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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

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

WE are now in the season of Advent. In three weeks' time we shall be at that annual pause when for many 'plain living and high thinking are no more.' Before beginning our usual Notes let us take one second to say genially and very cordially to all our readers 'All the compliments of the Season!'

We have good news for you. We can solve one Christmas problem for you and thereby and by the same act give you some valuable assistance towards clearing up another. The one we can solve is the annual one of the Christmas present. There has appeared a book which we can whole-heartedly recommend. It is Canon F. R. BARRY'S *What has Christianity to Say?* (S.C.M.). The price is five shillings net. Some will wish, of course, to spend more than that; but, however much more you give, make this book part of your gift.

In this fine book Canon BARRY sets in clear light the other Christmas problem to which we have alluded. It is this: Can the ordinary Christian without irony or doubt in his voice wish his neighbour 'A Merry Christmas'? Or can the minister in these days preach on Christmas with much of the old confidence and joyous assurance? That many ministers feel bewildered about it we have ample evidence. It used to be so easy to discourse on subjects like 'What difference did Jesus make?' or 'What if Christ had not come?' To-day, the world being what it is, and religion being in the parlous plight in which it seems to be in many parts

and among so many people in all parts, what is one to say about it? What has Christianity to say or what is Christianity able to do in a world which proudly declares that Christianity is a back number for which it has no use?

Instead of strictly following Canon BARRY and making citations from this masterly book, let us set down some points gathered from the book as a whole. First, we must resolutely and honestly face the facts of the present situation, however unpleasant they be. It admits of no doubt that in our time the area that once seemed to be effectively occupied by Christianity has very seriously shrunk. It is of little real comfort to say, 'Well, that just means that the hold of Christianity was only apparent, not real.' We question if that be true, even if true it does not help. When non-churchgoing spread, we cheered ourselves by a thought that religion was not infallibly bound up with church-attendance. When the older theologies lost their grip, we thought it might turn out to be not altogether a disadvantage. But we have more and more evidence that the Christian ethic is by multitudes not only questioned in theory but contradicted in practice. And that is a grim fact which makes facile optimism impossible, and raises the question, Has Christianity finally failed? Is its day over?

We are living in an age which in many respects is curiously like the world into which Christianity

was born. Philosophies have criticised one another into impotence. Scepticism abounds. Strong but vague enthusiasms have a brief run and then fade out. Further, we have a dehumanizing factor which the first Christian centuries knew not—man is the slave of machinery, and his wonderful engines have outstripped his character. Let us face the fact that Christians in this age are rapidly approaching being what they were in primitive Christian times—a small body in a pagan world.

Second, from this approximation of our world, spiritually and morally, to the world to which Christianity came, we gain real understanding of a feature of that ancient world which has puzzled many—Cæsar-worship. It is difficult to understand how hard-headed Romans and quick-minded Greeks could ever have found any satisfaction in worshipping the living Cæsar. Yet under our eyes we see the thing, in its real significance, happening again. Devotion to the State is for millions supplying all the religion they seem to need. Towards the State they express real religious fervour. In devoting their lives wholly to the service of the State their questionings as to the significance of their individual lives are set at rest; their life is seen to have meaning and purpose. The ancient worship of Cæsar was only a more picturesque form of the same thing. Let us make no mistake, there is something of genuine spiritual satisfaction in Fascism and Communism. In fact, the alternatives before men in our day are just what they were so long ago, Cæsar or Christ.

Third, the real catastrophe would be that Christians should become panic-struck and speak in the accents of defeat. 'We are perplexed, but not in despair,' wrote St. Paul, and, in still grimmer circumstances, his cry from behind prison-bars was, 'Rejoice, again I say, rejoice.' The anti-gods mission of the Buddha, the worship of Cæsar, and the religious fervour of the anti-God campaign in Russia are in the last analysis demonstration of the truth that man is incurably religious. He craves something that will integrate and give meaning to his life. He craves something vastly mightier than himself that will take care of him, provide him 'a

place in the sun,' and which he may serve with confidence and joy. He knows that real life is found only on the path of surrender and self-sacrifice.

Because in our time multitudes have apostatized we should not despair. It is very distressing, but it is no sort of proof that Christianity's day is over. When we see the son of godly parents setting out for the far country, we are indeed grieved for him; but we do not begin wondering whether religion is played out. Should we do so any more if a generation or a century turn its back on the Faith? The Church has perhaps been overmuch deluded with the nineteenth century naïve belief in the inevitability of progress in steady upward direction, forgetting that each new generation is a new problem, and that each man must be born again.

