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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

IN *The Prophet of the Heart*, the Rev. Frank CAIRNS has produced one of the best books on preaching and for the preacher that has appeared for long. It contains the 'Warrack Lectures on Preaching' for 1934, and is published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton (6s. net). One of the most effective and impressive lectures is that on 'The Sermon as an Act of Worship.' It is typical of the outlook in the whole book, which is not concerned to give hints on how to make sermons, or how to deliver them, or how to gather material for them, but is directed straight at the conscience of the preacher himself.

Mr. CAIRNS agrees that the idea of the sermon as an act of worship is not the popular one. The sermon is rather regarded as a rival to the worship, or at any rate as independent of it. 'We don't go to church to hear sermons but to worship God' is the attitude of many people. And many of our younger ministers are reported to be anxious to whittle down the sermon and reduce it almost to vanishing point. In certain churches it is quite usual for people to leave the church before the sermon, from no discourtesy to the minister but simply because they believe that the sermon is not an integral part of the worship.

Another class of people share this idea from an opposite pole. To them the sermon is the only thing that matters. They are 'sermon tasters,' and are much commoner in Scotland than in the

south. For it is in the non-liturgical forms of service that the sermon has been most violently dissevered from the worship. But it is not unknown in England. When Bishop Gore was Canon of Westminster the church filled up as he ascended the pulpit. In this view the worship is only a 'preliminary' to the preaching. Mr. CAIRNS mentions a third class to whom the sermon is of so little account that when the text is given out they settle themselves comfortably for sleep! There is a story of Dr. John Hutton, that, when a 'hearer' began to observe this ritual, the preacher turned to the other side of the church and said: 'Come, come, let us start level, and if—after I have been two minutes at my work—any person is disposed to sleep, he is quite entitled to do so.' There was no sleeping in church that day!

The significance of these various attitudes is ominous. They are due either to a wrong conception of the function of the sermon or to the failure of preachers to fulfil its proper function. What is urgently needed is that we should put the sermon *back inside the worship of God*. The drift away from this is leading the Church into the shallows of ineffectiveness and unfaithfulness. There are two views of preaching between which the preacher has to choose. It may be either an offering to God which he makes with a clear conscience, or it may be something which could not be regarded as possessing the authority of the Word of God or any divine sanction whatever, being either cheap

and tawdry or simply an exhibition of erudition or literary skill.

There is a history behind the place which the sermon occupies in Protestant worship. At the Reformation, just at the point in the service where according to the form of the Roman Catholic Church the Host was elevated, the Reformers put the sermon. 'The central place which had been taken by the Mass was claimed for the reading and preaching of the Word in a context of prayer. This is expressed in the Ordination Service of the Church of England in which the priest receives into his hands not a chalice but a Bible.' The tremendous significance of this is obvious. The Mass is a symbolic act in which the Church seeks to bring home to the worshippers the sense both of the presence of God and of their response as the only true worship of God. And that is what the sermon which takes its place is to be with us.

But even further than this. The sermon takes the place of the offering of the Host for a sound reason. A symbol may produce reverence or awaken devotion, but it cannot give knowledge. And it is vital not only that we should worship but that we should know what kind of God we worship. Unless that is made clear to the worshipper, it is not possible to have Christian worship at all. A crucifix will not do this. Nor will any symbolism, even that of the Holy Supper, without the voice that explains. And the Church that silences or muffles that voice opens the door to all sorts of error, as history shows. It was the prophet, and not the priest, who educated Israel in the knowledge of God. And therefore the function of the sermon is to proclaim the Word that inspires worship.

The author quotes words of the late Principal Denney which deserve a paragraph to themselves. 'If the sermon in church is what it ought to be—if it is not an exhibition of the preacher but of Jesus—there should be nothing in it even conceivably in contrast with worship, but the very reverse. What can be more truly described as worship than hearing the Word of God as it ought to be heard,

hearing it with penitence, with contrition, with faith and self-consecration, with vows of new obedience? If this is not worship in spirit and in truth, what is?' So tremendous a thing is preaching, and so incapable of it is any one till he realizes his unfitness.

The lecturer then addresses himself to the question: How is all this to be realized in practice? And he offers some suggestions which may be briefly indicated. First of all, this conception of the sermon puts the preacher alongside his people. 'I have not the slightest idea,' wrote Dr. Oman, 'of what makes preaching popular . . . yet I think I have now a pretty clear idea of what makes it edifying; it is what a man is saying to his own soul as well as to the souls of others. In this way a Sunday may be for the minister himself a day of refreshing from the Lord. Otherwise, it is an impoverishing as well as a dull drudgery.'

Further, the sermon must be placed in a context of prayer. It is here, at any rate from one standpoint, that the prayers in the Divine Service are of such moment. The problem is already solved for churches with a liturgical service. But for churches where 'free prayer' is practised the point is of urgent importance. Mr. CAIRNS reveals in this connexion an interesting fact. When he was in Sydney as a visiting preacher for some months he found that while the people could not tolerate read sermons, they not only endured the reading of his prayers, but showed him that, whatever might be the result of his sermons, there was no doubt that through his prayers God poured His grace into many souls.

