teaching, widespread in both judaism and primitive (i.e. jewish-christian) christianity, and adds a ‘gospel’ section (chs. 1,3b-2,1), which suggests obvious Matthaean parallels, and a conclusion (ch. 6,2–3). He follows this teaching with the rituals of baptism, fasting, daily prayers and eucharist (chs. 7–10), and concludes with disciplinary regulations concerning the reception and support of ministers (chs. 11–13). Some is clearly his own work based upon knowledge of the contemporary situation (chs. 7,2–3b; 11–13). However, the sources he uses betray their archaic origins. Chapters 14 and 15 (the second part of the disciplinary section) he assigns to a redactor (B), similarly chapter 16, the little apocalypse. He dates the completed work from the latter part of the first century, thus parting company with most modern writers. Later on (83 ff.), he demonstrates that there is no factual evidence that the Didache text depends on any new testament canonical writings, inspite of obvious parallels. He ignores Audet’s suggestion\(^4\) that the Didache may use an earlier Matthew (note written source in 15,4), which could be interpreted from the Papias logion. For Rordorf chapters 11–13 provide the key to the origin/destination of this work – West Syria. The support for Egypt based, among other things, on the dissemination of the text there, he counterbalances with an eastward circulation. However, I am disappointed that he was not tempted to follow the trail along the silk route that I had indicated.\(^5\) He rejects the location, Antioch, in favour of surrounding rural (farming) communities (13,3) but admits in his footnotes to the text translation (191,10) that they were not all necessarily rural! His further argument against Antioch is based upon silence of both Paul and Ignatius in respect of the Didache. However, silence may not necessarily mean ignorance. There are reasons to suppose that Paul when writing to the Corinthians both elaborated and re-interpreted the Didache eucharistic rituals (see below).

The literary type

For Rordorf the Didache has neither overall unity (17) nor claim to recognition as the first of the church orders (21, n. 2). I disagree. Accepting that the final format blends archaic and contemporary traditions proper to A and B, I suggest\(^6\) that we see here, “the earliest of the church orders ... a recognisable forerunner of the long line of medieval ordines. The contents have a logical sequence from pre-baptismal instruction ... to a little apocalypse, the latter clearly pro-