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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE present Archbishop of York wrote some years ago: 'It is often said that our Lord's doctrine is that of free forgiveness on the sole condition of repentance. But there is a condition which we must fulfil if we are to make our own the forgiveness which God always and freely offers. And it is noticeable that repentance is not, in fact, mentioned in this connexion. The one thing that is mentioned, and that with a most solemn reiteration, is our forgiveness of those who have injured us or are in our debt.'

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Dr. TEMPLE still regards this aspect of our Lord's doctrine of forgiveness of sins as 'profoundly true' and 'vitaly important,' and he affirms it to be 'almost universally neglected.' This appears in his Foreword to a recent book, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, by the Rev. E. Basil Redlich, B.D., Canon Theologian of Leicester (T. & T. Clark; 10s. 6d. net). In this book Canon Redlich gathers together the teaching of the Bible, and especially of the Gospels, on the subject of forgiveness; and the burden of his exposition is that to gain forgiveness from God a man must first forgive his fellow-men.

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There is much in this part of the work to interest the Christian expositor (it may be here noted that in following up his main contention the writer passes beyond the Biblical period), and the exposition is for the most part clear and on popular lines. In the second part the emphasis is systematic rather than historical, and here the writer essays a 'rationale of forgiveness.' Whether one agrees always with his analyses in this part, as with his interpretations in the first part, one cannot but be impressed with the

necessity of making more of forgivingness in the presentation of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness.

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But Canon Redlich would go further than this and claim primacy for forgivingness over repentance. The first point he would make is that forgivingness is almost universally absent in repentance, as this latter term is understood in Moral Theology, or in Manuals of Confession, or in the Church of England. For example, in the Prayer Book of the Church of England, repentance and the forgiveness of others are required as two distinct and separate conditions in the Exhortation and Invitation of the Communion Office, in the Catechism, and in the Visitation of the Sick. And in this, it must be allowed, the Church of England is in line with the teaching on repentance in the Old Testament and even in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

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The next point he would make is that repentance, understood according to the mind of Christ, cannot really be dissociated from forgivingness but must be accompanied by it. Repentance without forgivingness is not true repentance. Truly experienced repentance must include not only the love of God but also the love of man. Then only is repentance ideal and complete.

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The final point is now reached. It is that when we consider the differences between forgivingness and repentance, as the latter is narrowly understood, we must award the primacy to forgivingness. We are invited to consider positions such as the following: (1) Only if he have the forgiving spirit before he makes confession can a sinner prove himself

worthily prepared for the forgiveness of God ; for God is love, and His love is like the sun which shines on the just and the unjust. (2) It is part of the same position that only if he have the forgiving spirit is there a guarantee that selfishness and self-centredness have no place in the heart of the penitent ; and the very nature of the God of love is opposed to selfishness and self-centredness in any form. (3) To forgive another makes greater claims on our spiritual energy than does repentance before God. (4) Repentance and the disposition of penitence relate to acts done by us, but forgivingness is greater, as relating to acts done against us. (5) Forgivingness is a more potent remedy for the ills of the world than repentance.

While one may question the propriety of thus attempting to exalt forgivingness over repentance, as narrowly understood ; while also one may desiderate a more vigorous logical treatment of the distinction in question, one cannot but realize that if the spirit of forgiveness does not take possession of the penitent, then he cannot be in the truly Christian state of forgiveness. Accordingly, we are grateful to Canon Redlich for making this point so emphatically.

The critical state of the world and particularly the trials through which the churches on the Continent have had to pass has led to very profound searchings of heart, and one can discern in continental theologians a note of deeper seriousness, not to say desperate earnestness. The days of the arm-chair critic are gone ; faith is felt to be a matter of life and death, and men are driven back for refuge on the fundamentals. We whose life, both in Church and State, is more peaceful, and who look on the conflict more as spectators than as actors and sufferers, would do well to give heed to those who speak to us out of the midst of the fiery furnace.