In a world curiously like our own Christianity won a notable victory. Is there any reason to doubt that the wonder can be repeated? Time, we may be surely confident, will be on the side of Christianity. The deified State has no element of permanence about it. A 'god' that is subject to vicissitude and even to destruction will not long satisfy the religious cravings of men. Men, too, will some day realize that too big a price is being paid for such benefits as the Totalitarian State confers, that it requires too utter a surrender of personal rights. As against Christianity the idolatry of the State seems immeasurably poor.

Such are the thoughts suggested by a perusal of Canon BARRY's book. For an adequate diagnosis of the situation and guidance how to meet it, we refer our readers to the book itself.

There is in our day welcome and increasing evidence that the Church, hard pressed on all sides, is rallying its forces for a counter-attack, and is being led to concentrate its energies more and more upon its own specific work of evangelism. To those in all the churches who are looking for help and guidance in regard to this all-important matter

we can cordially recommend a valuable little book by the Rev. Frederic C. SPURR, *The Evangelism for our Time* (Epworth Press; 2s. net). It is highly illuminating and practical, and contains the ripe experience and reflection of a great Christian preacher and teacher. _____

The religious situation, as we have said in the preceding Note, is discouraging enough, but not such as to lead Christian people to despair. 'Does the tide always come back like that, after it's gone out?' asked a little boy at the seaside. And his father answered confidently, 'Always, my son.' The religious tide is far out to-day, and there are many who predict that it will return no more. Christianity is on its death-bed, they say, and the date of the actual demise is authoritatively given as round about the year 1965! 'The only answer to these people is to refer them to history, and especially to their own fathers in the unfaith, who were as confident as are their descendants that Christianity would soon become a thing of the past. They said it in the second century, in the third, in the tenth, the thirteenth, the sixteenth, the eighteenth, the nineteenth, and they will continue to say it. Meanwhile we may recall to them the word of Tertullian, "The Church is an anvil that has worn out many hammers."' _____

History is the best corrective of pessimism. It is a record of continual ebb and flow. There come into the life of man strange tides of the spirit, when life surges up to higher levels and human energies express themselves in great ways. Then there comes the ebb, when men grow slack, sensual, material, when faith, hope, and charity fail, and the lowered spiritual vitality predisposes the spirit to various maladies: doubt, denial, quarrels, misunderstandings, greed, social dissensions, and, finally, sanguinary wars. Then, disillusioned, sick and desperate, men rise from the dust and call upon God. So it has ever been in the past, and so doubtless will it be again. _____

Meantime, what can be done to turn the ebbing tide? Last year the *Morning Post* published a series of articles under the heading of 'The Empty

Pew,' in which various people gave their reasons for having abandoned the Church. The main reasons given were such as these—that the Christian Creed is outworn, that criticism has undermined the authority of the Bible, that comparative religion has destroyed the exclusive claim of Christianity to be the revelation of God to man. The answers showed great ignorance of what the Church claims and teaches; and doubtless were in large measure due to the secular atmosphere of our time, and to the poison of rationalism which has been assiduously circulated through the blood of the people. But the fact remains that such ideas flourish in the heart of Christendom, and the question is, Who is responsible for this? _____

Has the Church done all it might have done to make its message intelligible to this new age? Is it enough to affirm dogmatically certain truths and trust to the Spirit of God to convince the mind and heart of the hearer. No doubt, apart from the working of the Spirit, all our efforts are in vain. 'St. Paul believed that, but it did not absolve him from the obligation of reasoning and proving, when he dealt with the pagan world.' In short, the apologist is needed no less than the evangelist, and most manifestly needed in our time. 'But the new apologetic must be very different from the old. Paley and Butler are of little use in our day. Their atmosphere is not ours. We have to deal with a wholly different outlook. A scientific conception of the universe and a new psychological account of personality are to-day in possession of men's minds. It is with these that we have to reckon, and through these that we must make a new approach to the thought of God. And it will be found that, by a new route, we shall arrive at the old goal. It can be shown that evolution, fairly interpreted, so far from dispensing with God, makes Him all the more necessary. The old "analogies" still hold good, but in a new setting. "Purpose" in the life of the world, can be demonstrated.' And in general it can be shown that Christian faith has a firm basis deep down in the very nature of things. _____

The work of the apologist, however, can only be preparatory. It may indeed help to clear away

difficulties which are an obstacle to faith, and that is a great service, but it cannot give to men a personal certitude about God. All human argumentation has an element of uncertainty about it. It is a structure which is liable to give way. Man's need can only be met by a sure Word of God upon which his feet can be securely planted as upon a rock. And surely it will not be denied that the world is in desperate need of such a Word of God to-day for its guidance and salvation. 'The world is blindly groping after a new social order. Communism comes forward with its promise of paradise below on condition that we rid ourselves of the last remnants of belief in God and Christ. Fascism has its programme. Labour has its plan. And after all our efforts we are in captivity again, in the midst of a world armed to the teeth, and feverishly preparing for what many speak of as an "inevitable war." By general admission we are in a desperate plight, fearful, suspicious, defending ourselves against a dreaded outbreak of fresh devilities.'

