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# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

DR. P. CARNEGIE SIMPSON is a great churchman and a recognized authority on all matters pertaining to Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical order as these are understood in the evangelical churches. In the Chalmers Lectures for 1934, delivered to the divinity students of the Church of Scotland, he has made a most notable contribution to a great subject. He writes in no polemical spirit, but with a weight of learning, a strong sanity, and breadth of view which are very impressive.

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His lectures are published under the title of *The Evangelical Church Catholic* (Hodder & Stoughton ; 6s. net). After an introductory lecture precedence is given to a lecture on 'the religion of the evangel,' for, as Archbishop Söderblom said, 'The first thing is the evangelic.' Of this lecture a brief outline may be given.

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The word 'gospel' is one of those deceptive words the sound of which easily does duty for the reality. If, however, we seek to define it we may say in the most general terms that it is 'the answer to two fundamental questions. One is the question of the character of God, including His relationship to man, the other is that of the meaning of life, including its deliverance from what threatens to destroy and defeat it.'

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The question for the gospel concerning God is not merely that of His existence. That does not carry us very far. The science of to-day shows

signs of being more favourable to a spiritual view of the universe, but 'a universe which is ultimately a mathematical formula—as we are told by science to-day the universe is—no more assures our spirits of their Divine Father, or gives our lives a Divine Friend and Saviour, than does a universe of "brute matter." . . . A gospel is needed to answer that in the scientific age of an Eddington and a Whitehead as much as it was needed in the scientific age of a Huxley or a Tyndall.'

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The second question which a gospel must deal with is the problem of human life. And here we have to take account not only of the mystery, trouble, and sorrow which overshadow the human lot, but still more deeply of the fact that some 'moral poison' has infected human nature. 'Whether or not it arose through what the Churches call a "fall," and whether or not it is to be described as "sin"—a word hardly to be found in the modern vocabulary—it is there.' The evidence of its presence and of its blighting power is everywhere manifest, and because of it 'human life is not its own saviour and often is its own destroyer.' Neither intellectual knowledge nor material civilization is a cure for this. 'It needs a further word—the word of a gospel.'

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This gospel is to be found in the fact of Christ. He is the answer to our questions about God, and He is the solution of the problem of human life. It must be clearly kept in view that this gospel is

essentially personal; it is Christ Himself. And the Church, to which the stewardship of the gospel has been committed, must ever guard against depersonalizing it. This happens when the chief emphasis is laid on the Church as an institution, or when the gospel is conceived as a matter of doctrinal propositions. It also happens when the gospel is conceived as subjective religious emotion, or intellectualized as a mere scheme of ideals or an ethical system. 'I had rather preach,' said Principal Denney, 'with a crucifix in my hand and the feeblest power of moral reflection than have the finest insight into ethical principles and no Son of God who came by blood.'

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The response to this gospel, that is the response to Christ Himself, may be as varied as the variety of human nature. 'The Christ has been one; the contacts have been many. There have been those with whom the *nexus* is a definite and conscious conversion; those for whom it is the sacraments; those in whom it is an uneventful but real growth as life goes on; those to whom it is the experience of the "inner light"; those to whom it is by the practical service of humanity for Christ's sake and in His name. Of all such, He who is the evangel says, "Him that cometh to Me"—by any way—"I will in no wise cast out." Every way that really leads to and ends in Christ is essentially evangelical; and His gospel is as large as His own Personality.'

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While this is true, and urgently needing to be said in certain quarters, ultra-evangelical as well as ultra-ecclesiastical, at the same time it is true that the evangelical message has often been obscured and distorted by being presented in wrong ways. Accordingly we must consistently affirm what we believe to be the character of the genuine religion of the evangel, and set forth that version of it which seems to be most in accord with the mind and spirit of Christ. There are, it will be found, 'three characteristics of the genuine religion of the evangel—of the way, that is, in which the evangelical Christian responds to the gospel about God and about life which is in Christ.'

The first is a sense of infinite indebtedness to God for the gift of Jesus Christ. 'This, more than anything, gives to evangelical religion what may be called its attitude, which is the attitude of one who, in Christ, has received from God what he has neither made nor merited.' Distinctions are drawn between ethical and non-ethical religions, but an equally great distinction is to be drawn between 'religions of ethic in which we attain a greater or less degree of merit, and the religion of the evangel, in which, in the first place, God gives to us and does so even when we have done ill.' Christianity, while it is of course ethical, is primarily and distinctively the religion of the God who so loved the world that He gave. 'It is the sense of this which strikes in evangelical religion the indebtedness of which I am speaking. . . . A man who has no appreciation of it, though he may be in many ways a good man and a Christian, has hardly seen the gospel and has certainly not yet felt it.'