These reflections are suggested by the appearance in English of a book by a notable German Lutheran—*The Mystery of God*, by Dr. Wilhelm STÄHLIN

(S.C.M. ; 7s. 6d. net). It has been published under the auspices of the World Conference on Faith and Order, and is to be regarded as a statement of first-rate importance dealing with the Christian revelation as it is embodied in the Word, the Sacraments, and the Church.

The treatment is fresh and powerful, the work of a profound thinker who goes to the root of his subject, and at the same time feels as profoundly as he thinks. Here is a man who manifestly trembles at the Word of God, and his seriousness, quite apart from the weight of his argument, is exceedingly impressive.

His thinking centres round the conception of 'the mystery of God,' of which the Church has received a stewardship. What is that mystery ? It is the action of God in history whereby the Unseen becomes visible and the Eternal is revealed in time.

This mystery is not the pervasive presence of God at all times and in all places. It is revealed in Christ at a definite point of time, like the lightning-flash which strikes one spot of earth, or like the subterranean fire which, while 'secretly at work from the earliest beginning beneath the covering surface of earthly happening, making the earth quake now and again with sinister rumblings and yet in a secret manner bearing and nourishing all life and happening upon earth, breaks forth at one place from out of the primeval deep.'

How is this Divine mystery related to the earthly actuality, and in what manner does it enter into it ? For answer Dr. STÄHLIN makes use of the Lutheran phrase 'in, with, and under.' That phrase was used to express the relation of Christ to the sacrament of the Supper. His body and blood were 'in, with, and under' the bread and wine. The words may be given a far wider application. 'It is of the essence of the mystery that here God Himself, His love, and His power become present in, with, and under an earthly actuality. At no time did the mystery exist in the thin atmosphere of mere thought, detached from a concrete

and sensible happening in the earthly sphere. The Divine mystery is actualized in this very thing, that God unites Himself with an earthly form, and even now invites and obliges us to experience and receive the transcendent mystery in, with, and under a concrete (that is, a definite and limited) physical reality.' \_\_\_\_\_

God was 'in' Christ. The Divine mystery is the mystery of the Incarnation. It pleased God to pour the fullness of His wisdom and love into an earthly vessel. 'The Divine mystery does not dwell with those who bear in themselves an insatiable yearning for boundless expanses, preferring the general to the particular, despising the once-only, and scorning the notion that the Lord of Heaven could dwell within the shrine of narrowness and poverty.' \_\_\_\_\_

The word 'with' points to an alliance between the heavenly boon and the earthly reality. The Divine majesty is fitly represented as a consuming fire. 'No man shall see me and live.' But it is the mystery of God's mercy that He does not consume the earthly vessel into which He pours His fullness. The deity of Christ does not absorb or consume His humanity. 'Reformation theology fought the medieval doctrine of trans-substantiation, not because it seemed to them to be too miraculous—rationalism was first guilty of this misunderstanding—but because it suspected in that doctrine a rationalistic dissolving of the mystery which was not fair to the inconceivable miracle of the Divine presence in earthly matter.' \_\_\_\_\_

The third word in the formula, 'under,' indicates that the Divine mystery, though revealed, remains at the same time in obscurity. 'Jesus Christ Himself, the distinctive content of the mystery, is one form in which the majesty of God is concealed. The Church bears the slave-form of the Cross, and its glory is a hidden glory.' But this hiddenness is not final. Some day the hidden will be made manifest. The mystery is the Divine secret in this interim situation of history, in which it is not yet manifested what we shall be. 'The night is passing away, but it is not yet full daylight. The com-

forting and saving Divine grace is still hidden under the coverings of earthly material. The "under" of the Reformation formula reminds us of the fact that we have the Divine mystery with us as the great hope.' \_\_\_\_\_

This Divine mystery is embodied in and expressed through the Church, the Sacraments, and the Word. These subjects are treated in a very arresting way, and with a reverence which makes the reader feel that he is in touch with holy things.

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Emeritus Professor G. Dawes Hicks, M.A., Ph.D., Litt.D., F.B.A., has published a useful and interesting book designed primarily for the 'general reader,' namely, his Hibbert Lectures on *The Philosophical Bases of Theism* (Allen & Unwin; 8s. 6d. net). It is his contention that the true revelation of God must be sought in the whole process of Nature and human history and in the intellectual, moral, and religious experience of individuals. He follows up this contention with a discussion of the essential meaning of the classical theistic arguments and of the argument from moral values. He also discusses the issue between pantheism and theism.

