

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

'No one has yet failed of his response who has spoken to England on the deepest notes of ethical conviction and sincerity. Who is speaking to it in such tones to-day? What we need is another John Wesley, some one who can speak to us like a prophet. If it could hear that liberating voice, the English people would rise up like a flame to rebuild and re-possess its inheritance. What it awaits is spiritual leadership.'

So writes Canon F. R. BARRY in *Convictions* (Nisbet; 2s. net)—one of those little books whose value is to be measured not by size, and certainly not by price. It proves that something at least of the prophetic spirit and something of spiritual leadership are not wholly lacking among us. It is not perhaps highly original in thought, for the larger works by Professor Macmurray and William de Burgh, which we recently reviewed, contain much on the same lines. But it is compact, it is cheap, it is clearly and forcibly expressed, it is a pronouncement which we hope will be very widely pondered, it is fitted at once to warn and to encourage us in this distressful time.

We are living through a 'Day of the Lord.' That is Canon BARRY's conviction. If we listen to God and trust God and do God's will, we are secure. Our danger is that we forget God. We have forgotten God overmuch. We have measured things by the wrong standard. Too seldom have we asked, 'What is God's will for me?'

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Apart from God what we take to be watch-words, like 'liberty' and 'democracy,' are fallacious because they are empty of real meaning and motive and purpose. 'Liberty is the natural right of man,' we say. Yet we must ask, What kind of liberty and what kind of man? Man is not born free, Canon BARRY holds, he has to be re-born into liberty. For the only worth-while liberty is the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Democracy is the political form of liberty. But 'Fascism is the inevitable pathology of a modern democracy if it has lost its soul.' 'If man is made for no eternal home, if he be but a social or economic by-product, then the State is obviously a great deal stronger and bigger than the man and lasts much longer.' 'If we leave out God and immortality, freedom is indefensible and chimerical.'

In our day democracy is at the crisis of its fate. It has vanished from and is a term of contempt in several great States. In a world of power-politics its very existence anywhere is threatened. Its greatest enemy is within not without. 'If we concentrate on armed defence without a moral and spiritual renewal, then the Fascist victory will be won.' Aeroplanes may be necessary but 'our fundamental need lies far deeper in the secret places of the soul.'

True democracy is more than a method of self-government. So-called 'democracy' gave us the

*laissez aller* policy and its bitter fruit of social injustice and tyranny. True democracy is unreliable and inconceivable without religion, 'it is religious far more than political.' 'It is the inner conviction of our hearts—our attitude to life and one another, the value that we have learnt to set on Man.' And this is the creation of faith in Christ.

So Canon BARRY's appeal is—back to God in penitence and in hope. It is criminal to despair. The Church may be persecuted, it may even disappear from the Rhine to the Pacific. It was a persecuted Church that transformed the ancient world. From behind prison bars the cry rang out: 'Rejoice!' 'The peoples of Europe are looking for a new day: it is craven to think that it cannot dawn. We must not mistrust the power of God, who is able to make all things new.'

In these days of an insistent conservatism (if not a conservative orthodoxy) in theology it is perhaps well that the voice of theological Liberalism should be allowed to raise itself. After all, while the conservative theocentrism of to-day reflects the religion of the New Testament, it is not easily appreciated by the ordinary man; whereas the synthesis of New Testament religion with 'natural theology' provides a form of Christian theology with which the ordinary man may readily find points of contact.

Professor S. ANGUS, of the Chair of New Testament and Historical Theology at St. Andrew's College, University of Sydney, is well known not only for his published studies of the religious and historical background of Early Christianity but also for his championship of a liberal and progressive type of Christian theology. He returns to this latter rôle in his most recent book, *Essential Christianity* (Murray; 6s. net).

At the outset he would disarm a certain criticism by affirming that essential Christianity is not to be arrived at by any minimizing process. Nothing, he says, will satisfy him in the definition of our

religion unless there be contained in it 'the full-orbed Evangel of the Incarnation.' What Christianity is cannot be arrived at by stating a minimum of theological opinions held by all Christians, but by stating a maximum of experience in Christ and a maximum of consecration to Christ.

But let us try to present his exposition in summary outline. The first point is that Christianity is faith in God through Jesus. It is the response not merely of the intellect but of the whole personality to Jesus' exhortation that we should have confidence in God. It is an experience of life—the life of God in the soul of man. It is an experience in the depth of the soul, not a set of opinions blown about by eddying winds of controversy or criticism.

The next point is that Christianity is the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Its be-all and end-all is to produce autonomous Christlike personality. Jesus threw men back upon their own consciences. He restored and rehabilitated the moral consciousness as the citadel of personal life. He never encouraged men to put their consciences in the safe keeping of a religious authority or to receive their convictions from a sacred society. Christianity is the religion of the glorious liberty of those who know that only those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. It thus promotes individuality, not individualism, in a community of spiritual personalities who are members one of another in Christ.