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The second characteristic is an entire trust in Christ and in Him alone. 'The God who is revealed in Christ and who gave us Christ can be relied on as really friendly to us and as more than friendly—as forgiving and loving and our Father; and to this about the character of God we can hold, despite many unsolved mysteries and problems in the world and in life, and despite, also, the fears of our own hearts and the accusations of our consciences.' The simplicity of this, however, is continually in danger of being obscured, on the one hand by legalism, on the other hand by ecclesiastical formalism. Legalism says we must make good our standing before God by racial privilege as among the Jews, or by working up a moral credit balance as in Luther's day. Ecclesiastical formalism asserts that only through certain channels and certain persons can the free grace of God be guaranteed to come. 'Of these systems it must be said that a God who will receive men only if they have in their hands a racial passport or a moral bank-book with a credit balance of good works, or who, further, will deal with them only through certain official channels, is not other than a *different kind of Person* from the Father pictured in Christ, who is waiting for His prodigal and bankrupt children, and is ready

to meet them whenever and wherever and however they turn to Him.'

The third characteristic is 'a loyalty of life to Christ.' By that is meant an obedience which is given in a spirit of freedom, and which is not prescribed and controlled by rule, but is inspired and guided by love. St. Paul is much concerned about the maintaining of the liberty which we have in Christ. He will not suffer it to be cribbed and confined by any system of external regulations. This freedom has always been viewed with suspicion by the ecclesiastical mind. Undoubtedly it has its dangers, and there are timid souls who feel more secure when they have surrendered their wills to the keeping of some external authority. But it is not to this that the gospel calls us, but to the obedience of free men in Christ. In other words, human personality is not only respected in Christ, but developed. It is not to be questioned that 'in many cases, this surrender of the things which constitute personality may be made with sincere consecration of spirit. But it is not the response to the gospel which we see in the New Testament. The religion of the evangel is not of this kind. It is the religion of a loyalty to Christ which is safeguarded, not by external rule, but in personal love, and is free because its law is the spirit of Christ in the heart, in whom we find, not only our salvation, but ourselves.'

In his recently published volume on *Christian Theology*, Dr. A. C. HEADLAM, Bishop of Gloucester, has given to the world the lectures which theological students were fortunate to receive from him while he was a Professor of Divinity. The volume contains a comparatively elaborate account of the history of the Christian Doctrine of God, and more especially of the History of Christology. One turns with interest to the concluding chapter in which Dr. HEADLAM indulges in reflections upon the way he has traversed.

What is the value, he asks, of the erudition which such instruction is designed to impart? Has it any practical utility? Is it not religion that men

require, not theology? Should we not preach an undogmatic Christianity?

The first consideration Dr. HEADLAM would have us notice is that, although their influence is not always realized, intellectual conceptions are of paramount importance in life. Religion, if it is to be of real influence upon life, must satisfy the intellect as well as the emotions. The first words of the Lord's Prayer, 'Our Father,' are simple enough from a religious point of view, but they contain a fundamental dogmatic truth. Indeed no one's religion, however simple it may be, can be independent of dogmatic questions. A clergyman who has not studied dogmatic questions will hardly be able to meet the religious difficulties which often trouble quite simple people.

A second consideration is that Christian truth demands restatement from time to time. The intellectual conceptions of mankind are constantly changing. There was restatement in the time of the Schoolmen and again at the time of the Reformation. But if the gospel message is to be commended to-day, it should be in the language, not of the thirteenth or the sixteenth, but of the twentieth century. For this we must know what the gospel message is, what are the fundamental truths of the Christian tradition.

The fundamental truths which we have to teach are belief in God, belief in Jesus Christ, and belief in the Holy Spirit. And it is because the doctrine of the Trinity guards carefully all these truths that the Church adheres so closely to what some have thought an irrational creed. But even in itself the doctrine of the Trinity has always made an appeal to the religious consciousness as guarding the mysteriousness of the universe.

Belief in God is of necessity expressed in human language, much of which must be symbolical and relative, but in relation to the moral attributes of God nothing relative or symbolical must be allowed. Our moral instincts are the strongest proofs of God's existence, and the mercy, justice, and love of God must be real, and higher than ours. It should be

the aim of Christian ministers to make belief in God real and vital. For this a sound intellectual grip of theistic belief is required.

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Belief in Jesus Christ is summed up in the Incarnation and the Atonement, and no belief in Him is adequate which does not guard the reality of revelation and the reality of redemption. Unless Jesus Christ be really God, He cannot reveal God or redeem man. That is why the belief in the true divinity of Christ is fundamental. The lofty conception of God that we must inevitably form at the present day makes us feel that God must be brought nearer to us, and that is what Christ effects through His life and teaching.

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Belief in the Holy Spirit is one of the most fundamental facts of individual religion. All religious people have the feeling that God speaks to them in their hearts and souls. But we should not forget the corporate aspect of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit as inspiring and guiding the Church. Because we believe that the Spirit has guided the Church in ages gone by, we accept the fundamental truths that have always been taught on the authority of the Church, although we cannot limit the action of the Holy Spirit to the past. The belief in the Spirit as working now as in the past through inspired human intellects is vital to the Church.

