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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE Student Christian Movement Press has issued (in paper covers; 2s. 6d. net) a short introduction to the history of Christian doctrine under the title *Creeds in the Making*. The author, the Rev. Alan RICHARDSON, formerly Tutor of Jesus College, Oxford, writes in an attractive popular style, and shows himself to be in sympathy with modern ways of thought. After reviewing the early development of doctrine, he dwells in particular upon the formulations of the Trinity, the Person of Christ, the Atonement, and the Holy Spirit. It is appropriate that this month we should consider the treatment of the last-named doctrine, which is a doctrine that puzzles many people to-day.

The raw material, as it were, of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the early Christian belief in God as ever-present and ever-active in the world. It was a belief inherited from Judaism. But whereas the Jews had tended to limit the divine activity to the fortunes of the Chosen Race, the early Christians conceived of it as extending over the whole range of human life. They themselves felt the presence and power of God to be with them in all their efforts to spread the gospel; and their experience of God was always for them a living fellowship with the Master whom they had followed in Galilee.

'God was now seen to possess the character and quality of Jesus. The great Spirit of the world, hitherto ignorantly worshipped by genuinely religious pagans as Logos, or the pervading Reason of God, now received a name; the immanent Spirit recognized by Greek philosophers and men of religion was discovered to be the Spirit of Jesus—as he had been known in Galilee—on a cosmic scale. The Unknown God was now felt to possess a character, the character of the love that was in Jesus Christ. The early Christians found that the Spirit of their Master so completely filled the world that they at once came to identify the immanent Spirit of God in the universe with the now universalised Spirit of their Risen Lord.' And thus it happens that in the New Testament the phrases 'Spirit of God' and 'Spirit of Jesus' are used more or less interchangeably.

The subsequent doctrine of the Holy Spirit as developed by the Church after the close of the Apostolic period was loyal to the teaching of the New Testament. Indeed, it was laid down in defence of the New Testament faith against heretical tendencies, and not from a merely theoretical interest. It was against the Macedonian heresy that in the so-called Nicene Creed, endorsed by the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381, the Holy Spirit is affirmed to be Divine: 'the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, . . . who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.' In the Chalcedonian Definition of A.D. 451, and in the so-called Athanasian Creed of about the same date, the Divinity or Godhead of the Holy Spirit is even more explicitly affirmed.

According to the Christian conception, then, the Holy Spirit is no mere impersonal agency at work in the nature of things, no vague, abstract, blindly moving Force. It is God Himself in action. It is the active, living God to whom both the Old and the New Testament bear witness—a God who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Through the Holy Spirit we may enter into personal relationship with God, who possesses a character as clearly defined as that of Jesus Christ.

'The Church to-day sorely needs to reawaken to the full realisation of the significance of her ancient doctrine of God as Holy Spirit. Only by so doing will she be able to overcome the devitalising and ancient superstition that God is remote and uninterested in the affairs of men—a position to which we all too easily revert when we lose touch with the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit. She must renew in this present age her fellowship with the active, living God, whose leadership and creative work in the world to-day are no less real and powerful than in the pioneer days of Paul's first Gentile mission.'

Mr. RICHARDSON ends on a note with which many Churchmen will find themselves in full accord: 'The Christian Church is, or should be, the true home of God's Spirit on the earth, or, to vary the metaphor, the supreme instrument of his activity in the world. The Spirit assuredly uses other instruments—the League of Nations, a Disarmament Conference, or a Slum Clearance Committee, perhaps—but ideally, at any rate, the Church is his instrument *par excellence*. That is her sole *raison d'être*. For the Church is still the living body of Christ on earth, his incarnation in the twentieth century, and through the Church the Spirit moves towards the sanctification of the world.'

A distinguished leader of thought, being consulted on a vital point in ethics, gave the discouraging reply, 'We are all groping; you must just grope with the rest.'

It is not a reply that would naturally have occurred to men's minds in former times. For it was felt then that while much might be uncertain there was much that was sure. There was a divinely appointed path to walk in; there were great and immovable landmarks, set from the beginning for man's guidance throughout his earthly pilgrimage. To these if a man would but give good heed there was no fear of his going astray.

But now for a great mass of the people of to-day that feeling of certainty is gone. A fog seems to have fallen over the face of man's intellectual and moral world, obliterating the ancient landmarks and leaving the wayfarer honestly bewildered. Through the fog he hears many voices calling, but how is he to know which of them he ought to follow?

The causes of this lamentable uncertainty have been variously assigned. The doctrine of relativity is held to be largely responsible. Einstein has emphasized and succeeded in impressing on the public mind the fact that all our viewpoints are relative, that no two viewpoints are the same, and that things cannot really be what they appear to us to be. Einstein's whole endeavour, doubtless, was to find a way of overcoming this relativity, and in this he attained a marvellous success, but the critical part of his work is what has mainly been laid hold of. It has spread abroad the idea that my point of view is as good as my neighbour's, that my thoughts are as likely to be true as his, that all absolute standards are swept away, and that we are perfectly free to follow any path we choose.