The third point is that Christianity must ever be the religion of the Cross—the Cross in Jesus' own life and in the life of every follower of His. Not only the Son of Man but every follower of the Son of Man is called upon 'not to be ministered unto but to minister.' If 'Christ crucified' is the beginning of Christianity, 'to be crucified with Christ' is Christianity in action. It is central in the whole Christian ethic that life can only be won by losing it. We cannot be Christians at all without self-sacrifice.

The fourth point is that Christianity is the actual consciousness of divine sonship. Jesus is the only

or unique Son of God in the sense that He alone realized the fullness of divine sonship. But it is God's purpose that we should strive toward the goal of sonship like Christ's. This filial consciousness rests upon the essential unity of God and man, an idea which is denied in ancient dualisms and Barthian neo-Calvinism.

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The fifth point is that Christianity is in its essential expression Christ-likeness. Essential Christianity must concentrate on character as did Jesus. The sure marks of that vital Christianity which is Christ-likeness are not credal allegiances or forms of worship but lives transformed and informed by the Spirit of Christ. Not the conformity of sheer imitation or literal obedience but of a moral spontaneity turning to One who has the words of eternal life.

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The sixth point is that our divine sonship expressed in Christ-likeness is realized in a progressive oneness with Christ. It is not only that God was and is in Christ, but that Christ is in us and we in Christ. Jesus' greatness and uniqueness do not, either in His own view or in St. Paul's, separate the Christian from Christ. If the creeds avoid saying of Christ anything that can be said of the Christian, then the creeds are so far not Pauline. It was Paul's central experience that he was in Christ and Christ in him.

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The last point is that although Christianity is an historical religion, it is not based on history. A living faith rests only in union with the living God. While our present religious experience has been historically mediated, it is none the less *our* experience, not the experience of our predecessors in religion. The spiritual and timeless world in which religion lives and moves is revealed in the material and historical, but does not derive its being from the material and historical. Considered historically Christianity *was* and *is*; but religiously considered Christianity *is*. History may be the outward means of our entry into the secret place of the Most High, but in that region only is essential Christianity.

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In his extraordinarily able book, *Preface to Faith* (reviewed under 'Literature' last month) (Allen and Unwin; 6s. net), Professor Louis Arnaud REID, D.Litt., has a chapter which is at the same time suggestive and distinctly relevant to the present situation. It is on 'Christianity and Morals.' Christianity has in the past, he says, and in our own times suffered from two contrary misinterpretations. One he calls the 'vertical' error, the other the 'horizontal.' The vertical, which he only mentions, is the tendency to stress religion at the expense of morals, to extol the 'other' world above this one.

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The opposite error is thinking that Christianity consists of a number of moral principles or precepts, and that the chief benefit of Christianity is that it encourages people to live decent lives—in other words that Christianity is important because it is humanitarian. But this is to confuse the effects of Christianity with its essence, and to fail to understand that Christianity preaches, not a meliorism which can only be relative, but the absolute value and the absolute obligation of love. Humanitarian Christian virtues are like fruits which can be enjoyed only for a time if they are cut off from the tree. Sooner or later the fruit grows woody and withers, and we have to return to the living tree for more.

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The source from which Christian morality originally sprang was the inspiration of the person, the life and the death of Jesus, who revealed the perfect love of a 'Father in Heaven.' The strange and paradoxical moral sayings of Jesus are a partial expression of this religious reality. Only a full recognition of the absolute, the unconditional, the perfectionist demands implied in these sayings can yield any proper understanding of the meaning of Christian morality.

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The source of Christian morality, then, is purely religious. In Christianity, belief in the transcendent implications of love revealed in the Incarnation of Christ may not only transform the moral life but may also give to it a meaning and a largeness of setting which it could not otherwise possess. Yet,

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The source of Christian morality, then, is purely religious. In Christianity, belief in the transcendent implications of love revealed in the Incarnation of Christ may not only transform the moral life but may also give to it a meaning and a largeness of setting which it could not otherwise possess. Yet,

on the other hand, while Christian religious belief reinforces morality, it also creates a tension which makes moral life seem more difficult than ever, makes it even in one sense impossible. The ideal which, on the Christian view, is realized in the perfect will of God is an absolute ideal that transcends the powers of any relative and finite being.

On the one hand the ideal demands to be expressed in human character and action, and on the other hand it never can be. And that not only by reason of the obvious fact of our self-will which insists on going its own way, but also because of the fact of our finitude. There is thus a kind of paradox in religious morality which is central to it. It produces a state of mind in which there is both inspiration and something like despair.

The most obvious instances of this difficult and radical paradox are the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount. There are three different ways in which these are regarded. (1) Sometimes it is said that they represent a code of duties which might be obligatory in heaven, but that they do not apply to the present workaday world. (2) Or it is thought that it would be good to put them into practice here, yet they set too high a standard for ordinary human nature. Perhaps it is good that there should be people among us who will never resist evil and give away freely to any one who asks. But it is much too severe a demand for most of us. (3) Or it is sometimes felt, not merely that a good deal of the Sermon on the Mount is 'impossible' in the above sense, but that it is impossible *morally*. It is not only difficult to turn the other cheek; it is wrong. It would be making the world a too pleasant place for bullies, swindlers, spongers, and national megalomaniacs.

