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# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

IN his recent work on *The Gospel in the Early Church*, Emeritus Professor James MACKINNON considers the strength of the appeal of the Christian message.

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In the first place, the gospel had an immense advantage over the rival religions of the ancient Roman world in possessing an historic Founder, whose claims to allegiance in the moral and spiritual sphere were based on the solid fact of a unique personality. No mythical figure, like Attis, or Sarapis, or Mithras, could present a claim comparable to that of Jesus. And in keeping with the historic personality was the teaching: the infinite love and the redemptive purpose of God; the possibility and the actuality of a new life here and life eternal hereafter; the imminent end of the present æon, with the prospect of the deliverance of man and the universe from the demonic power of evil.

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In the second place, the gospel had also an immense advantage in being able to appeal to the testimony of the Christian life. The early Christian communities, despite all blemishes, were the nurseries of an enthusiasm in well-doing, of a passionate devotion to the highest, unparalleled in the religious history of the time. The history of early Christianity is the history of a power not only of religious revolution but of moral regeneration, even if the real fell short of the ideal.

In the third place, the influence of its Scriptures was part of the strength of the appeal of early Christianity. It is not only that the Gospels and the Epistles are so heart-searching and soul-compelling, but the adoption of the Old Testament as a Christian book gave to Christianity an antiquity and a prestige which it could not have derived from the apostolic writings. Here was unrolled the authoritative record of the Divine activity and the Divine will in creation and history, such as no other document, however ancient, could supply.

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In the fourth place, the gospel owed some measure of its appeal to the tendency of Christianity to adapt itself to its environment—a process which began with the universalism of Paul and was developed by the Apologists, who proclaimed Christianity as the true philosophy. But paganism tended to react on Christianity and to impart a sensuous, materialistic significance and content to Christian beliefs and rites, transforming in the case of the sacraments the symbol into the thing symbolized. None the less there was great missionary value for the spread of the gospel in the accommodating tendency, however questionable the effects it might have in course of time.

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In the fifth place, another powerful factor in the success of the gospel appeal is to be found in the personality of some of the Christian missionaries. Especially in the Apostolic Age the man was almost as important as his message—Peter, Paul, the

mystic author of the Fourth Gospel, and the host of apostles, prophets, and teachers who were their fellow-workers in the sustained missionary effort which carried the gospel, within a generation, from Jerusalem to Rome. But it was from the moral and religious, rather than the intellectual, side of personality that Christianity derived its power to conquer the world: from Nero to Diocletian at any rate the martyrs were the greatest missionaries.

Finally, the organization of the Christian communities lent a powerful force to the Christian mission. In the earliest period the apostles, prophets, and teachers were an itinerant class, 'speaking the Word of God' from city to city. But soon organization became a necessity, and it was developed in the struggle with Montanism and Gnosticism, till the Christian Church became a highly organized league, like that which the Empire represented in the political sphere. And the efficacy of the organization became irresistible when the religious and political spheres were allied, and Church and State united in the prosecution of the same end.

There was a time, not so very long ago, when it was customary to accentuate the isolation of Israel, as a people little, if at all, affected by the political and religious influences that shaped the life of her neighbours and that pervaded the great contemporary empires—as, in short, a people dwelling apart and alone. The historians, the archæologists, and the excavators have put an end to all that. They have made it indisputably and abundantly clear that Israel was profoundly affected, not only by the politics, but by the religions of the dominant empires, and very particularly by the religions of Egypt and Babylon.

How impossible it has become to think of Israel in isolation will be forcibly brought home to the most rigid traditionalist by a book on *Myth and Ritual* which has just been published by the Oxford University Press (10s. 6d. net)—a book so fascinating that we have paid it the rare compliment of reading most of it twice. The editor, Professor S.

H. HOOKE, who contributes two of the essays, one on 'The Myth and Ritual Pattern of the Ancient East,' and the other on 'Traces of the Myth and Ritual Pattern in Canaan,' has gathered a number of brilliant scholars together who can speak with authority on the themes he assigned them. Dr. A. M. BLACKMAN writes on 'Myth and Ritual in Ancient Egypt,' Mr. C. J. GADD on 'Babylonian Myth and Ritual,' Dr. F. J. HOLLIS on 'The Sun-cult and the Temple at Jerusalem,' Professor W. O. E. OESTERLEY on 'Early Hebrew Festival Rituals,' Dr. E. O. JAMES on 'Initiatory Rituals,' and Professor T. H. ROBINSON on 'Hebrew Myths.' All these discussions are prefaced by an illuminating Foreword from the pen of Canon D. C. SIMPSON.

The simple collocation of the words 'myth' and 'ritual' is the key to one aspect of the book, which repeatedly emphasizes the peculiarly intimate connexion between these two things. In worship certain things were done and certain things were said, and the things that were said were, in a sense, the exposition of the things that were being dramatically done, and they had a certain magical efficacy of their own. The Babylonian Creation Epic, for example, of which Mr. GADD gives a very vivid account, is not simply a piece of mythology setting forth the Babylonian view of origins; it was part of the worship. It was recited from beginning to end by the high priest, late in the evening of the fourth day of the festival of the New Year celebrations, before the image of Marduk. That Epic, Mr. GADD insists, was not composed merely as *belles lettres*; it was to be recited as part of the New Year ritual, and the recitation was believed to have a magical virtue. 'It is probably not too bold to affirm that all Babylonian mythology is magical in purpose, and directly or indirectly forms an efficient part of some incantation.'