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There are two questions that even believing Christians sometimes ask themselves: What reason or reasons have we for believing that Christ is living? And, secondly, what distinction is there between an experience of a living Christ and an experience of a living God? With regard to the former question, as Dr. A. C. MCGIFFERT points out in *Christianity as History and Faith*, reviewed elsewhere, it is not enough to furnish the proofs that Christ did actually rise from the dead nineteen hundred years ago.

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Unless the event is vitally connected with the age in which we live, unless it has a vital significance for our modern life, it is not easy to see how we can go on accepting it indefinitely. The case is

parallel with that of the belief in God. The old Deistic idea of God as a Being who once created the world and then took His hands off and left it to run without any interference from Him led inevitably to atheism. If God is not present and active, He might as well be dispensed with altogether. And so there came the belief in Divine Immanence. God was brought back into the life of the world. Even so, if the resurrection of Christ were an isolated event, it would in the end come to mean nothing. If the belief is to be a reality it must become part and parcel of the life of to-day.

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‘It is my own conviction that the Resurrection is vitally concerned with our age—that it really means a living Christ still active and powerful among us.’ In what way, and by what means is His presence shown? we may ask. And Dr. MCGIFFERT shows us how. One way is to be seen in the advancing ethical ideals of our time. We are to-day witnessing a tremendous growth in Christian ideals. They are dynamic, full of life, and developing all the time to meet our modern conditions. And they are Christian ideals.

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The Christian conscience of to-day is sensitive on many matters on which the conscience of our fathers was obtuse—slavery, the drink and drug traffic, religious liberty, the emancipation of women, the economic status of the working classes, the relations of capital and labour. It is quite certain our ideals are rising. And it is as certain that the spirit of Christ is behind them and behind their development. Is Christ still alive and present with us? What more could He do if He were here in the flesh? Is not His spirit moving forward with us in the great advances of the human spirit?

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Secondly, the living Christ is to be found in our Christian faith in the future, in our faith in a better world still to be—a faith often derided yet the real secret of all the moral advance we are making. What does this faith mean if not a living instead of a dead Christ? Faith in a better future does not arise out of the earth as we know it. The world to-day is full of the most depressing disillusionments. The idea of a mechanical and

necessary progress is, as Dean Inge so often reminds us, a baseless one. Faith in progress comes from a living Christ, and it is a faith in which are rooted the labour and the sacrifice that will alone make those better things actual. It is Christ who creates the faith that is never satisfied but is ever reaching forth to better things.

Further, there is also moral power here that testifies to living force and not mere dead futility. It is certain that multitudes of people find in Christ inspiration and strength for daily living. Could the inspiration be any greater, and the pressure of spirit on spirit more compelling if Christ were actually with us in the flesh? Not thus do we follow the dead. Only as for us is any one alive, only so far can he dominate our lives as Christ still dominates the lives of His disciples.

Once more, and just as truly, Christ is known in a type of experience like that which came to the man on the way to Emmaus. If Christ were with

us, would not our hearts burn within us, would we not feel the joy of His presence, even if our eyes were holden and we did not see Him? And is not this experience of joy and inspiration the experience of those who are doing Christ's work, following in His footsteps, living in His spirit? Is there not something about it that transcends the common life? This is fellowship with a living Christ.

And then comes the question: Is not this the same as fellowship with God? How do you distinguish the two? The answer is: it *is* the same, and we do not distinguish them. 'I for one cannot distinguish in my own experience between the living God and the living Christ. It is the experience of Christians that, as they find God in the Jesus of the Gospels, so now they find Him in the living Christ, working out His divine purposes, illuminating the minds of His children, imparting to them of His power, kindling their joy, offering Himself for fellowship with them as they respond by giving themselves eagerly and gladly to the doing of His will.'

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## Jesus as a Poet Teacher.

BY THE REVEREND CANON J. M. C. CRUM, M.A., CANTERBURY.

IN April 1925 died Professor C. F. Burney, who had written in the previous December the preface of his book, *The Poetry of our Lord*. He was not there to fight its battles, and the attack on his position, and the defence of it are largely the exclusive business of Aramaic scholars, and yet, the question whether our Lord did adopt for His teaching the use of poetry is one which must have suggested itself to many who know no Aramaic, and a consideration of what is implied in Professor Burney's hypothesis is of such many-sided interest, that an essay may be allowed to discuss the subject from a general view of it.

And, first of all, it is worth while to ask, what is poetry? A poet is a poet because he has something quite unprosaic to say, but what is it that distinguishes his sayings as poetry? Where do his

ordinary sayings leave off and where does the poetry begin? What constitutes a poem?

Would you not say that when you classify sayings as 'poems' you are satisfied that their form has conformed to some conventional law. Under the stress of the thinker and speaker's feeling, he must have been moved to use a kind of dancing of words to express himself. His language must have moved with an energy and vitality as different from ordinary talk as dancing is from ordinary walking. It must have been set in such a motion as is free and yet requires and accepts and welcomes laws to move by, as dancing does. In any poem you are aware of a tension between two tendencies, there is some kind of convention observed, some rhythm of stresses or syllables, some formal mould of lines or stanzas, some ornament of alliteration or rhymes.