Well, what are we to say about this? Dr. REID (who, by the way, is a Professor of Philosophy) points out, first, that Jesus makes no attempt to set forth a philosophical or theological system of morals. He speaks rather as a prophet or a poet uttering principles in parable form. Philosophy is not written to move, but to assert, to question, to analyse, to synthesize. The parable, the poetic

utterance—these are spoken from the heart and appeal to the heart. They convey their content through the living form of the illustration.

Further, the parables of Jesus were the expression of His character and life. It is through them that we largely gain our impression of the personality of Jesus. Only through the understanding and love of the personality of Jesus can we properly realize the unity of His teaching as a whole throughout the sayings, and without realizing the unity of the teaching we are bound to misunderstand it. It is not as abstract utterances that the sayings count, nor even as poetic paradoxes. It is the personality of Jesus embodying the principles and expressing them in deeds and words, which moves us, through love, to the understanding of the principles, and which fuses their manyness into one gospel.

Further we must distinguish between moral principles and moral rules. A law, or rule, is always relative to concrete circumstances, and it must be *possible*. So far as morality is a matter of codes or laws, it varies from time to time and from place to place. And if a law were not possible of fulfilment, if it were not workable, it could not endure. An absolute law of asceticism would be valueless. But a *principle* is not relative, does not arise out of particular conditions. It is absolute, and represents an ideal which is apprehended as being absolutely valid. And if we attempt to make a law or a rule out of a principle we are trying to make absolute what is only relative.

Now the Sermon on the Mount is not that utterance of rules which to the superficial eye it may seem to be. It contains vivid, concrete and pictorial exemplifications of certain general principles, and the moral difficulties which have arisen in its interpretation are due to the attempt to make these exemplifications of principle (poetically and paradoxically expressed) into absolute rules to be obeyed in all circumstances. The prime principle of Jesus is, 'Be ye perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect.' The ideal of human life is nothing less than the completest possible expression of the love

of God. But this, though it is not a rule or law, but a principle, is also a command, an absolute command. And if it seems irrational to ask what is 'impossible' for human nature, it should be realized that the vision of an 'impossible' ideal will be a constant inspiration which can transform petty lives.

What has been said applies to the injunction which above all the others has aroused controversy, that of non-resistance. The chief difficulty about this is not that it is extremely difficult, but that most of us cannot believe that it would be a good rule to act upon. Speaking generally, it does not appear that it would be morally desirable to make an absolute rule of non-resistance. What the principle does bring out is the value of an attitude of mind which sees that love is of infinitely greater

value than the use of force. And there are occasions on which this principle should be asserted at all costs. But the occasions are individual occasions, to be judged by the individual who has seen the vision and knows the circumstances. And we must not turn a principle into a law.

To sum up. The teaching of Jesus is not a set of rules, but consists of the principles which were expressed concretely by Jesus in His life and in His teachings, and which through these come to be understood. Christian living is the assimilation of the principles—an assimilation largely induced by contact with the personality of Jesus—and a re-expression of them in ways appropriate to the individual circumstances of place and time. Christian living is thus never stereotyped. It is individual and it is creative.

## The Righteousness of Jahveh.

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

I PROPOSE in this paper to consider the meaning or meanings of the term 'the righteousness of Jahveh,' and its relation to the righteousness of men. In a second paper I hope to set beside this what is involved in the Pauline conception of the righteousness of God. In dealing with a term of wide religious use like *Sedakah*, the Hebrew word generally translated 'Righteousness,' we must beware of attempting to assign to it any one English equivalent; to say simply that it means justice or righteousness. Philologists are aware that there is no word in any language, the frontiers of whose territory precisely coincide with those of any one word in another language. All words which are worth study have had a long history, every stage of which has left its mark on what we call the meaning of the word. This is especially true of the group *dikaiosune*, justice, right, *Recht*, *Gerechtigkeit*. Justice and *la Justice* do not even mean the same thing.

All this demands a certain degree of caution that is sometimes forgotten. Most students of the Old Testament have been brought up on the classics. They were familiar with the views of Plato and

Aristotle on *dikaiosune* before they thought of the Hebrew *Sedakah*, as it is found in Isaiah or Job. Further, we instinctively think of justice as retributive or distributive; and with our knowledge of our own legal systems and the relation of the judge to the plaintiff and the accused, it is difficult not to breathe the atmosphere of a law-court in London or Berlin, when we are standing at the city-gate of Hebron or Samaria.<sup>1</sup>

Nor can we gain much help, in dealing with the Hebrew word, from etymology. The root *sdk*, in the cognate languages, is said to signify telling the truth (Arab.), to be excellent (Sab.), to be true or righteous (Ethiop.), and so on. *Saduk*, in the Tel-el-Amarna letters, means innocent. All that we can do, when we turn to the Old Testament writings, is to collect the outstanding instances, attempt to classify them, and ask what meaning best suits the different classes. Knowing something of the adventures that befall important words in the course of their existence, we shall be slow to expect a single meaning; yet to look for a more or less

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. H. Dodd, *Romans*, 60.