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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

It may be taken as an evidence of the fullness of the truth as it is in Jesus that the Church's presentation of it varies from time to time, with the emphasis laid now on this aspect, now on that, as if in a continually renewed endeavour to do justice to its all-round completeness.

In recent times much prominence has been given to the social gospel. The conception of the Kingdom of God has been predominant. It has been taken for granted that the social gospel was the original gospel subsequently obscured by doctrinal and churchly tradition. 'Christians had their authority for a social task in the teachings of Jesus, and they approached the future with a clear sense of direction and with a faith that they could be co-workers with God in building his kingdom in this world.'

To-day there is a perceptible movement away from this position. A doubt has arisen, and is making itself felt strongly, as to whether the social gospel is the principal thing and whether it sufficiently interprets the concept of the Kingdom of God. Where before there was clarity and confidence there is now a manifest doubt and hesitation. 'It seems as though the leaders of Christian thought had just succeeded in waking up large sections of the church to its social task and then themselves had grown uncertain and cold concerning that task.'

The question is raised as to the relation of the gospel to modern society. Can we really find in the simple teaching of Jesus a sufficient guide for the right organizing of our complex social system? This topic is treated in an interesting article on 'The Relevance of the Ethic of Jesus for Modern Society,' by Mr John C. Bennett of Auburn Theological Seminary. It is published in the current number of *Religion in Life*, an American Christian Quarterly which is always fresh and vital.

First of all we must be clear as to the content of the ethic of Jesus before we consider its applications. Briefly summarized, the ethic of Jesus is rooted in His religion. God is the pattern for ethical life, and the worth of human persons is known from God's love for them. The moral problem is primarily a problem of the inner life. Out of the heart of man proceed all those evils that vex humanity. Love is the supreme demand, love without barriers, love absolute not only in its inclusiveness but also in its intensity, love to the utmost point of forgiveness and self-sacrifice. At the same time a balance is preserved between love and an aggressive dealing with evil. 'There is what John Mackay calls the "Christ of the whip." He came to cast fire on the earth, to bring not peace but a sword. His denunciations of the Pharisees and his cleansing of the temple, instead of being blemishes to be explained away, reveal the balance of his character.' Further in His scale of values, while first place is given to the highest spiritual good, room is made for the primary needs of bread and health. 'He saw the

evil of wealth and the evil of hunger. He avoided the extremes of ascetic religion and of this-worldly religion, of Hinduism and of Communism.' And, withal, He laid stress on the moral and religious importance of humility. 'One should be as receptive as a child. The poor, the meek, those who know that they are sinners—they are the folk who are most fit for the Kingdom of God.'

Now in trying to apply this ethic to modern conditions the first difficulty we encounter lies in the difference between our age and the age of Jesus. This difference has been stressed. Jesus, it is said, had no knowledge of science and art, no notion of natural law, no conception of the mastery over Nature which man was to attain and by means of which he would profoundly alter the conditions of human life. 'Those who speak in this way are trying to say one thing which needs to be said. They are protesting against the assumption of much conventional Christianity that Christ is "all sufficient" for salvation, against the neglect of specific modern methods for dealing with the soul and society.'

The fallacy underlying this argument lies in the assumption that the things that have changed are more important than the things that endure. Much of the talk about the revolutionary changes in human life which this age of ours has brought to pass is highly exaggerated. After all, these changes when they are examined are found to be very superficial. 'There has been no important change in human nature, in our basic needs and emotions, in the effect of suffering and sin and death upon us, in our essential dependence upon an apparently indifferent nature, in what we most admire, in our experience of God. The permanence of great literature, the permanence of Plato suggests that there should be no *a priori* difficulty about the permanence of Jesus.'

A more serious difficulty lies in the apocalyptic elements in the teaching of Jesus. These have been taken to mean that 'Jesus had no ethic which is relevant to the task of changing society gradually, by human effort,' but only an ethic suitable for the short period before the coming of the Kingdom. But it is evident that while Jesus did think in terms of apocalyptic He was not obsessed by it. He put new moral and religious content into it. He avoided an immoral fatalism by His emphasis on repentance as the condition of entrance into the Kingdom, and He was not blind to the values of common life. It was of the essence of His sane apocalyptic that He held the balance even between the eternal and the temporal, and looked at human life from the only true standpoint. 'It was one of the results of his apocalyptic form of thought that the ethic of Jesus retained an absoluteness which might not have been possible if he had been interested in the next steps for the Jews in Palestine in the first century instead of the conditions for entrance into the eternal kingdom of God. As it is he has set forth an ethic which is not fully applicable to any age but which is the regulative ideal for every age.'

