

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

It is not every day that we get an outstanding book, but here is a book which deserves to be read and pondered in all the churches.

It is a book written at the request of the International Missionary Council in order to serve as material for the World Missionary Conference to be held in Madras this year. Its aim is to 'state the fundamental position of the Christian Church as a witness-bearing body in the modern world.' Very wisely was the Council guided to commit this task to Professor Hendrik KRAEMER of Leiden, who has produced a really noble book under the title of *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Edinburgh House Press ; 8s. 6d. net).

The primary aim of the book is to give guidance to those who are engaged in the missionary work of the Church and are faced with the manifold problems of the non-Christian world. It surveys the present religious situation in the non-Christian world, gives an incisive analysis of non-Christian systems of life and thought, and defines the Christian attitude towards the non-Christian religions.

But it does much more. It goes down to the fundamentals, and its supreme excellence is that it is so profoundly Christian from first to last. The older churches at home as well as the younger churches in the mission field are living in a non-Christian environment, and are urgently called to a deeper understanding of the Christian message and a more courageous presentation of the Christian ethic. With this whole critical situation Professor KRAEMER deals in a singularly fresh and suggestive way, and his exposition of the Christian message is intel-

lectually stimulating and heart-searching to an extraordinary degree.

'In the midst of the cataclysmic events of the modern world and the meeting with great non-Christian religions in their state of partial disintegration and partial reconstruction, the Christian Church needs a clear consciousness of its faith.' Before the divine message can be rightly translated and interpreted it must first be understood. Now the only source from which this knowledge of the Christian faith can be drawn is the Word of God. For the Christian faith is not a philosophy nor a series of religious and moral ideas, but it is based on the revelation of a series of divine acts. It is primarily historical ; it comes in the form of a story. It has engendered many ideas, concepts and experiences, but these are never adequate to the revelation from which they flow. 'This world of divine revelational acts cannot be explained in terms of human evolution as ideas that have developed, but can only be stated in the form of a story. . . . Therefore, to the Bible we will turn, because there the witness of the prophets and apostles is to be found on which the Church is built.'

Now to get into line with Bible thought is not so easy as it seems. 'The reason for this is obviously that the religious and moral universe which we enter in the Bible is radically different from what we meet anywhere else and also from our natural habits of thinking, even our so-called "Christian" thinking.' The Bible is radically religious, because radically theocentric. 'God, His holy Will, His acts, His love, His judgment, is the beginning and the end of all. Man and the world are brought in

the place held by the Blessed Virgin in the purpose of God.

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Nor shall we follow our author in his exposition under the second head of the Roman claim to authority. He indulges the hope that in time this claim, which interferes with the claims of conscience and of God, will be abandoned. Nowadays the Holy Father is only regarded as infallible under conditions which hardly ever occur. The ultimate authority belongs in fact to the Church in union with the Holy Father, and not to the Holy Father himself. And a meaning may be given to the infallibility of the Church which is in accordance with the New Testament teaching, and on which the various communions may be united. The teaching which the Church as a whole has given throughout the centuries, and which its members have accepted, we may take to be, if not infallible, 'as little removed from infallibility as is no matter.'

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'If the changes for which we hope pass over the Roman Church, it will be comparatively easy for the rest of Christendom to enter into union with it, and even to give to the Bishop of Rome, not only recognition as the chief Bishop of Christendom, but functions in relation to the whole Church which will be invaluable for the preservation of discipline and unity.'

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So far the Roman Church. What now of the changes necessary in other communions? As a step toward reunion the Church of England and Protestant communions must begin, says Dr. GOUDGE, to rid themselves of three characteristics—individualism, indiscipline, and nationalism.

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Individualism he regards as the first and greatest obstacle to reunion. It is the great curse of Protestantism and of Anglicanism, and not least of Anglo-Catholics. While we cannot surrender either our individual judgment or our individual conscience, we should profoundly mistrust both when we find them out of harmony with those of our fellow-Christians.

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Individualism leads to indiscipline, which is widely prevalent in the Church of England and among Protestants generally. At the Edinburgh

Conference the suggestion that it was the duty of the Church to discipline the lives of its members occasioned much laughter. 'What Calvin, not to say St. Paul, would have thought of this passes imagination.' But it is the natural result of the view that it is our individual welfare, and not the welfare of the Church as a whole, with which we should be primarily concerned.

