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# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

DR. TEMPLE, the Archbishop of York, delivered last year a course of four lectures at the College of Preachers at Washington, which are now published under the title of *The Preacher's Theme To-Day* (S.P.C.K. ; 2s. 6d. net).

The lectures deal with Revelation, the Incarnation, Sin and Atonement, Christianity, Ethics and Politics. Of these perhaps the most striking is the first.

DR. TEMPLE regards the question of Revelation as being 'the centre of the most important of all theological problems of our time.' The reason of this is that the prevailing philosophy of our time denies expressly or by implication the possibility of genuine revelation in the Christian sense. We have got rid of the materialism which was known in the end of the nineteenth century, and this is 'undoubtedly a very great gain for the presentation of the Christian faith.' But in its place we are now met by a philosophy 'which uses spiritual language and aims at preserving what it has become our custom to call spiritual values, but which has been disposed to take over from the old kind of materialism a sense of reality as a closed system in which every part depends upon every other part in the scheme of the whole, so that the principle of reality itself, the ultimate power, whether called God or not, is thought of as guiding all events but truly revealing itself in no one event.' In this philosophy, while mind has its recognized place, it is really made

subordinate to matter. It is regarded as being active only in response to a material situation, and its actions are all to be completely accounted for, like physical events, in terms of cause and effect.

In opposition to this philosophy it is vitally important for us to maintain the distinction between causes and reasons. Our action in any given case is no doubt influenced by many causes arising out of our inherited dispositions, our education, environment, and so forth, but no one in accounting for his action would simply give a recital of these. On the contrary, he would speak of the future, of some end to be gained, of some good to be done. In a word, he would give reasons. So then we must claim that 'there exist in the world beings, namely, ourselves, of such a kind as to act by reasons and not by causes.' For this conception no form of materialism makes any allowance, however little in actual practice the materialist may be able to maintain his consistency. Here is the fundamental point of difference between a materialistic and a spiritual philosophy.

Setting aside materialism and turning to examine types of spiritual philosophy we find a further difference emerging. It is the distinguishing mark between Theism and Pantheism. 'Does God take definite and specific action, or is He only in a general sense the source of all that is or happens?' The best Pantheism is very close to Theism, but here there is a clear line of divergence. The great

distinction among men, as Dr. Edwin Bevan is always insisting, is 'not between Eastern and Western, but between those who have come strongly under the influence of the Bible and those who have not.' Pantheism traces its lineage back to the philosophy of ancient Greece which, in profound harmony with the highest Indian thought, conceives God as 'a static perfection, whose nature appears in all things that are grounded in that perfection.' Theism, on the other hand, deriving its thought from the Bible, conceives God as 'a living and righteous will, so that we come closest to Him not when, with our mind, we obtain a wide conspectus of truth, but when in our purposes we are united with His righteous purpose.'

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Now there is a great measure of truth in Pantheism. For if there is any revelation at all then everything whatsoever must be revelation, because the Being who is to be revealed is the God of heaven and earth, the Maker of all things, and the character of the Maker must appear to some extent in what He has made. There are, of course, facts which, taken in isolation, would give no true conception of God at all. 'The claim of any one who says that all things in some degree reveal God, must be that if only we could see it in its whole context there would be perceptible in the movement, of which this fact is an episode, at least some trace of the divine character and will. Unless all things are revelation, nothing can be revelation.'

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But the question rises whether God is merely the universal immanent principle, or does He take sides? 'Is there any sense in language such as that about coming to the help of the Lord against the mighty? Does that represent anything in the real constitution of the world?' If God is conceived in terms of personality and will, it surely follows that some of those events which we regard as His action will reveal Him much more fully than others. The great man in nine-tenths of his actions would probably be indistinguishable from the average man, but in some emergency his distinction would immediately appear and an altogether new light would be thrown upon his character, his power, and his purposes. If God is truly personal this analogy may

fitly be applied to His action. 'For the most part we must expect to find that the divine action proceeds by a perfectly regular process. It will only be set aside when there is sufficient occasion.' This does not mean that there is a fixed natural process with which we claim that God may interfere from time to time. It rather means that 'all the while He is acting, only all the while it is appropriate on most occasions to follow a regular course, as does the ordinary man of regular habit in the conduct of his daily life. But, where some sufficient emergency occurs, this course can be set aside, because all the while it is grounded not in physical necessity, but in the divine will, or in the divine apprehension of what is good.' Such an emergency, so the Bible teaches, has arisen through the sin of man, and has given rise to a special divine activity or revelation.

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The question now arises as to the *locus* of this revelation. We have all, doubtless, freed our minds from the idea that it resides in a series of propositions or in words expressly dictated by the Divine Spirit. But there is an impression that the *locus* of revelation is supremely within the human mind, that 'it comes in the poetic glow wherein the mind is wrapped into a union with the divine, and seeks to utter what it has experienced by those modes of expression which seem to force words to convey something beyond their ordinary meaning.' In this there is no doubt a great measure of truth, but it has this difficulty that poetic apprehension of this sort is always very vague. 'It may stir deeply those who are in sufficient mental sympathy with the poet to enter into his experience as they read his utterances, but a good many people will be left untouched; and there is nothing definite there at all.'