This raises the question of whether the ethic of Jesus can be applied in any social system without compromise. Glib talk about applying His principles is unreal, for no social order in this present world is or ever will be in the full sense Christian. Of course, 'for the individual Christian, so far as his inner life is concerned, the ideal of absolute love is not so remote from the possibility of realisation that we need to raise the question of its relevance.' But social conditions place limits on the full expression of the Christian ideal. 'We are involved in the behavior of the nation but we cannot reasonably expect that the policy of the nation will rise above enlightened self-interest. Indeed, at present we should have reason to be thankful if nations were to rise to that level. We are involved in the practices which make possible our economic privileges, and the only real escape from responsibility for them is to ally ourselves with those who from motives and by methods which are ethically mixed are seeking to overthrow the economic order by which we profit. In either case we are forced to compromise.'

Are we, then, shut up to a double standard of morality, a Christian standard for the individual, and a sub-Christian standard for the group? Here the ethic of Jesus can help us in two ways.

It provides a norm by which the present social order is to be judged. There must ever be a sense of tension between the Christian ideal and the best possible social good open to us. 'That tension gives us the correct perspective from which to see ourselves and society, and it is a necessary spur to keep us at the task of raising the level of social possibility. To relax that tension is to run the risk of identifying what is at present inevitable with what is divinely ordained. We must be wary about calling any human institution a "schopfungsordnung" (an order of creation), for man has had too large a part in the creation of such institutions to identify them, no matter how stubbornly resistant to human wills, with the will of God.'

Next there is the encouragement to do something, in the assurance that the next-best-thing-to-be-done has behind it the authority of the ideal. There is no situation so bad that there is not some best thing to be done in it, and our sense of shortcoming should be based, not upon the distance between the next-best-thing-to-be-done and the absolute ideal, but rather upon our weakness and failure in doing it, or upon careless or biased choice among the possibilities which are open to us. 'The worst danger which confronts those who emphasize the absoluteness of the ethic of Jesus is that they will reduce all possibilities to the same level as equally infected with sin. Capitalism, fascism, socialism, communism would be equally outside the circle of the concern of the Christian as a Christian. This tendency is characteristic of theology which is under Barthian influence. It is good to see that Brunner carefully avoids it. He says that the Christian must seek the better and the more just even though it is not fully Christian. As he puts it, though all economic and political possibilities are relative they are not equal. If we combine that warning with the conception of vocation which is central in Brunner's ethical thought it can be said that the vocation of the Christian is to do the next-best-thing though it fall short of the absolute ideal. The tension between that next-best-thing and the Christian ideal will keep him in a state of restlessness which at every stage of the process will put the burden of proof on all compromises, and which will constrain him to leave nothing undone to create new levels of possibility. . . . If Christian love means anything it will constrain us to work for radical social change and it will not allow us to be turned aside by sophisticated interpretations of Jesus, by theories of determinism, by perfectionist scruples, or by the opiate of a pessimistic eschatology.'

The main feature of Canon Lindsay DEWAR's *Man and God*, reviewed in another column, is its emphasis upon the empirical argument for belief in God, which is the argument from religious experience. This, he says, is the most fundamental argument, because apart from it we cannot be led to God at all. As Clement Webb says: 'Only in and through religious experience have we any knowledge of God. What are called arguments for the existence of God will never prove to those who lack such experience the existence of God, but only at most the need of assuming, in order to account for our experiences other than religious, a Designing Mind, or a Necessary Being, or an Absolute Reality.'

Schleiermacher recognized the primacy of religious experience, and this has made him such an important influence in the history of religion. But he does not mean by religious experience the immediate apprehension of God as adorable. The feeling of absolute dependence, which is for Schleiermacher the essence of religion, is universally bound up with self-consciousness, but is independent of all specific experience. It is continuously present and remains self-identical while all other states of mind are changing. Clearly there is here no immediate apprehension of God. On the contrary, God is known only by inference from the feeling of absolute dependence.

In the 'Discourses' Schleiermacher appears to write in a somewhat different strain. His language there appears to indicate that religious experience means an immediate as distinct from an inferred apprehension of God, such as it means in 'The Christian Faith.' But he is no closer to the position from which Canon DEWAR argues, that in religious experience God is immediately apprehended. For

in the 'Discourses' he gives religion a definitely pantheistic turn.

