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# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

ON no subject, perhaps, does there exist more confusion of thought than on that of revelation. That perplexity has had two main sources. For one thing, in days gone by the idea of revelation was bound up in men's minds with a theory of the verbal inspiration of Scripture. From Genesis to the Apocalypse the Bible was not only the container of the Word of God, it was the words of God, and that was revelation—a kind of Divine dictation. Only here and there did the other higher religions approximate to it; no other religion than ours really possessed it. The inadequacy of that view is now generally understood, and men ask in bewilderment—What is the meaning of revelation? Is there a revelation? If so, how do we know it?

Such questions are suggested by other considerations. The term 'revelation' has been so variously and lightly used or misused that quite human discoveries have often enough been called 'revelations'; and this prompts the inquiry, are not God's revelations and man's discoveries two sides of the same thing? A little reflection will show that if we answer that question in the affirmative, revelation in any real or important sense has gone. Revelation must be of something beyond man's power of discovery, else there is no point in retaining the term.

In recent times we have had some good and some indifferent discussions of revelation from the philosophical or the theological view-point. Of

those some have been more or less helpful, some have merely added to the obscurity of the matter, this being largely due to the fact that they have been too greatly theoretical instead of experiential, too abstract, too much from the point of view of a shrewd observer externally examining some curious phenomena. Revelation will remain an *ignis fatuus* if it be studied from the 'spectator-attitude.'

We have longed for a book on the subject from some competent scholar who realized what are the real difficulties for the average Christian mind; and we have got one which goes very far towards satisfying us in Professor E. F. SCOTT'S *The New Testament Idea of Revelation* (Nicholson & Watson; 6s. net). Dr. SCOTT'S main purpose is to expound what we may learn about revelation from Jesus, St. Paul, and St. John; but that core has a valuable periphery which explains revelation in the Old Testament and in Apocalyptic, gives an account of the attainments of Hellenistic religion, and discusses 'old and new in revelation' and 'the Spirit and the Church.'

Let us see, then, what Dr. SCOTT has to say on three questions. Let the first be what he himself takes first—what is revelation? In brief, revelation is God's breaking through to answer man's need. Here, Dr. SCOTT, like Professor Lamont in his 'Christ in the World of Thought,' reminds us how man, insatiably curious as to the world in which his lot is cast and the meaning of it and the

experiences which befall him, finds himself, so to say, on a little illumined islet set in a vast expanse of bewilderment and mystery. Science and reason reach a point beyond which they can make no advance. Unless part at least of the mystery is cleared up man can know no peace. Unless the Beyond become articulate, man's most pressing questions must be for ever unanswered. Man's whole nature cries out against permanent silence; and every religion imparts some measure of assurance that God has spoken or does speak. That answer of God to man's moral and spiritual needs is revelation. There is no substitute for it in science or reason. When revelation of God's nature, mind, and will has been given, then indeed reason may or should work upon the 'given'; but it is quite incapable of providing that which is given.

Next, where is God's final revelation to man? In Jesus Christ, Dr. SCOTT answers. For the questing human soul there has been, no doubt, some measure of satisfaction in all the religions to which men have adhered; but it is in Christ that is found the full illumination which man either needs or is capable of receiving. While Jesus was a Teacher indeed, essentially He was a Revealer. 'His teaching involved much more than instruction. Stress is always laid in the Gospels on the power which accompanied His teaching.' Since His message 'came direct from God, there was in it something of the energy which makes the Word of God creative.' 'The word of Jesus was with power, and it was this power that constituted the revelation.' 'Jesus was the revealer inasmuch as He gave men not merely a knowledge of God but a living apprehension of God.' So Dr. SCOTT can infer that fuller records of what He said would not really add to what we require; and that even if criticism compels us to abandon the genuineness of a number of reputed Sayings, it would not matter very much. There would remain enough.