That this is a most unhappy state of mind and a very grave danger to the moral order every serious person must deeply feel. The lamentable uncertainty of to-day is in striking contrast to the note of certainty which resounds through the Scriptures. Here we encounter men who speak with assurance. They do not hesitate to say, 'We know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true'; then, as if to make assurance doubly sure, they add, 'We know that we know Him.'

Is there any way whereby we may attain this certainty? Is it possible still to hear a voice which

says, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' and so to find rest to our souls? In the American Christian Quarterly, *Religion in Life*, there is a thoughtful article on the subject of 'Certainty,' by the Rev. Edgar P. Dickie, B.D., in which he deals in particular with the answers to man's search for assurance which have been given by the Barthian School and by Karl Heim of Tübingen.

Touching briefly on the various realms of intellectual activity, he finds that certainty is not attainable in æsthetics where judgments are influenced by individual taste, nor in metaphysics where the answers to the question 'what is truth?' are as varied as the schools of the philosophers. The same uncertainty has invaded the field of ethics. 'Oswald Spengler carries the investigations of Einstein to a more alarming conclusion, when he applies the same methods to ethics. In ethical matters, he claims to have brought about a revolution comparable to that of Copernicus in astronomy; to have removed the centre-point of ethical orientation. The sense of "duty," which has hitherto been regarded as absolute, and universal in all men, is, he would say, quite as naïve a piece of self-deception as any to which the geocentric astronomers were prone. To-day men are prepared to die for that which they consider right. But rightness can be determined only by an omniscient spectator of all time and all experience. Not being that, we have no guarantee that our view of the ethical obligation is anything more than a parochial prejudice. The man of the future may feel it his duty to die for the very opposite of that for which men to-day are ready to die.'

Is there any way out of the fog, any sure pathway to truth, any bridge leading over into the country of reality? This is a matter of life and death, as both the Barthians and Karl Heim insist. That is what they mean by their emphasis on 'existential thinking.' The attitude of the mere observer is an impossible one. Nobody can really stand outside life and look upon it as a spectacle. If any one attempts to take up that attitude he shuts himself off from truth. 'Metaphysics, unable to shake free from Aristotle's "world spectatorship" or *bios theoretikos*, gives an æsthetic view of God, without passion or personal decision. But religion represents the search for truth, with the whole soul and the whole of existence at stake.'

Barth acknowledges, indeed is vividly conscious of, the relativity of history. But he counters this with the great affirmation that there is given to man a sure Word of God. At this point he is brought into touch with the divine, or rather the divine breaks in upon him abruptly. God is transcendent, and is not to be found by any human effort or search, 'an unbridgeable gulf separates man from God.' It cannot be crossed from man's side, and every attempt to do so is but a repetition of the proud assault of the Titans. But in the mercy of God there breaks in upon man in his utter helplessness that divine and saving Word of God which is given in Christ. Here man reaches certainty in the possession of the eternally real.

Points of criticism will at once occur. If God is so remote and separate from man it becomes hard to see in what way He can come to be known. Surely something may be known of Him through His works of creation and providence. On the other hand, if the finite is so incapable of the infinite, how can the Word of God ever find a point of attachment in the human soul? 'If there is one certainty in human life it is that God is speaking in conscience. A conscience stabbed awake is God's voice; is man in touch with very God. And, because this is the Father of Jesus, the last word of the stricken conscience is *not* man's "Depart from me," but God's "Come unto Me." There are both words in the voice of conscience, and each is an essential part of the experience.' Further, it may be asked, by what criterion is the Word of God to be recognized? To this Barth would no doubt reply that the Word of God is self-authenticating, or comes home convincingly by the testimony of the Holy Spirit within the heart. It is obvious that the ultimate ground of certainty cannot be authenticated by anything beyond itself, for then that other thing would become the ultimate ground.

Karl Heim, like Barth, is much concerned with

the question of certainty. He realizes that it must have its home in the beyond, it must come to us as a Power which commands. He finds it at the meeting-place of Christ and the soul. 'Deliberately and confidently, Heim places Christ at the centre of metaphysics.' He is the ultimately real, the One who has appeared in time but passes not away, the Master of the world's fate. Spengler argues that our position at one given point in space and time is mere chance, with no absolute value in the universe. Karl Heim replies that face to face with Christ the soul finds its eternal destiny and value.

This certainty has its root in a personal relationship, not in any scientific process or intellectual activity. 'As the best human analogy for that unassailable certainty between the believer and Christ, Heim takes the relationship of trust between husband and wife. It is of the same quality—"I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." It is a relation which is in possession of absolute certainty, because it is a relation of trust. God trusts me beyond that which I now am: I trust him beyond that which I now see.'