In Schleiermacher there is no thinking about God, whether, as in his later work, we make God an inference, or whether we adopt his earlier pantheistic standpoint. In either case we are concerned simply with states of mind. This is in complete antithesis to the views of religion which Canon DEWAR suggests. For him God is the centre of all religious experience. The experiencer is on the circumference. With Schleiermacher, on the other hand, the experiencer is in the centre and God is on the circumference.

The argument from religious experience is, then, not to be confounded with the teaching of Schleiermacher, whose advocacy of the importance of religious experience has led to serious misunderstandings. His is the ego-centric viewpoint, and the only way to get away from that viewpoint is to recognize the immediacy of the apprehension of God, which is the truth underlying the Ontological Argument. For the Ontological Argument can only be rightly appreciated as an attempt to vindicate the validity of religious experience. But we shall not follow Canon DEWAR'S exposition further.

Enough has been said to show why it is that the Barthian theologians think that theology went wrong with Schleiermacher. It became a monologue in which only man was the speaker. It should be a dialogue, in which man is the listener and God the Speaker.

A notably interesting and important statement has been issued by Mr. J. H. OLDHAM in the shape of a pamphlet, *Church, Community and State: A World Issue* (S.C.M.; 1s. net). Mr. OLDHAM is nearly as well known internationally as Dr. Mott, and his words are always well-weighed and pointed. His present deliverance has to do with the World Conference which is being called for 1937 by the Universal Christian Council, and is by way of preparation for it. But the matter of his pamphlet is of urgent concern to us all in 1935.

In thoughtful minds, both Christian and non-Christian, there is a widespread and deep sense that we stand to-day at one of the great turning-points in human history, comparable in significance to that in which the Middles Ages gave birth to the modern world. The ideas which have given character and shape to modern Western civilization are in the melting-pot, and what the new will be no man can say. All that we can do is to open our minds to the momentous happenings of our own time and try to understand their meaning in the light of Christian faith.

One of the most striking changes in the past hundred years has been a prodigious expansion in the functions of the State. One region of life after another has been brought under its control. Mr. OLDHAM gives a long list of these. But the fact is familiar. And what is equally plain is that this State-activity has brought to the community many and large social benefits. Organization may be the means to a larger freedom, as the strict control of the motor traffic has shown.

None the less it would be sheer blindness to ignore the fact that in this extension of State control there are grave dangers. And the menace becomes serious in proportion as the State advances 'totalitarian' claims, *i.e.* in so far as it claims to dominate, control, and direct the whole life of the community and of its individual members. Such totalitarian claims are being made to-day in Russia, Italy, Germany, and even in Mexico and Turkey. The totalitarian State is one which lays claim to man in the totality of his being; which declares its own authority to be the source of all authority; which refuses to recognize the independence in their own sphere of religion, culture, education, and the family; which seeks to impose on all its citizens a particular philosophy of life; and which sets out to create by means of all the agencies of public information and education a particular type of man in accordance with its own understanding of the meaning and end of man's existence.

Underlying these claims are certain beliefs regarding the nature and destiny of man. In so far as these are incompatible with the Christian understanding of the meaning and purpose of man's existence, the Church must inevitably be involved in a life and death struggle for its existence. Any attempt to use the supreme authority of the State and all the agencies at its command to impose on the whole community a philosophy of life and a pattern of living which are wholly, or in important respects, contrary to the Christian understanding of the real meaning of life constitutes a definite menace to Christianity.

An obvious illustration is Russia. The aim of Communism is to establish an integral culture on the basis of an integral philosophy of life. No quarter, therefore, must be given to religion. 'We reject religion,' it has been officially proclaimed, 'in order to clear and prepare the way for injecting into the consciousness of the toilers the basic principles of Marxian science. With us exposure is no end in itself; it is only one of the means of purging the minds of the toilers of false mystic views of life by grafting thereon the scientific materialist conception of the world, of man and of human society.

In the Italian Fascist State religion is both respected and protected. But here also it is clearly affirmed that 'Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State.' That there can be spheres of life independent of the State is emphatically denied. The Fascist conviction is expressed in the watchword, 'Nothing against the State; nothing outside the State; everything for the State.' There may be a concordat with religion, but between an integral nationalism which claims absolute authority and seeks to form its citizens in accordance with its own understanding of life and those whose ultimate loyalty is to God and His demands, there can be no abiding reconciliation.