Lastly, what are we to think of the notion of 'progressive revelation'? It plays a great part in the thought of many who find it a 'blessed word' which almost magically solves all Biblical problems and all questions raised by the study of the History

of Religions. Dr. SCOTT holds there is some degree of truth in it. Within the bounds of our Bible—to go no farther afield—we do see men advancing in their religious beliefs and practices. But to call that 'progressive revelation' is mischievous and misleading. There is a temptation to bring revelation into the same class as ordinary knowledge. We are tempted to think that God can speak to men now as He could not possibly have spoken to saints and prophets long ago. That leads to confusion and to error. It tends to diminish the value of revelation in proportion to its antiquity; as against this the Ancient Church was right in retaining the Old Testament.

Further, the idea of progressive revelation tends to make God dependent on man's degree of progress, so that not God's initiative but man's advance is the all-important consideration. 'The Divine act is conditioned by man's progress.' God has not really, or primarily at least, drawn near to man; man, like an Alpine climber, ever attaining finer vistas has won new conceptions of God. 'Thus the whole idea of revelation is tacitly abandoned.'

The President of Seabury Western Seminary, Dr. Frederick C. GRANT, writes as a liberal Anglican, and in his most recent volume, *Frontiers of Christian Thinking* (Willett, Clark & Co., New York; \$2.00), he offers a vigorous presentation of his views on God, Christ, the Church, Christian Reunion, World-Fellowship, and World Co-operation through Religion. Let us turn to his views on Christ, especially as it will be interesting to see what the translator of two little works on 'Form Criticism,' by Professors Bultmann and Kundsinn, has to say on the subject of the Founder of the Christian religion.

Every single gospel tradition, he allows, has something to tell us of the Founder, of His teaching, character, or influence; as has also the tradition taken as a whole. But, as the Form Critics have impressed upon him, the gospel tradition was so

thoroughly fluid during the oral period that the original element and the accretions of the first ten or twenty years are now all but inseparable. It is no longer possible to distinguish infallibly and set apart without residue the 'Galilean Gospel'—the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus of Nazareth. It may be that what we think to be 'Christianity according to Christ' is that 'According to Mark' or 'According to Q,' or according to the Church's earliest teachers in Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Cæsarea, or Joppa, or Samaria, or Damascus, or Rome.

A similar difficulty to that which confronts the 'liberalist,' who would strip off the later accretions from the gospel and get back to the ethical teaching of Jesus, confronts also the 'eschatologist' who would refer back to Jesus the primitive Messianic faith enshrined in the earliest records, whether found in Mark or Q, or in the Little Apocalypse (embedded in Mk 13), or in the material peculiar to the Gospel of Matthew. Here, again, it is impossible to be wholly sure which elements are original and which are later accretions made during the period of oral transmission.

But what we have in the Gospels, and in the New Testament as a whole, is something new in human history. It is not the surviving words of a great ethical teacher, nor the early records of a Messianic sect, but the literary deposit left by a mighty stream of spiritual life, ethical and Messianic and more, flowing through two or three generations of human society, at first with torrential velocity down the rocky hillsides of Palestine, and then, at slower speed but with gathering volume, out upon the broad plains of the Græco-Roman world. It is something essentially new, which older terms, or even perennial conventional terms, were—and still are—inadequate to embrace or to convey.

This something new and more must be sought in the movement itself of which the New Testament is a fragmentary record. It is *the reality of the Spiritual Christ*. None of the New Testament writers, not even Paul, sets forth this truth adequately, though it is the presupposition of all their exposition, admonition, exhortation, and devotion.

Behind all the external expressions of Christ's historical life and teaching the great new fact was that out from the Eternal had come a Voice, a human life, a moving Spirit, and the whole world was changing perceptibly as a result. Christianity was more than Messianism, and more than an ethical movement; it was the new springtide of the Spirit. It is the Spiritual Christ, not the historical—if a distinction must be made—who is the Founder and the real source of our religion.