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As for nationalism, the third characteristic commonly found in churches outside the Roman obedience, it still shows itself in a strong tendency at least to put the welfare of the nation rather than that of the universal Church into the foreground of thought and effort. Despite the large exodus of the world from it, the Church of England is by no means free as yet from nationalism. But, as secular education and freedom of thought grow, the identification of the churches with the nations will pass away to the decrease of their members and the increase of their purity. Healthful reunion may have to wait for that.

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Dr. GOUDGE's positions are apt sometimes to be misunderstood, and in any case they will hardly meet with universal acceptance; but he must be given the credit of his conviction that the reunion of the Church of God is a far more important work than the endeavour to apply Christian principles to national and international life. These principles, as he urges, are not likely to be understood or accepted unless they are first illustrated, and their successful working demonstrated, in the life of the Church itself.

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The significance of the rise of the Totalitarian State for Christianity has been so often referred to in these 'Notes' that some readers may be a little tired of the subject. Yet it is a matter of such vital importance that we make no apology for returning to it, whenever a noteworthy pronouncement on the topic is made.

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One of the most suggestive utterances is that of Professor André PHILIP, a learned member of the French Chamber of Deputies, who was invited to deliver the 'Burge Memorial Lecture' for the current year, and whose Lecture on *Christianity*

*and Present Day International Relations* is published with an 'Introduction' by the Master of Balliol (S.C.M.; 6d. net). His views are of interest as those of one distinguished both as a Christian philosopher and a practical politician.

The philosophy latent in the notion of a Totalitarian State may be, and often is, criticised as an infringement of the value of personality. In that there is obvious truth. The difficulty, however, emerges that in practice Democracies, too, are endlessly engaged in curtailing individual liberties. One is 'regimented' in all sorts of ways whether one lives in Britain or in Germany; and it might be argued that in actual practice for the average individual, Fascism or Nazism or Russian Communism is only some degrees more thorough than our so-called Democracy in limiting individual freedom.

That the problem of individual freedom is a very old one, and a very complex one, Professor PHILIP is well aware; and his criticism of Totalitarianism is not primarily on the ground of violation of human right. He does not plead for individual freedom. On the contrary, he pleads for complete surrender. Only the surrender must not be made to Society, nor to Nation, nor to State. It must be made to God; and his criticism of Totalitarianism just is that it demands a giving to Cæsar of what is due to God. The State or the Nation, in fact, usurps the place of God. Totalitarianism is a neo-paganism. In Germany the Nation is God, and Hitler is His prophet.

God is the only absolute Sovereign—that is the Christian view. Society, and Nation, and State have their due place. One may truly enough say that they are ordained of God. But they are not sovereign for the Christian. In serving them he will be mindful that for him the supreme consideration is the Will of God.

Such necessary entities as Society, Nation, and State are of mixed composition. They are constituted by *sinful* humanity. Here Professor PHILIP takes the same view as Reinhold Niebuhr in his 'Burge' Lecture last year. The State can too

easily become 'demonic,' and when it is conceived as itself the supreme end, it is certain to become so.

Christians then, says Professor PHILIP, 'have to be united in a solemn condemnation in the name of God's sovereignty of every form of Totalitarian State, Nation, or Society.'

But we live in a world alongside Totalitarian States. What is to govern our attitude towards, or our dealings with, them? We are in the world and have our part to play, and no Christian dare shirk his responsibilities as, in the Professor's view, some Pacifists seem to do. That is the first thing the Christian must realize—his personal responsibility for what is happening in the world.

His second recommendation is not to over-emphasize the value of non-violence. It sometimes succeeds, sometimes it does not. Our pacifist friends will find this a hard saying, but many are saying it, and with some reason. The Professor is convinced that had the Democracies acted differently when Japan invaded Manchuria, the story of Abyssinia and of China would have been different.

That, of course, takes us into a highly controversial sphere and we should be sorry if the Professor's *political* views diverted any from consideration of his *religious* views. Christians may differ among themselves as to technical details in the solution of any actual problem, but all need to be recalled to the sense of God's sovereignty, their own responsibility, and the essence of the Christian attitude to the bewildering situations with which a rapidly changing world confronts us.

One of the most suggestive things in the Lecture emerges here. We have erred, we are told, in asking what is the Christian 'rule,' or even what is the Christian 'principle,' to be applied in the solution of a problem. Christ did not lay down rules or expound 'principles.' He inculcated an 'attitude' to life and its problems. He was not a 'moralist,' who came with new rules. He came to bring communion with a Father instead of obedience to a rule.