Germany seems equally favourable towards Christianity. But in Germany the determining factor is the resolute and passionate will to create an integral national life, expressing the spirit and embodying the values of the German racial and national soul. The source of everything is the ultimate influence of soil and blood and communal solidarity. The task of the present, says one of Germany's leading nationalists, Rosenberg, is 'to awaken the racial soul to life, to recognize that it is the supreme value, and to assign to other values their organic place under its sovereignty—in State, art, and religion, since the race-bound soul of the community is the measure of all our thoughts, voluntary aspirations, and actions.' Every other interest, including religion, must be subordinated to the primacy of the political aim.

The issue this raises is obvious. The Church has always been in conflict with the secularized world, but a new factor has been introduced into the struggle in our day, changing its character in ways that we have hardly begun to appreciate. The new factor is the closer organization of society resulting from the enormous advances in science and technical invention. The members of a modern community find themselves more and more closely bound together in a common life and subjected as never before to the continuous pressure of a common culture interpreted by their rulers, writers, and educators. The crucial issue is whether this common life and common culture will be inspired by Christian or pagan conceptions of the meaning and purpose of human life. In a community consciously committed to a pagan view, and most of all where the State has adopted a totalitarian policy, the Christian witness of the Church can be borne only at the cost of suffering and martyrdom. Once again the Christian Church throughout the world confronts a situation resembling in many respects that in which in the early centuries it stood face to face with the pagan might of the Roman Empire.

This is the motive that has led to the calling of a great World Conference of the Christian churches. It is increasingly clear that among the questions that concern the Christian Church at the present time none is more central and fundamental than

that of its relations with the modern State and the secularized society from which the State derives its character. This conviction has received powerful reinforcement from the course of events in the German Evangelical Church. It is this question to which the World Conference will devote its consideration. In the latter part of his pamphlet Mr. OLDHAM sketches the kind of detailed problems that are rooted in the central issue, and the task to which, in his view, the Church must address itself. The whole pamphlet should be carefully studied.

Things most certainly Believed.

VI.

BY PROFESSOR H. R. MACKINTOSH, D.PHIL., D.D., EDINBURGH.

IN the last resort, I suppose, there is only one thing I believe, namely, that God is of such and such a character. Or at all events there is only one Reality to which I can give that unique and unmitigated trust which deserves the great name of 'religious faith'—God, the Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer. This probably is obvious, but it is worth while repeating with the modest intention of underlining the truth, frequently overlooked, that the gospel, to believe which makes one a Christian, is not just a number of things, no one can tell how many, but a definite declaration of a single truth, and that a truth about God. Theology is the doctrine of God. No doubt it sets forth other derivative aspects of truth as well; but ultimately all it has to say about man or sin or pardon or immortality is known to be true because, above and behind all else, we are sure of God.

Once this is understood, there is no difficulty in going on to other articles in my personal creed, which, if they really are implied in what by faith I know about God, will share the certainty I have of Him. They will be things which He has made sure to me in the ways He uses to bring conviction to the human mind. What these ways are we need not pause to debate here. Suffice it to say that He who reveals Himself to me as being of a certain character, and as in that character claiming me for Himself, thereby implicitly brings home to me certain other truths about myself, my neighbour, the world that my neighbour and I inhabit, our common prospects, our reciprocal duties. The single fundamental doctrine of God—which, with all its genuine singleness, may be complex enough—rays out an absolute light on all other facts, so far as they concern my personal relationship to Him. If He has spoken to me, if I have heard His sovereign Word of love and judgment, then by that very circumstance I have become aware in principle of what I am to believe also concerning man and the world. To become a British citizen implies for a foreigner much more than is expressly stated in his papers of naturalization; to have been brought to belief in God involves various other true beliefs in addition, all consequent upon, and inseparable from, the basic and initial certainty concerning God. No doubt I shall need time to spell out these particular implications, and even by the end I shall only be fully conscious of a few. But once I discover them, I shall have the insight that they were wrapped up in the truth about God from the start. I have not invented them; under God's teaching they have dawned upon me.

This initial or all-embracing belief about God, quite clearly, is not a belief reached by the pathway of scientific demonstration. And more, it is not enough to say, however confidently, that it is none the worse for that. The point rather is that to try for scientific proof of my faith in God would show only too clearly that I had no real understanding of what believing in God means. A Cambridge philosopher, writing to a friend about Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, observes: 'I don't think it's any good appealing, as he is rather fond of doing, to the heart on questions of truth. After all, there is only one way of getting at the truth and that is by proving it. All that talk about the heart only comes to saying, "It must be true because we want it to be." Which is both false and rather cowardly.' This has a conclusive sound until we think it over. The philosopher in question, in spite of his brave words, would have been hard put to it to prove—in