How are we to account for the fact that some of the clearest and most characteristic sayings of Jesus are all but certainly additions or accretions to the tradition? We should frankly recognize that the Spirit of Jesus, living on in the Church, was one with the historical Jesus, and was a genuinely creative force in the thought of men long after His death. The literature of primitive Christianity is to be understood, if at all, only in the light of that religious basic assumption of the complete actuality of the Spiritual Christ. And the Spiritual Christ is no figure of speech, no beautiful symbol for the surviving influence of a great prophet, but a genuinely real Person—to be apprehended, however, by faith, and not by recourse to metaphysics or history.

There was a timeless element in Christ which escapes analysis and classification. It shines through His sayings and parables, through the outline of incident and anecdote, and through the apocalyptic presuppositions of His circle. And right here must be found the point of departure for an adequate and valid modern Christology. Somehow, it is not just a man who speaks to us through Him, but God speaks. In some sense His character is one with God's character. In fact, the revelation of the eternal Spiritual Christ was made through the life and the words, the teaching and the spirit, of Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth in Galilee.

For the rest, we are Victorian enough in our theology to adore the Manhood of Christ and at the same time to continue to say the Nicene Creed without reservations. It seems to us supremely

natural that the Spiritual Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, should have appeared as a Prophet among the Jews of Palestine in the first century.

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Canon Peter GREEN'S mind is practical rather than speculative, but it is remarkable how, amid the multifarious activities of his ministry in a great industrial centre, he has kept himself abreast of the best thought of our time. On problems of right conduct he has written with great soundness and common sense, and on any question of Christian ethics he is always well worth listening to. He has now published a course of lectures on Pastoral Theology delivered at Durham University in 1935. The title is *The Man of God* (Hodder & Stoughton; 3s. 6d. net), and it is one of the most helpful and humbling books which could be put into the hands of ministers and theological students.

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The book is inspired by a threefold conviction. 'I am convinced that nothing can save Western civilization from complete collapse except a great revival of vital religion. I am convinced that, here in England and for the Church of England, such a revival must begin in the parishes. And I am convinced that any such revival must begin in the hearts and lives of the clergy.' To win for Christ the slums and garden cities of our land, the industrial areas and quiet countrysides, as much devotion and sacrifice is called for as to win the peoples of Africa and India.

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For the accomplishment of this there is needed a new ideal of parish work to fill the minds of the rising generation of clergy. As to what that ideal is Canon GREEN leaves his readers in no doubt. 'Let your directly spiritual work be your chief aim and chief interest, and let anything and everything that draws you away from it be regarded as something to be regretted.' This does not mean that the preacher is to be in any wise unpractical. On the contrary, the greatest stress is laid on the minutely careful supervision of every detail of Church work. What is objected to is the suggestion, frequently made and influentially sup-

ported, that the preacher of the gospel can best commend his message to this generation by activity in social service. It is argued, on the one hand, that men and women living under bad social conditions cannot be expected to listen to the message of the gospel; and on the other hand, if men who feel deeply the stupidity and injustice of our present social system see the clergy active in their efforts for reform, they will be drawn to the Church and her services. While not denying the great need and value of social reform, Canon GREEN has a firm conviction that the policy recommended is a mistaken one. 'Of the first contention I will only say that it is clean contrary to the teachings of history from the days of the Apostles, when slaves and harlots and the dregs of the Roman Empire found new hope and the possibility of holiness in the Gospel, down to our own day. . . . And as to the second contention, namely, that men interested in social reform will be attracted to the Church if they see the clergy zealous in the same causes, I can only say that when I was ordained I expected it to be true; that for many years I hoped it would prove true; and that during forty years' experience I have never met the slightest evidence of anything of the sort.'

