

Editorial

EASTER AND THEOLOGY

IT IS a common complaint that the enthusiasm evident in the annual celebration of the Easter festival all too soon subsides into a dull normalcy in the church's life and work. This criticism is usually directed against the people who fill the pews on Easter Sunday but are lax in their attendance and indifferent in their interest and support at other times. Perhaps the time has come to suggest that judgment should begin in the pulpit and the study and that preachers and theologians should do some self-evaluating in this connection. It is probably true enough that churches crowded at Easter are not necessarily a reliable indication of the vitality of people's faith. It may also be true, however, that many who throng the sanctuary at such times absent themselves thereafter because they realize, through past experience, that the great affirmations of the faith made at this season will somehow be put away for another year with the Easter lilies and the special music.

In other words, the question which this editorial would like to raise concerns the extent to which the theologizing and preaching of the church in Canada today is a significant and appropriate presentation of the everlasting gospel of God which becomes "gospel" because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Assuming that preachers should be theologians and, in principle at least, theologians should be preachers, does Canadian theology as it is taught in classrooms, written in books and spoken in pulpits have in it something of the sound of trumpets proclaiming Christ's triumph and the relevance which it has for all of life? Or must the ancient words be repeated, though in a much different spirit, in reaction to so much contemporary theologizing, "*He is not here, He is risen*"? On this basis the evangelical validity of our theology can most surely be judged.

No estimate of the present situation will be attempted here. The state of a nation's spiritual health cannot be finally assessed by any human diagnosis and generalizations are never fair in any case. It would appear, however, that for many people today the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is simply the comforting vindication and assurance of immortality. If this is the case, then a serious question has to be raised regarding the kind of preaching to which they have been exposed. It is quite true, of course, that ministers cannot be held entirely responsible for the views of their people. Many a wrong idea has been carried away after listening to a good sermon. On the other hand it should be safe to assume that the Christian thinking of people is moulded by the preaching they hear Sunday by Sunday. While misunderstandings can arise even in the best of circumstances, the fault

must sometimes lie in the minister's failure to make clear what he means and not always in the listener's inability to comprehend what he says. If erroneous notions are current today to any considerable degree, the fact should have a humbling and challenging effect on all who preach and teach.

It is surely beyond question that the resurrection of Christ is both the reality which influences and illumines everything we say in preaching and the reason why we preach at all. Without the resurrection there would be no gospel to preach in any New Testament sense of the term. Could it be that many sermons today are simply moralistic homilies, or ill-tempered attacks on the errors of contemporary man and society, or touching invitations to find peace of mind in the midst of the many cares and uncertainties of modern life, because some preachers have forgotten what the gospel really is? Could it be that much preaching today leaves people without hope and without God in the world and without any commanding, liberating purpose for their lives, because it is more a pious exhortation to do better and be better than a proclamation of the good news of what God has done for us men and for our salvation in Jesus Christ? Do modern worshippers leave the sanctuary with the realization that here in the midst of all the vicissitudes and frustrations of existence there is a present kingdom of life and joy and peace and the assurance of a final triumph at the end of time? Do they go forth girded for courageous and creative action in our world today because they have been told clearly that every vexing problem and situation of our time can be a locus of resurrection through the power and purpose of the risen Lord even within the limited possibilities of human history, which can expect perfection only at the end of time? Are these the notes sounding through contemporary preaching, or is it sometimes found necessary to put the ancient question to many wistful searchers of our age who might think of wending their way to church hoping to find Him for whom all men are really seeking, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

Surely one important purpose of a theological journal is to be an intellectual stimulus which, in its own way, serves as a reminder that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and a scholarly interpretation of what this means in the total life of man. The Easter season is an appropriate time for writers, readers and all who have a real concern for the church, to reaffirm that the *Canadian Journal of Theology* shall seek to fulfill this essential function and be enabled to exercise its important ministry in ever-widening circles.

E.S.M.

CORRECTION

We regret a small but serious error in the printing of the Index for 1959, included in our last number. A corrected Index appears at the end of the present issue.

E.R.F.