For many readers the chief interest of the book will probably lie in its broad suggestion, supported by much convincing detail, that Hebrew ritual, and consequently Hebrew myth, reproduce, doubtless in a disintegrated form, the myth and ritual 'pattern' of the great religious systems of Egypt and Babylonia. Professor HOOKE has made this so

probable as to be practically certain for Canaan. His main thesis, he justly claims, appears to be substantiated; and that thesis is 'that the general pattern of Canaanite myth and ritual, though modified in transmission, was ultimately derived from an earlier pattern; to this earlier pattern Egypt, and, to a still greater degree Babylon, had contributed the dominant characteristics.' And Israel, we must remember, fell heir to the Canaanite civilization—to this aspect of it doubtless, as well as to others.

Now what was this general 'pattern,' as it is called? Following Professor Hooke, Dr. OESTERLEY summarizes it thus: (a) a dramatic representation of the death and resurrection of the god, with whom the king was identified; (b) a recitation or symbolic representation of the myth of creation; (c) a ritual combat, in which the triumph of the god over his enemies was depicted; (d) a sacred marriage; (e) a triumphal procession, in which the king played the part of the god; and (f) the importance of the king for the well-being of the community.

The simple reader of the Old Testament, uninitiated into the ways of ancient Oriental religion, may well ask in wonder where the Hebrew parallels to such a pattern are to be found. He can think of nothing remotely representing the death and resurrection of the god, and still less of the sacred marriage. But to some features of the 'pattern' there are undoubtedly analogies which cannot be fairly described as far-fetched. The Norwegian scholar Mowinckel has made it extremely probable that certain 'Processional Psalms' were sung by the Hebrews at a New Year Festival of the enthronement of Jehovah, and such a psalm as 24<sup>7-10</sup> may well have formed part of the ceremony of the entry of Jehovah into the sacred precincts, and, as such, have been sung not on one occasion only, but every year, and the Elephantine papyri have disclosed the curious fact that, in Egypt at any rate, even as late as the fifth century B.C., there was a goddess, Anath, associated with Jehovah.

These facts, together with certain others, lend

considerable plausibility to the following conjectural reconstruction of the myth-ritual pattern as it appeared in pre-exilic Israel. The reconstruction is Professor T. H. ROBINSON'S, and these are his words: 'It necessarily began with the removal of Jahweh and Anath from their home in the Temple, and with their occupation of a sacred hut in the neighbourhood of the sanctuary, probably in a vineyard. Then began the story of Creation, opening with the great contest of Jahweh against the powers of Chaos. This probably took different forms in different sanctuaries, but the issue was everywhere the victory of Jahweh. The divine marriage followed, consummated in the sacred hut, and this was succeeded by the death of Jahweh. After a period of lamentation He was restored to life, and, with His consort, was led to His home in the Temple, there to reign until the changes of the year brought back again the festal season.'

The reader to whom this reconstruction seems too outrageously bold to be probable must be referred to the arguments by which Dr. ROBINSON leads up to and supports it, and also to the general impression, left by the other essayists, of the dominance of the 'pattern' and of certain features in Hebrew religion which can be most naturally explained as in some intimate way connected with it. The prophets, of course, denounced such features as were inconsistent with their own nobler conceptions of religion; but those features were there.

There is much else in this striking book to rivet the attention. Of peculiar interest, for example, is Dr. HOLLIS'S contention that 'solar myth and ritual were to the front in Solomon's Temple,' that Sun-worship was prevalent in Israel and particularly in the Temple at Jerusalem, and that the Temple itself may have had its origin in an eclipse of the sun which took place in 948 B.C.

If all the suggestions in this book proved true, Old Testament religion would be more interesting and wonderful than ever; for while it borrowed heavily from other religions, it had an inherent quality which enabled it, on its higher reaches, on the one hand to eliminate all that was unworthy of

association with itself, and on the other to adapt to its own higher use such features as lent themselves to assimilation, and, in adapting, to transform them.

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Dr. Hensley HENSON, the Bishop of Durham, has issued a small book, *The Group Movement* (Milford ; 2s. 6d. net), in which he embodies his considered judgment of the 'Oxford Group' and its activities. The book contains the first part of his charge, delivered at the third quadrennial visitation of his diocese. He was led to this theme by two facts. He found that 'Groupism,' as he calls the Movement, had been interesting many church people in the diocese. And a considerable number of such people had come to him for counsel and direction on the matter. We have, then, in this little book of about eighty pages the conclusions of one of the most penetrating intellects in the religious world of our day on a subject of outstanding interest to religious people.