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Now, however, we find that the primary interest of the Bible is not in the experience or the doctrine, but in the *event*. The Bible is for the most part a history book. 'The biblical historian is always concerned with the question, What was in the mind of God? But that to which he desires to relate the mind of God is always the event, and I want to suggest to you that on the biblical view the *locus*,

the sphere, the area, of revelation, is primarily the historic event, not thoughts in men's minds at all, but the thing that happens—the deliverance from Egypt, the retreat of Sennacherib, the Exile, and the Return. In these things we are to read the action of God, His purpose, His judgment.' No doubt the event can only be interpreted aright by the mind that is divinely illuminated, as was the prophet's mind. But the divine act comes first, and the prophet is to be regarded not as a man to whom God has communicated certain divine truths, but as one who has been divinely enlightened to interpret the divine act.

All this has a direct and important bearing upon the revelation of Christ in the Gospels. Here the divine fact is that the Word was made flesh. Doubtless that fact would have been barren if there had not been those whose minds were illuminated to receive and understand it. 'We beheld his glory.' But the solid foundation of fact must never be belittled or overlooked. Only a false spirituality will lead us away from the divine act in history to a purely mental illumination or mystical experience. 'Actual and effective revelation takes place when there is a coincidence of the divinely guided event and the divinely illuminated mind, and for the fullness and effectiveness of revelation both factors are necessary.'

What student of theology, what preacher or teacher has not felt—and probably complained—that of all Christian doctrines that of the Holy Spirit is among the most obscure?

It is obscure because it has been so neglected. It received scant and almost superficial attention in the early centuries; the Church asserted the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit mainly as a corollary of the consubstantiality of the Son, but the only problem as to the Godhead which received real attention was that of Father—Son.

In later times the question enlisted attention often enough, but little of real satisfying value was attained. On the one hand, so many of the writers

took positions which seemed wild, unreal, and almost meaningless; on the other hand, more sober writers were under the domination of what had long passed as traditional 'orthodoxy,' so that their often learned disquisitions also seem unreal and not obviously meaningful. They were at pains, for example, to prove that the Holy Spirit is a 'person,' not an influence, but the modern mind asks impatiently what does that mean?

Yes, there is clamant need for a fresh start on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We make bold to say that the Church to-day is in dire need of it. Who will give us at least the foundations or outline?

We think of Canon C. E. RAVEN. He might conceivably do something of real value here. For the third of his Riddell Memorial Lectures (1935), a series with the general title of *Evolution and the Christian Concept of God* (Milford; 2s. 6d. net), is on 'The Energy of the Spirit,' and in it he shows at least that he is fully alive to the difficulties we all feel and to the vital importance of our coming to some clearer notions as to the Holy Spirit.

He shows how the difficulties arose. They lie in the New Testament itself. We have all noticed how the 'fruits of the Spirit' seem so different from the 'manifestations of the Spirit,' the former being principally ethical and spiritual, the latter being largely matters of 'tongues' and ecstasies and miracles. Whether we are quite prepared to agree with Canon RAVEN's suggestion that St. Luke 'misinterpreted Pentecost' or not, the distinction we have drawn stares us in the face.

Then very convincingly Dr. RAVEN points out how Montanus, who interpreted 'spiritual gifts' in the ecstatic sense, and the 'orthodox' Church, which rightly enough condemned his extravagance, were responsible between them for the unsatisfactory state of things which has existed ever since. For the Church came to believe that the Holy Spirit dwelt only within her bounds; and that belief, he points out, leads almost inevitably to a

quasi-magical view which fails entirely to do justice to any tenable view of the Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture.

Another unfortunate happening in early days confirmed this tendency to make the Holy Spirit an exclusive possession of the Church. The Alexandrian theology did not distinguish carefully enough between the Logos and the Holy Spirit. It left no real room for the Spirit and kept Him only as the source of special acts of inspiration, so 'lending weight to the tendency to restrict His scope to purely ecclesiastical regions.' 'Any recognition of a divine element outside the Scriptures and the Church' became suspect. The whole natural order was a mass of corruption, the good works of the heathen were only *splendida vitia*.

We must, holds Dr. RAVEN, 'move away from traditional orthodoxy,' 'to recover a lost and vital element in the Christian religion.' 'To do full justice to our faith in the Spirit as the Giver of Life would be at once to connect Him with the whole creative process—with that quest for life and life abundant to which evolution testifies and which Jesus endorsed and consummated.'

Bergson in his 'Creative Evolution' has shown that evolution is a complete mystery apart from some such hypothesis as that of an *élan vital*—an urge, a nisus towards perfection whose operations result in 'emergences' novel and unpredictable. Dr. RAVEN does not suggest that the *élan vital* is to be identified with the Holy Spirit, but he urges that 'no one can fail to be struck by the analogy between the activity of the Life-force and the operations of the Spirit.' 'Bergson's description of the way in which Life insinuates itself into matter, overcomes resistances, moulds it to serve higher ends, and brings with it liberty, variety, and richness of achievement might be transferred almost without change to the operation of the Spirit as described in the Acts of the Apostles.'