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But he deals particularly with the nature and significance of specifically religious experience, and it is to his treatment of this subject that we would direct attention. It is good to see the classical and standard theistic arguments refurbished and presented afresh, but more vital to present-day theism is the defence of the validity of religious experience.

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There has been a marked tendency amongst theological writers of recent times to discountenance the influence of the intellect or the knowing factor in the formation of the religious consciousness. More perhaps than any other, Schleiermacher is responsible for this. At the root of his interpretation of religious experience lay the notion of the Divine immanence in the soul of man. The true nature of religion, he said, is just 'the immediate consciousness of the Deity as He is found in our-

selves and in the world.' More specifically it is 'a feeling of absolute dependence.'

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But in using this latter phrase Schleiermacher gave his case away. Mere feeling could not proclaim its own nature. Dependence is discerned by the religious man as the result of a cognitive act. Religious feelings cannot be other than feelings engendered by religious ideas. The phrase 'absolute dependence' must imply a reality, to some extent known, on which to depend.

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Schleiermacher frequently employed the term 'feeling' in the way it is now customary to speak of 'immediate' or 'intuitive' experience. But here again we meet with ambiguity. 'Immediate experience' does not contain within itself a 'consciousness of unity with the Eternal.' To live through, to experience, a mental process, and to know that we are living through it, are two very different things. Moreover, perception or apprehension as it takes place in ourselves is an extremely complex process. It may seem to be direct and immediate, yet mediate inference may be present in it.

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In his states of ecstasy the mystic is assured that he has an immediate intuition of God. But the mystic is constrained to interpret his experiences even in simply attempting to describe them. And his interpretation implies that, prior to the experience in question, he has acquired his religious beliefs precisely as his non-mystical neighbour acquires his, namely, through instruction and tradition, through habitual ways of thinking, and through rational reflection. In other words, he brings his theological convictions to the mystical experience.

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'When, for example, some of the mystics declare that in the stage of what they call "contemplation" they have been able to "see" how God can be three Persons, or in what wise the Virgin Mary had been assumed into heaven, nothing can be more obvious than that they "see" what they have been by training and teaching predisposed to see. Had they been nurtured in the faith of Buddhism or of Taoism their mystic visions would unquestionably have been entirely different.'

It is a grave error to separate feeling or intuition or mystical apprehension or, for that matter, the 'numinous' faculty from knowing. Such a separation, could it ever come about, would mean the extinction of both. As a matter of fact it is not mere feeling that is really meant when it is claimed that feeling is the ultimate root of religious experience. When Tennyson, clinging to his religious assurance, asserted 'I have felt,' he was really opposing to doubt, not mere feeling as such, but his entire personality, including the cognitive and volitional elements.

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In religious experience, it should be observed, we do not apprehend the mind of God in a way similar to that in which we apprehend our own mind. However vivid and profound a man's religious experience may be, he can be conscious of God only through the medium of God's manifestations in the universe, including finite minds, and through the emotions thus awakened. 'And every serious and reflective mind amongst us could tell of moments, not indeed of ecstatic exaltation of the mystic type, but of calm rational insight into the spiritual meaning of existence, when he has been conscious of a revelation or filled with an enthusiasm the import of which has been to him infinitely precious, and concerning which he is persuaded it was no phantom of unreality.'

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There is much that is eloquent in these pages, and they are illuminated by many a concrete instance. The following quotation may serve to round off this account of the discussion on religious experience: 'Call it reason, call it insight, call it inspiration, whatever it be that enables us thus to grasp the deeper significance of the world without and the world within, it engenders the irresistible conviction that the human knower is not alone in knowing the facts of Nature, that the human heart is not alone in the love it feels, that the human will is not alone in striving for the good which it reveres. And that surely is what we mean by God—a consciousness that knows all that we cannot know, that loves beyond our power of loving, that "realises" the good where our faltering efforts fail.'