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First of all the Bishop deals with the Movement generally. In the second part of the charge he handles the specific characteristics of the Group propaganda. With regard to the Movement generally, he lays down certain general principles which seem to be relevant. In the first place, such Movements are to be found in an age of dislocation (such as has followed the War), and in an age also when the Church has largely sunk into an apathy. They are, therefore, in the nature of revolts and criticisms. And in this respect the Bishop recognizes their relevance and value. He has many severe and faithful words to say about the Church of our time. And, considered in this light, such Movements as 'Groupism' possess real spiritual inspiration.

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Further, Dr. HENSON recognizes that there have always been two types of religion, the church type and the sect type. Both types are rooted in the Apostolic Age. In other words, both are to be found in the New Testament—the Christianity of the Catholic Church, expressed in hierarchy, sacraments, and formal discipline, and the Christianity

of the individual disciple, expressed in personal reformation and mystical experience. The two are never easy with each other, and often they come into direct conflict. The sect utters a protest against some 'formalism' or other of the Church, and is apt on its own part to become an exaggeration and a tradition. The result is often separation and the formation of a new 'body.'

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The Oxford Group repudiates the idea of separation from the Church. Mr. Russell, for example, in 'For Sinners Only' says: 'They wished to be an inner church in all churches, irrespective of denomination, for the deepening of spiritual life within Christ's body. . . . In fact, a power-house within and without the churches.' No doubt, comments the Bishop, but then *every* sect begins with the same profession, and in a very interesting passage he gives chapter and verse. The Quakers, for example, never for a moment thought of forming another denomination at the outset. Yet to-day they are the most self-contained of religious communities. It was the same with the Methodists, as is very well known.

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One other general point occupies the Bishop for some time. The Groupists claim to be recovering and reproducing the religion of the Apostles. Their Movement is an essay in first-century Christianity, and the New Testament provides them with all the direction they need. They are seeking, in the words of one of their expositors, 'to recapture the life and power and fellowship in Christ as it was in New Testament days.' But this, Dr. HENSON contends, cannot reasonably be done. For the Apostolic Age was totally different from ours, and we are the children of our own age. We must perforce relate the gospel to our own environment, and the Christianity of the twentieth century can never be quite as the Christianity of the first. We had an example of a similar attempt in Mr. Hickson's faith-healing mission, which was hailed by many as a reproduction of primitive Christianity. And this Movement, as well as that led by Dr. Buchman, reveals the note of all sects—the tendency to exaggerate the originality and value of their own methods.

Passing now to the second part of the discussion, we find the Bishop at close grips with the Movement. The three outstanding features of Groupism are Sharing, Guidance, and Loyalty. Sharing means two things, confession and witness. Confession is essential, and Dr. HENSON thinks the Movement has done a real service in emphasizing this eminently Christian discipline. But *public* confession, or 'witnessing,' is a totally different thing, and a very questionable one. It is beset with so many perils, psychological and religious, that only the very strongest and humblest could steer a way safely through them. And these perils are never so serious as when they bear on those in whom, because of their youth, 'the self-confidence of inexperience supplements the unconscious pride of spiritual self-advertisement.'

Guidance, in the Group practice, is the unwholesome emphasis of a very real Christian fact. In the Group it is a normal experience, the ruling authority in daily life, conscious, detailed, and decisive, overriding reason and superseding the most carefully prepared plans. It may, and does sometimes, cancel the most important engagements. 'The faithful servant learnt from his Master each new morning how the day shall be spent.' If God, who is the Lord of all our time, wishes us to go to 'apparently fixed engagements' He will send us to them. If He wills us to break free from them He is able to guide us in that direction also. This doctrine, comments Dr. HENSON, if acted upon, would make social life impossible. God may guide us to make engagements, and then, when they are due, to break them. The Christian life is, and must be, a guided life, but it is a life directed by reason and conscience, illuminated by the Spirit of God, but free and responsible.

Loyalty is the third of the distinctive Group

words. If Dr. HENSON is correct in his facts this would seem to be the most serious defect in the Movement. While the individual adherent of the Group is encouraged to seek guidance and to follow it in detail, regarding it as Divinely authoritative, he is dominated by the Group; and beyond the Group to which he is attached there is an 'Inner Group' over which Dr. Buchman himself presides, and whose decisions are final. Groupism is thus a closed system, as close-knit and dominating as that of the Jesuits, which leaves to the individual Groupist little liberty and no ultimate responsibility. This amazing paradox is difficult to understand. The doctrine of 'Guidance' seems to be purely individualistic, yet the Group authority makes the individual completely subordinate to the system.

Inevitably we have been able only to summarize what is an extremely searching examination of a widely popular Movement. It will be seen that the Bishop of Durham is not aggressively sympathetic with the Group theory or the Group practice. But, in concluding his examination, Dr. HENSON has written some pages that ought to be read by all clergymen, and indeed by all churchmen. He admits the influence and power in the Group Movement. He recognizes the truth in it and the good it has achieved. This truth, and this good, are due to the really Christian elements in it. Its strength lies in these Christian factors, factors which are so largely absent from members of the Church. The unreality of much church religion, its tepid respectability, its insincerity, are humbly and frankly exposed in these searching pages. And the charge, as it ends, pushes home to mind and conscience the need of genuine repentance, the need of that surrender and that witness which have been to many members of these Groups new life and power and freedom.