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The business of the parish minister is to build up his people in the faith, and then set them to work for the Kingdom of God. To this end there must first of all be the most careful pastoral supervision of the congregation. Where there is even one sheep straying from the fold the shepherd ought not to be content with the ninety-and-nine. We must make every effort to keep our young people. They need much more shepherding and teaching than they usually get. They must be gone after and sought out, and made to feel that they are wanted and, if absent, are missed. 'No clergyman need fear that he will draw careless and unfit boys and girls to the Altar. If they do not want to come, we shall not get them. But that does not justify us in saying, Oh, if they want to come they will come; and if not, they are better away.' The same applies to adult members, for they also may easily drop off if not looked after. So the pastor must be for ever on the watch.

But it is not enough to get people to church. We need to get them to Christ. Our aim must be 'a converted congregation.' It is to be feared that a large percentage of regular members have never really faced the question of entire surrender to Christ. 'Do we clergy give the subject of conversion a due place in our preaching? I do not want to go back to the old days, when a more or less stereotyped appeal for conversion was a necessary ending to every sermon. There are other things to be aimed at in preaching besides conversion. But if conversion is not the *only* thing to be aimed at in our preaching, it is certainly the *first* thing. I would beg you, when you are ordained and have to preach to your people, to give directly evangelical preaching—the summons, that is to say, to conviction of sin, to surrender to Christ, to acceptance of a full and free salvation, and efforts after entire consecration of life—its proper place.'

The next aim is to have an instructed congregation. 'A truly converted congregation will be anxious and ready to be instructed.' There must be instruction in faith, that is in what to believe, and instruction in practice, that is what to do. 'One reason why our people so easily fall away into Christian Science, Theosophy, and other heresies, is because the teachers of those systems pay their converts the compliment of giving them something to study and something to believe, while we clergy, with teaching beyond all comparison more true, more beautiful and more helpful, allow our people to grow up in almost complete ignorance.'

A congregation, if converted and duly instructed, will naturally become missionary in spirit, and such every Christian congregation ought to be. 'Many congregations would be ready to do some active evangelistic work, if the matter were brought before them. And all would be the better for it. For the grace of God is like water, and the soul is like a cistern. Water cannot go on flowing in unless it also flows out. One of my young men put it well to me when he said, "It is wonderful how much more interest I take in my religion now I am trying

to pass it on to other folk. It is dull work just sitting and being talked to."'

A valuable chapter is given to 'The Man of God as Evangelist,' and the clergy are urged to exercise their gifts in that direction. 'I am daily more and more convinced that the idea, so often expressed, that Evangelistic Missions of the old type have had their day and are unsuited to modern conditions, is the exact opposite of the truth. I believe that parochial missions of a definitely evangelistic character are exactly what the church does need and that, if they are neglected, nothing else can take their place.' It cannot be questioned that something revolutionary and vitalizing requires to be done. England is largely a heathen country. 'All the talk, so popular nowadays, about people who never enter a place of worship being really more truly religious than most church-goers is such dreadful nonsense, that I wonder anyone can keep a straight face while repeating it.'

The mission should be parochial, a united effort as far as possible of the whole congregation. It should be carefully prepared for and organized, and should aim at leading 'men and women to decision, and to public acknowledgment of such decision.' On all these points Canon GREEN has many helpful and incisive things to say. He emphasizes in conclusion that the mission must be one of definite evangelism. With the suggestion that what is needed at the present time is rather 'teaching missions' he decisively disagrees. Such missions in his experience have 'always been disappointing.' 'Discussion of social questions, with men who feel, and rightly feel, the cruelty and injustice of our social system, is no doubt an excellent thing. Bold proclamation of Christ's teaching as applied to politics, economics, and citizenship is most necessary. Neither of these things can take the place of the preaching of "Christ crucified," nor of the direct summons to repentance, surrender to Christ, and the acceptance of a free salvation. Much modern preaching is ineffectual because we try to make "good" men out of "unconverted" men. Which is simply to build a wall and daub it with untempered mortar.'