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CURRENT ISSUES.

THERE is a good deal of moral instruction conveyed by means of novels nowadays. Fiction has become a channel of propaganda, not always to the benefit of its artistic structure, and in some modern romances the reader unawares is brought into touch with counsel and ethical analysis. In one recent novel called *The Faithful Heart* there is an example of this. An old seaman is distilling his wisdom of life for the benefit of his boy, and among other things he declares: "Remember that, in all history, salt matters more than anything else. . . . And do not forget in the end that Christianity, whichever way you look at it, is an anchor."

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"In all history, salt matters more than anything else." But what does "salt" mean? If we took the word in a strict Oriental sense, it might mean "good feeling" or "loyalty to engagements," for salt was an indispensable item in ancient compacts. And this would yield a good sense. Nothing would do more for the world than a heightened sense of honour in fulfilling contracts or pledges, either between nations or between individuals. But probably what the old seaman meant was that life needs to be kept from growing corrupt. No salt, no health on board! Where salt fails, scurvy prevails. And life on land as on sea requires those who are "the salt of the earth," people who give a tone to their circle, their Church, or their community. It is of vital moment indeed to have such an element present. The old mariner's sentence is an echo of what Jesus said when He told His disciples that they were "the salt of the earth." As they embodied His principles and spirit, they kept people round them from growing corrupt.

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But how? Christianity as an anchor is more intelligible. We all know that life is wrecked, in a moral crisis, if it lets go

Christian principles of purity and honesty. Men and women ride out the storm as they hold fast to these principles. But how Christianity works as the salt of the earth is not so easy to perceive. Not so easy even to practise. A writer in the *Journal of Religion* faces this question. His article is entitled, "Does the Church Lead?"

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The answer to the question is No. The Church does not lead, either in politics, for example, or in social ethics. The Church does not dictate. No one looks to the Church for advice or for guidance. "The futility of her claim to leadership is witnessed in the indifference shown her when she assumes to speak with authority; she is severely ignored in the world of practical affairs."

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Some deplore this. They lament the failure of the Church to issue orders to the world. But the writer of the article—he is an American—is not dismayed. He regards this as the inevitable result of the Church's position; the Church is not in the world to assume such leadership, it "preaches clearly defined principles, but has no definite programme." Now, as soon as a principle becomes attached to a programme of reform, those who agree on the principle are not always agreed upon the wisdom of the particular programme which claims to realise it, and the Church cannot command assent from all its members.

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The writer gives some illustrations. The principle of peace is accepted and urged by the Church, but, once that is put into the concrete demand for disarmament, a variety of opinions exist as to whether America can afford to disarm, in view of the present condition of the world. Again, the unanimity of the Churches about prohibition, we are told, does not mean that the Church to-day could marshal its forces with "the same united front" if the question were raised about the permission to use light wines and beer. The prohibition amendment has met with "only moderate success, with the result that faith in its practicability has been shaken." Not that the Church repudiates the principle; it simply has to face the fact that disagreement has arisen over its application. "The experience of the last few years has raised a serious doubt in the minds

of many Christians whether the principle has not been applied too rigorously.”

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So it is not easy to exercise the functions of salt. The writer of the article in question recognises that. But he will not admit that the Church needs to deplore any loss of prestige in leadership. Whatever the defects of the past have been, the Church has witnessed for centuries to ideals of justice, righteousness, and brotherhood. What has been achieved, has been due to the Church's existence and testimony working in the mass of prejudice and indifference. "Only in so far as she fails to create and to develop public conscience and humanitarian sympathies can she be charged with failure. For it is not the Church's task to provide programmes, but to inculcate Christian principles; it is not her task to assume leadership in every realm of thought, conduct, or relationship, but to develop Christian leaders."

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Behind the Gospels of Matthew and Luke lie two main sources. So most scholars are agreed. One of them is the Gospel of Mark, more or less in its present form. The other is less easy to identify. By some scholars it is held to be the "Logia" of Matthew mentioned by Papias in the second century, but those who feel unable to accept this theory have to look elsewhere for traces of its origin. Professor John Line, a Canadian critic, is one of these. He devotes an article in the July number of the *Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* to the problem of this second source.

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According to Professor Line, it had close affinities to the Fourth Gospel. He lays stress upon the saying in Matthew xi. 25-27 = Luke x. 21, 22, and also upon the words of Matthew xi. 19 = Luke vii. 35, where either Jesus identifies Himself, or the Evangelist identifies Him, with the Wisdom of God. Now, the conception of Wisdom is absent from the Fourth Gospel, and this might appear to tell against Professor Line's theory. But he holds that both the Logos and Wisdom were conceptions of this Hellenistic Judaism, his conclusion being that while "the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, the second Synoptic document portrayed Him cognately as the Incarnate Wisdom of God. In other words,

the document represents an earlier phase of that same Ephesian movement in Christian doctrine of which the Gospel of John is the consummation."

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And who wrote it? Who was in Ephesus during this pre-Johannine period? Paul was, Priscilla was, but Professor Line prefers the third candidate, Apollos. No doubt, Apollos was at first very imperfectly acquainted with the truth about Jesus; when he came to Ephesus, he needed instruction. But perhaps he picked up there fuller knowledge of the facts than he had gained at Alexandria, and then was able to prepare this document for the use of the Pauline Churches. "On some record to which he was indebted—a record that was itself very probably Palestinian—Apollos may have based, when his Christian belief had become maturer, his portraiture of Christ as Incarnate Wisdom."

THE TEN BEST BOOKS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION.

THE term Philosophy of Religion dates only from the close of the eighteenth century, but the thing denoted is much older. As to how much older, there is difference of opinion. Writers on the subject are not agreed as to how philosophy of religion should be defined, or even described. Some use it as synonymous with religious philosophy or with Theism, in which case we ought to begin with Plato or even earlier Greek philosophy. Others deny that philosophy of religion can be said to have emerged till the end of the mediæval period which saw the rise of theosophical mysticism and the anti-scholastic Renaissance philosophy, on the ground that while among Fathers and Schoolmen there was much able speculation on religion, their thinking was never scientific, never independent, but was always guided, though in varying degree, by dogmatic presuppositions and the interests of church doctrine. Spinoza maintained in his