Now it is the Church's mission to tell the world that there is to be found in Christ that sure Word of God for lack of which the world is perishing. Christ tells us 'the truth of things, namely, that man wrongs his brother, because he is wrong with, and wrongs, the Heavenly Father. And he cannot treat his brother with justice and love until he returns to the love of the Father.' And with the truth Christ gives the power. His word from the beginning was 'with power,' and so it has continued to be. 'It saved that old world, by giving a meaning to life when life had lost all meaning. For a pantheon of gods, which men held in contempt, it revealed God as Father—Holy Father. It created a new and genuine brotherhood. Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, master and slave, entered a new fellowship in which all became new men in Christ. It redeemed man from his evil passions and vices, and made saints of the scum of the earth. And it has continued as "power." It is available for man to-day.'

Here, surely, is a gospel worth believing and worth preaching. It is based upon historic facts,

for God in Christ has entered into history. We must keep our feet firmly upon that ground. It used to be the fashion among those who had drunk at the wells of Hegelianism to say that eternal truth could not be made dependent upon contingent happenings on the field of history. When Christian faith is thus divorced from the facts of the gospel story it straightway becomes thin, evanescent, and futile. The Christian preacher has a story to tell, and based upon that story he has a message of good news to give to the world—good news about God in His relation to man, and good news about the whole of human life. 'What man needs to know about God is this: does He care for us in any personal sense? Is He with us in our struggle? Is He a helpless beholder of man's evil, or is He working against it; His good free will against man's evil free will? Can He redeem us from our hereditary handicap and make us completely human? And when life here below is ended, has He a home elsewhere to which we may go? It is the gospel alone which answers these questions.'

How is this message to be got across? There is a great variety of ways, each useful in its own place, but none of them sacrosanct or to be slavishly followed. The new age may call for new methods, and the book before us has many valuable hints as to possible methods, but the writer lays special stress on personal evangelism. 'I was one of a company of about ninety men assembled in a London committee room, who saw John Clifford die—or rather pass into the fuller life. In his last moments upon earth this great man, who throughout his long life as pastor, teacher, preacher, and social reformer was always an evangelist, pleaded for a restoration in the Church of the ministry of personal evangelism.' This opens the widest door, for it is not too much to say that the Church, through its members, is in actual touch with nearly the entire population. And it needs no deep spiritual experience to qualify a disciple of Christ for bearing witness to the truth as he has found it. Andrew was but a beginner when he found his brother Simon and induced him to come to Jesus as a fellow-learner. There can be no offence in Andrew's method. 'I have found the real Master

of life at last. See if I am not right. Then let us follow Him, you and I, together.' Men are impressed by the sincerity of that witness, while they would be repelled by an implied profession that we are better than they.

A symposium on the old yet ever new subject of *Revelation* has recently been issued under this title by Messrs. Faber & Faber. The cost of the volume is 7s. 6d. Professor John Baillie of the University of Edinburgh explains in the Preface that the volume is intended as a contribution towards the task and witness of the Church militant in the present age; and Mr. T. S. Eliot, who supplies an Introduction to the subject, appears to suggest that the Church militant may take heart even in this faithless and perverse day inasmuch as the current secularism is 'not a solid force of disciplined troops, but a varied host of allegiances.'

There are six essays more or less bearing on the subject proper, and in them six different Christian communions are represented. The writers in the order of their essays are Professor Karl Barth, representing the Swiss Reformed Church; the Archbishop of York, representing the Church of England; Professor Sergius Bulgakoff, representing the Greek or Orthodox Church; the Rev. M. C. D'Arcy, S.J., representing the Roman Catholic Church; Professor Walter M. Horton, representing not only the Baptist Church but the 'rising generation of Christian thinkers in America'; and Bishop Gustav Aulén, representing the Lutheran Church and Scandinavia. It will be interesting and instructive to compare their views of revelation.

Barth is purist or exclusivist in his use of the term. The only revelation entitled to the name is that which has taken place and is still taking place in Jesus Christ. Any other so-called revelation is revelation only in 'a perverted, invalid, and loose sense' of the concept. Once the need of divine grace in Christ is recognized, the discussion as to whether there is not revelation elsewhere than in Jesus Christ is superfluous. Such an attitude no

doubt serves to emphasize the Christian sense of the newness of the Christian revelation.