That this admits of a dangerous interpretation Canon RAVEN is well aware. But the danger ceases if we hold by the transcendence as well as

the immanence of God. God is more than 'life-force.'

To correlate the Power which leads man in his individual and social nature from lower to higher with the Power which has led the whole animate creation from lower to higher forms, and which in the case of man has led him to his artistic development or led him to 'witty inventions' of all kinds, is a procedure which gives us new vistas, and, we think, new satisfactions. And the new doctrine of the Holy Spirit which we desiderate will have to take account of all that Canon RAVEN has said.

In a recent work, *Divine Humanity* (S.P.C.K. ; 5s. net), the Rev. W. K. LOWTHER CLARKE, D.D., who is well versed in recent Biblical and Patristic scholarship, both English and Continental, offers a series of eleven Doctrinal Essays on New Testament Problems. About half of the material here presented has already appeared in the form of magazine articles. The title is suggested by the fact that the papers are intended as a contribution to the understanding of the Incarnation, which the author would define in terms of Chalcedon as interpreted through the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria.

While the papers are learned and full of points, they tend—if one may so put it—to lack point. We mean that, speaking generally, they do not succeed in making a well-defined impression on the reader's mind. But they repay patient study, and we would give in sample of them an account of the paper entitled 'Yet Without Sin.' The subject with which it deals is one of deep importance. It is the problem of the sinlessness of Jesus.

The author begins by asking whether a case can be made out to-day for a man being sinless. The question may be considered in three aspects. Is he sinless in his own estimation, in the estimation of others, or in God's estimation?

To claim that one has never done any harm, to be sinless in one's own estimation, may be the claim

of an unenlightened conscience, which sees only a narrow field of duty. But the claim is not to be lightly dismissed as the product of self-love. Saints of the Catholic Church have been known to present themselves before their confessor with a declaration that they have examined themselves and found no sin. (It is not universally true that the nearer the soul is to God the more deeply it feels the sense of sinfulness.) But God has only to put such saints in a place of difficulty, in which their life is no longer sheltered and free from conflict, and they will become conscious that they fall short of being perfect. Sinlessness is not necessarily perfection of character.

When one is called upon, for example, to rule over one's fellow-men, there is a likelihood not only of staining one's soul through immersion in the world's affairs, but even of causing serious hurt to others through inexperience and lack of judgment. Newman lived for years at the Oratory with less on his conscience than before, but would this state of things have lasted if he had gone to Westminster instead of Manning?

Again, to be sinless in the estimation of others is possible, but may it not be involved once more with a certain narrowness of outlook? In Mrs. Skrine's novel, 'Shepherd Easton's Daughter,' an attempt is made to depict a perfect character. Evil has no power over Dorcas' unspotted purity. But Dorcas' attack on the citadel of evil is unsuccessful. The problems involved are more than the beautiful soul of the solitary mystic can grapple with. Is, then, mere personal sanctity enough? One may possess that but fall far short of perfection of character.

Yet again, when we think of any one's relation to God, our judgment is theological. In comparison with Him who alone is holy and good, every man is a sinner and falls short of God's highest will for him. But in a sense we may believe him sinless. He is 'justified'; that is, God judges him by the direction of his life, not by his present attainment.

We may think, Dr. LOWTHER CLARKE says, of the sinlessness of Jesus in the same three ways. (1) Probably, despite Jn 8<sup>46</sup> ('which of you convicteth me of sin?'), Jesus would not have estimated Himself as sinless. He was normally unself-conscious in a way we can hardly conceive. Two thoughts dominated His mind, not the Father and the Son, but the Father and the sheep without a shepherd. Real self-consciousness meant for Him not the sense of sinlessness, but conscious union with the Father.

(2) In the estimation of others Jesus is not always regarded as sinless. As a prophet and reformer He became a cause of division, which is reflected in the contemporary judgments concerning Him. And this original divergence of opinion has continued to our day. Jewish writers, who consider Jesus one of the greatest of their race, compare Him unfavourably with Hillel as regards moral excellence. Christians see Him as perfect and, of course, sinless. Is not this just what we should expect? The last thing God Incarnate was likely to be was a colourless good man whom every one agreed to praise.

(3) What the human character of Jesus seemed in the eyes of the Father is a mystery. It is part of the Christian faith that Jesus' character was perfect. Isolated words or acts of His, if recorded of others or found in a different setting, might be judged differently. When they belong to the Jesus Christ of the Church's experience, declared Lord of all by the Resurrection, they form part of a whole which is characterized by perfection.

For the rest, the word 'sinlessness,' which is generally used of the Virgin Mary and may in a sense apply to lesser saints, is not suitable for the description of Jesus' character. If used at all, it should mean, as Grensted says, 'the full and positive response of His whole being to the God whom He knew as Father, and therewith to the guiding of that Power which He taught men to know as the Holy Spirit.'