In the third place, it ought to be kept in view that the preacher is not in the pulpit to air his own opinions, but to deliver the message of God. One of the weaknesses in the ministry to-day is the weakening of a sense of responsibility in preachers for what they preach. 'I shall get to my watchtower and wait to see what the Lord shall say unto me.' This from Habakkuk does not simply mean attention, willingness to hear, but, as Sir George Adam Smith reminds us, implies the sense of some

post given us to hold, the truth given into our keeping, the faith by which men have lived in the past, to whose fidelity we owe everything that has lit up the face of God in the generations which have passed. And what has been said applies to the handling of our subjects as well as their choice. It is possible to preach on 'God is love' in such a way of theologizing and argument as to make the whole head ache and the whole heart sick. The heart makes the theologian, but it also makes the preacher.

And finally, still bearing on the sermon as an act of worship, one of the preacher's supreme duties is teaching. He has to do with many who are spiritually blind, and who cannot worship aright till their eyes are opened. It is amazing to find so many people in our churches who have not the least idea of what Christian living means. It is incredible, but it is true, that they have never attempted to live a Christian life because they do not know what a Christian life is. The classic example is John Newton, the great hymn-writer. He was converted during a terrific storm in the Atlantic when he was engaged in the nefarious work of carrying African negroes to the plantations to sell them as slaves. And he went on with this abominable trade for years without the slightest idea that he was doing anything which was inconsistent with the Christian standard. This function of the sermon as teaching may be said to be an aid to worship rather than an act of worship. But it is because the main aim of the teaching is to exalt the grace of God that the sermon, even in this aspect, may be regarded as a devotion.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton said recently, 'We have found all the questions that can be found. It is time we gave up looking for questions and started looking for answers.' Whether man's inquiring mind has indeed reached the limit and asked every possible question may well be doubted, but certainly the mind of to-day is overrun with questions. It seems as if every man were asking his neighbour in despair why is the state of the

world what it is, and where can we find an escape from the present impasse. It is time we were not only looking for answers but finding them if we and our civilization are to escape impending doom.

Now there are some who with deep and unshakable conviction believe that a satisfying answer is to be found to men's deepest questions, and who are prepared to say quite definitely that 'Jesus Christ, Himself—the Jesus of history, but the Jesus alive to-day, our great Contemporary, freshly understood, freshly obeyed—can and will, if men will but have Him, bring humanity out of bondage, and give light to those that sit in darkness and in the land of the shadow of death.'

This being so, one of the most vital of all the needs of to-day is to publish this, and to make it understandable. To this task the BISHOP OF CROYDON (who to many students may be better known as the Rev. Edward S. Woods) has addressed himself in *What is This Christianity?* (Hodder & Stoughton; 3s. 6d. net). To say that it is the best book that he has written is high praise, but it is merited, for the treatment is extraordinarily lucid and every chapter is packed with good things.

Christianity is first of all an *event*. It takes its character from something which actually happened at a certain point in history. 'There did actually appear in the little country of Palestine, round about the years 4 B.C. to A.D. 29, this human being, named Jesus, who did and said certain things, and lived in His own unique way, and left an ineffaceable impression on His contemporaries, some of whom were quite sure that His death was very far from being the end of Him.' The man who would understand what Christianity is must begin with this life. No sounder advice can be given than this, 'Begin with the religion which Jesus practised, and you will get on to the religion of which Jesus is the centre.' In some strange way the whole canvas becomes alive as you look. The figure seen there casts a spell, and with ever-deepening wonder you follow, past Gethsemane and Calvary, to the open tomb in Joseph's garden.

But this is not the end of the event. Jesus cannot be understood unless account is taken of the impression He made on the minds and hearts of those who companied with Him, and who afterwards became His witnesses to the world. 'When the earthly drama was finished, when Jesus had left His little group of friends—left them in the sense that His visible presence was withdrawn—when, with the happenings of the last four years still vividly in mind, they began to consider carefully and soberly what it all meant, there was surely left in each of their minds one tremendous, irresistible, staggering conclusion: the conclusion that *the eternal God Himself had done this thing* and of set purpose.' To this must be added the record of the transforming power of the new religion as manifest through the Christian ages. 'Those happenings, historically certain and infinitely significant, are all an integral part of "the fact of Christ." Christianity as event, as God-in-action, came to a supreme focus in that one life and personality of Jesus of Nazareth; but the direct divine activity is very far indeed from ending there.'