Dr. Temple is not so intransigent. Revelations in other religions he allows, but of course he regards them as partial and incomplete as compared with the revelation in Jesus Christ. Nor does he favour a concept of revelation unrelated to the nature of the universe and of history; but while thus distinguishing between special and general revelation—that in Nature and in history—he holds our interpretation of general revelation to be unreliable, unless it is established by some special revelation 'wherein the divine nature and character are manifested as the diffused rays of sunlight are gathered in the focus of a burning-glass.'

Bulgakoff is true to the tradition of the Orthodox Catholicism in fully admitting the existence of a natural revelation of God in His creation, in Nature, and in the human spirit. Every pagan religion, he affirms, contains a kernel of divine revelation. But this essay is a difficult one for the Western mind to follow.

Father D'Arcy is so far with Barth in saying that what is directly communicated by God Himself, and is named by the Apostle Paul the gospel of Jesus Christ, is revelation in the strict sense of the word. Indeed, he welcomes the 'austere tradition of Protestantism' for which the Barthian theology stands. But, true to Roman Catholic tradition, he does not refuse the name of revelation to the witness of God unto Himself through physical nature, the souls of men and their activities, and in morals and art. In natural religion, however, man is 'like a blind man reading braille.' In supernatural revelation a new path is opened up which man himself could not trace.

Dr. Horton's is a most readable essay, informative and pointed. He welcomes liberal Protestantism as having made reverence for all truth a part—a permanent part, he hopes—of the Christian conscience. But he thinks that it has tended, through its contact with the notions of scientific discovery and religious insight, to lose the distinctive

element in the idea of revelation, namely, in E. F. Scott's words, divine 'disclosure of a realm of truth which cannot be apprehended by sense or by ordinary processes of thought.' The concept of revelation, as he appears rightly to point out, would never have been invented if the element of the 'given' had not in some special cases been infinitely more impressive than even any communication of new meaning from another person could be.

This American theologian would add a third category to those of general and special revelation, incidentally modifying the usual meaning of special revelation. He conceives of divine revelation as taking place in a general way in Nature and history, in a special way in the history of Israel and the Christian Church, and in an unique way in Jesus Christ. And he is in line with Dr. Temple and

consciously opposed to Barth in maintaining that the gospel is falsified or distorted if the revelation in Nature and history is ignored. 'The man who knows only Christ does not even know Christ.'

Bishop Aulén's essay is also opposed to Barth's exclusivist attitude. The Christian view of revelation, as he tersely puts it, is at once universal and exclusive; and in the history of Christian thought we can often observe the tension between universality and exclusiveness. But he is careful to insist, with the other essayists, that general revelation is not to be put on the same level as the revelation of God in Christ. Like the other essayists, he interprets the subject of revelation generously; so it is not surprising to find him taking occasion to lay stress once more on the soteriological notion which he expounded in his 'Christus Victor.'

Old Texts in Modern Translations.

Isaiah lxx. II (Moffatt).

BY PRINCIPAL W. F. LOFTHOUSE, D.D., BIRMINGHAM.

'SPREADING tables to Good Luck, pouring libations to Fate.' It was never more true than to-day that we know not what a day may bring forth, and that no one can boast himself of to-morrow. The possibility of some convulsion which shall shake our society to the depths is always before us. We whisper to one another of what will happen if, or even when, the war breaks out. And when we turn our thoughts to what after all is nearer to us, our own private and family concerns, things are no better. In spite of all that science has done to give us security and to ward off catastrophe, we are at the mercy of ill-fortune—an illness, an accident, a quarrel, a hot breath of passion suddenly sweeping us off our feet, and we find ourselves looking ruin in the face. 'What is God doing?' we cry in the bitterness of our heart.

This is however no new thing. We are not the first to feel like children groping in the dark. Were our grandfathers any more secure, or the

contemporaries of Shakespeare, or the Hebrews of the Old Testament, or the builders of Stonehenge, or the Cave-men of Altamira? Mankind has always dwelt on an island surrounded by the ocean of the unknown and unpredictable. The youth of to-day hesitates about committing himself to any stable occupation. 'Who knows,' he asks, 'whether Armageddon will not burst before I am in the saddle? Life is nothing but a gamble.' But youth has always had plenty of excuse for asking this. We are not the first to tremble at the approach of the end of the world, or at least of our own private world. It is a kind of nightmare, this horrible uncertainty. Sometimes we call it fate; an obscure and pitiless destiny that holds us in its unescapable grip. Sometimes we call it chance. It bids us to the gaming table; but the dice are loaded, and we know it; and though with a desperate laugh we resolve to try our luck, we know what the end will be. Is there really nothing but this? Is