And so, 'the appeal in preaching, whether it be to reason, to imagination, or to the ethical will, is null and void if it does not first lead toward a closer communion with Christ. Revelation being personal and incommunicable, it is possible for the preacher to come between the convert and God. There may be times when he is best left alone—with God. The word "Certainty" perhaps best expresses this conclusion, for the word has two sides. It is, first, convincing truth, and, second, personal conviction. Only from truth that is certain can we produce certainty about the truth. We preach for a verdict, urgently, as dying unto dying men. And we are able so to preach only because we can say, "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me."'

One of the criticisms made against Christianity to-day is that Jesus is no longer relevant to human need. He lived, we are told, in a simple society, largely rural and pastoral, and the issues which confronted Him in His day have no kinship with those that face us in a civilization world-wide, urbanized and mechanized, and shaped by the exigencies of an imperious commercialism. A striking answer to this criticism is made by the Rev. Richard ROBERTS, D.D., in his remarkable book, *That Strange Man upon His Cross* (Allenson; 3s. 6d. net).

The view referred to can be maintained, he says, only by those who have not acquainted themselves with the pertinent facts. It is too easily assumed that Palestine was a land of small, unimportant happenings. But there were elements in the situation in Palestine which are staggering in their modernity no less than in their tragedy. If it were conceivable that Jesus should reappear in the world and find Himself not in Palestine but in Germany to-day, He would discover Himself in a situation not unfamiliar to Him. In His day in Palestine the prevailing temper among His people was that of a heady and violent nationalism. The country was seething with sedition, and the empire employed tactics of ruthlessness against the insurgents. In the case of the Galilean Judas, the Romans with their terrible and pitiless efficiency made short work of the rebels and crucified two thousand of them.

That was the kind of setting in which the life of Jesus was lived. He spent His days among fierce nationalists and under the shadow of a sharp and merciless sword. In Germany to-day the rôles are differently cast, but the situation is essentially the same. There, at the moment, nationalism is victorious and rampant; and the rebels are the Communists who are having as short shrift from the Nazis as the Palestinian nationalists did from the Romans. What we have in Germany is merely a fresh deal of the same tragic old pack of cards.

Not so very long ago there was an even more remarkable parallel. A small nation was being unwillingly held within the Empire. In the north there was a loyalist minority, which desired to remain within the Empire. In the other parts

there was a nationalist revolutionary party which was aiming at the forcible ejection of the imperial power. That is a fair description of the situation in Ireland ten years ago; it is also an accurate description of the position in Palestine nineteen centuries ago. In the north Herod and his following were friendly to Rome. The Zealots were the Sinn Feiners of Palestine.

Nor is this the only 'Modernism' in the Gospels. Unemployment was not an unknown condition in Palestine. Jesus makes one such occasion the matter of a parable in which He sets forth the peculiar nature and operation of the divine justice, implying that our justice should be like it. Extortionate moneylending was apparently common; and if nowadays we tend to complain of customs, imposts, and tariffs, it was probably worse in Palestine, for there they had export duties and import duties, octroi, bridge and harbour duties, market taxes, a tax upon salt. The evils we call 'graft' and 'racketeering' and 'blackmail' were probably as common as they are to-day.

Moreover, around Herod and his party gathered all the moral corruption that is prone to flourish in a 'smart society'; and the conjugal affairs of that dissolute princeling made a toothsome morsel in the social gossip of the Empire. Much more could be adduced on these heads. What is sufficiently clear, however, is that the essentials of the human situation in Palestine were much the same as they are in ours. There is a difference, but it is a difference of scale and not of substance. Palestine was a small country; but it was, after all, on one of the great highways of the world; and pretty well the whole known world of that time came and went through it. There was a sort of cosmopolitanism in Palestine; and it is misleading to regard it as a backwater.

It is true that science and technical skill have bridged the seas and made highways in the air, so that the whole world is shrunk into a neighbourhood, and the ends of the earth are at the ends of the street. Human life is organized on a much larger scale, but at bottom it is the same life as then. Raw human nature is much the same in New York as it was long ago in Jerusalem; and it is that that sets us our problems still. Modern external conditions inevitably affect the form and the scale of the problems; but they do not alter their inward substance. Jesus is not out of date, because it was with human nature He had to do; and so He still speaks directly to our condition.

How much like the human situation Jesus had to face is to ours becomes plain when we consider what we may call loosely its psychological aspect. When to-day we want to 'put something across' either commercially or politically we attack the public in one or other of three ways—bribery, sensationalism, or coercion. Instances of the first two may easily be found in trade and entertainment circles. The obvious examples of the third are Communism, Fascism, and Hitlerism. But, says Dr. ROBERTS, these were exactly the three expedients presented to Jesus in the Wilderness temptation for the furtherance of His ends. And this great experience of Jesus, in which He rejected each and all, makes it clear that the years have introduced no great novelty into the psychology of the human situation in this world. We need not worry ourselves about the relevancy of Jesus to our condition.