Christianity is next an *experience*—an experience of God. When we find that in the historic fact of Christ God has done something, we are inevitably led on to ask what is the character of the God who acts thus. Jesus' name for this God was Father, and 'the word endorses and amplifies all the highest thought of God which can be found in religious experience before Christ came, both among the Jews and in other nations.' It implied a God who is not only personal, but who thinks and cares and loves. Men had sometimes dared to imagine that God must be something like that; now they knew. And this fact, now revealed, is of cosmic significance. It decides the very nature of the universe and of God's relation to mankind. It is found to involve the taking away of the sin of the world. 'If God had indeed, as the Christian claims, an all-embracing purpose of good for the beings He has made, then a Divine necessity rests upon Him to deal effectively with this sinister power which at every point seems to frustrate His purpose.' This action of God comes to a climax in

the death and resurrection of Jesus. 'Explain it as you will, the story of the Passion, the bare spectacle of Jesus in Gethsemane, on the *via dolorosa*, and finally nailed to the Cross, has in fact touched the hearts and transformed the lives of uncounted millions of men and women during the centuries since these things took place.' And how is this to be accounted for? It is that whatever was achieved by God in Christ in that death and resurrection, was universal, cosmic, eternal in its quality. 'Jesus crucified in Palestine by a combination of Jews and Romans somewhere about the year A.D. 29 is on the face of it, however much it revealed of His own heart of compassion, an isolated fact. If, however, He was what this book contends He was, then behind that one great act in space and time lies the very character of God throughout eternity, always and everywhere with unquenchable love meeting human sin and bearing human suffering.'

Further, Christianity is a *fellowship*. It is not a mere system of morality. Jesus was chiefly concerned to get men into right loving relation to God in the assurance that that would lead on to brotherly relations between men. 'That Christianity is not just a virtuous way of living, but a God-centred way of living, makes it, in the long run, far more effective in bettering human life than lofty political creeds or programmes of social amelioration.' The God of Jesus has no favourites, but His love embraces all men without distinction of nationality, race, or colour. 'When men come to believe in *that* God, then automatically the secret sign of a universal freemasonry is theirs.' The fruits of this spirit are manifold, and cannot be laid down specifically in a code to meet every case. In general it may be suggested that 'a Christian—at his best—does the kind of thing which a man would do whose life is centred on the God of Jesus Christ.' He will oppose all that is alien to human brotherhood. He is out to establish the rule of Christ in every department of human affairs. It is obvious that there is a woeful lack of fellowship in the world of to-day. Communist and Fascist are desperately striving by methods of violence to coerce men into co-operation and unity, and in the perilous state of the nations

their creed has to many the inspiration of a gospel. In this crisis 'the church is challenged as never before to speak the clear word and convict men of the supremacy of God over all human systems. What the Communists are trying to do by force and fear, we of the Christian Church must show can be done, and done far more effectively, by faith and love.'

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This leads to the aspect of Christianity as an *adventure*. It is not a religion of escape, except in so far as it means an escape from the prison-house of self into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. 'When a man finds, and is found by, the stupendous Reality which is Christ, he discovers himself to be living in a new world.' He is now set free to serve Christ the King, and to help to build His Kingdom. This involves a high adventure both in Christian thinking and in Christian living. It works from within outwards. It means 'bringing every thought—and every deed, and every social custom, and every national and international relation—into captivity to the obedience of Christ.' An adventure fit to fire the enthusiasm of youth and try the strength of the stoutest heart.

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Only the briefest reference can be made to the closing chapters, in which Christianity is presented as a *society* (the Church) and as a *victory*. The BISHOP closes with a striking illustration and appeal. 'Imagine some entirely remote island somewhere

in the middle of the Pacific, and imagine, for the sake of argument, that this island had remained completely aloof from the world's life and the progress of civilization; the inhabitants' manners, morals, transport, and amenities belonging, shall we say, to the Stone Age. Then suppose that some one came among them and began to teach them what the twentieth-century world knows of wireless and flying, and the conquest of disease, and the beauty of the earth, and the wonders of literature, and the possibilities of a new and better kind of joint human living based on understanding and co-operation. As compared with their old outlook and habits and possibilities, the new way would seem to the inhabitants of this hypothetical island as sheer miracle; yet the one who taught them would know that all the good he was bringing them was not in the least irrational, but achieved simply by bringing higher and more wonderful laws of the universe into operation. Compared with Jesus, we are spiritually in the Stone Age. But He says to us, in effect, that there is no reason why we should not emerge from our ancient and gloomy prison-house, and live with Him in a realm, in an order of things, where the love of God operates freely and unimpeded for the good of humanity. He said, when He was on earth, and still says, in effect, that that day would come whenever men would together look at God through His eyes, and together lay hold of what God waits and longs to give. *Why not Now and To-day?*'

Some Outstanding New Testament Problems.

II. 'L' and the Structure of the Lucan Gospel: A Study of the Proto-Luke Hypothesis.

BY J. M. CREED, D.D., ELY PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY, CAMBRIDGE.

A LATE and an untrustworthy tradition makes the evangelist St. Luke a painter. We need not stay to consider the authenticity of the *icon* of the Virgin Mary ascribed to the evangelist which the Empress Eudocia is said to have sent to Pulcheria

from Jerusalem, but we shall recognize an appropriateness in the legend: for of all the evangelists it is Luke who has provided the painters of Christendom with most of their favourite themes, and his Gospel abounds in scenes which portray