

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

PROFESSOR J. ALEXANDER FINDLAY of Didsbury College has published the substance of twenty-one years' English New Testament lectures. The lectures cover most of the ground of the New Testament and follow a certain scheme, into which, however, the author has not attempted to fit the Epistle of Jude, the Pastoral Epistles, Second and Third John, the Second Epistle of Peter, or the Apocalypse. These books seem to him to be of historical rather than theological or experimental importance.

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The lectures do not form an 'Introduction' in the full sense of the term to the books of the New Testament that are dealt with. Questions of date and authorship are secondary from the author's standpoint; what is primary is the subject-matter. And the endeavour is made to remove misunderstanding and bring out salient points, much reliance being placed here and there on a re-arrangement of the verses.

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The volume bears the title, *The Way, the Truth and the Life* (Hodder & Stoughton; 15s. net), and this title provides a direct clue to the idea which the author seeks to work out. Here is the burden of the book: 'There are *three* chief types of Christian thought and experience, all found perfectly expressed in the New Testament, for it not only contains, but unifies them all. All are Christian, because all are centred upon the person and work of Christ, and all find their final meeting-place in the First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel, which I take to be the latest of the greater books of the New Testament.'

What, then, are the three chief types of Christian thought and experience to which the author refers? They may be summed up as the 'way' ('in His steps'), the 'truth' ('learn of Me'), and the 'life' ('in Christ'). But the order in which they are presented in his book is not the Scriptural order; it is 'way,' 'life,' 'truth.'

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The first type may be associated with Peter. It is expressed in the First Epistle of Peter, the Gospel of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it receives its richest intellectual formulation. The characteristic thought of these books is that Jesus is the Way. As He followed the path of obedience to His Father's will to the end, so He calls us to follow Him, which involves our becoming 'strangers and pilgrims' in this world and pressing to the goal of His 'appearing.' This stream runs out to sea in the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus says, 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.'

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The second type, which emphasises not so much the imitation of Christ as possession by His Spirit, may be associated with Paul, whose life as a Christian began, not with a call to follow Jesus, but with a vision of the Risen Lord who had 'apprehended'—caught and possessed—him. The thought of Jesus as the Life is expressed not only in Paul but in the Gospel of Mark. For Mark Jesus is the God-possessed man. His life, death, and resurrection are an act of God. All the emphasis in Mark, as in Paul, is laid on God's work in the soul. This stream also runs out to sea in the First Epistle of

John and the Fourth Gospel ('Abide in me, and I in you').

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The third type of Christian thought and experience dwells rather on the words of Jesus. It is principally to be found in that book of the Sayings of the Lord (the document called Q) which underlies our First and Third Gospels. We find it also in the Epistle of James and in the contribution of the First Evangelist. In these sources of our Christian religion Jesus appears as the Truth. It is not so much by following His example, or being possessed by His Spirit, as by sitting at His feet and learning His words that we find rest to our souls. For His words are 'spirit and life.' This stream also runs out to sea in the First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus is the 'Word Incarnate.'

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We may gather from the above in what order Dr. FINDLAY discusses the New Testament documents, and that his discussion is based on well-defined critical views. But only the perusal of the book could open up to us the wealth of critical and exegetical matter which it contains. There will be many besides former students of Didsbury College who will turn to its pages for help and stimulus.

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Perhaps it is to be regretted that there is no index of Scripture references, long undoubtedly as it would have been. The busy preacher or teacher would have found such an index useful, especially as the Scriptures of the New Testament are not handled here in their canonical order, nor even in the order of their appearance, but in conformity with the special idea or thesis (interesting and suggestive, as it must be allowed) of which the work is an elaboration.

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What Dr. FINDLAY means when he speaks of the streams running out to sea in the First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel is literally expressed by him towards the close of the work. John, as he says, brought Peter, Paul, and Matthew together, and focused all they had seen upon the person of Jesus of Nazareth. To them Jesus showed the way, told the truth, brought the life; to John He *was* Himself the 'way, the truth, and the life.'

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Sir Richard GREGORY, Bart., F.R.S., has written a very imposing but somewhat disappointing book, *Religion in Science and Civilization* (Macmillan; 12s. 6d. net). The book abounds in facts, ideas, and theories, but instead of being marshalled in support of an orderly argument they come swarming on in a bewildering mob. It is almost as if the contents of a gigantic commonplace book had been emptied out on the pages. This impression is increased by the illustrations which are scattered through the book with no regard to the letterpress.

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When one ranges in this encyclopædic way through all the ages, sciences, religions, and civilizations, errors and superficial judgments are unavoidable. We note a reference to Yuan Shi Kai which is so inapplicable that one can only suppose it to be an error for Sun Yat Sen. The Church of Scotland is casually referred to as a branch of English Non-conformity! The opposition to Robertson Smith is dismissed as 'bigotry and prejudice,' though it is added that the tide so far turned that in a few years Smith was able to lecture in 'Aberdeen itself.' This despite the fact that the Church, while condemning Smith, expressly safeguarded the right of critical research, and that Aberdeen was enthusiastically behind Smith from first to last.

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On the other hand, it must be emphasised that a most friendly spirit towards religion runs through the book. The writer points out, what is too often forgotten, that the conflict has not been between religion and science, but more correctly between obscurantism and enlightenment. Authorities in science and religion have often stood shoulder to shoulder against the advance of new ideas. No doctor over forty, it was said, accepted Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood. Planck in our time has complained that the older physicists refused even to look at his Quantum Theory.

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The view widely held in literary and other intellectual circles was that 'men of science are materialists insensitive to beauty and incapable of deep emotion. They are believed to be blind to everything that makes life worth living to other people, and to know nothing of the artist's raptures

or of the hopes and despairs of passionate natures. In the great company of prophets, seers, and poets they are given no place.' That this view is now passing away is due to the fact that 'mechanistic principles no longer dominate scientific thought.' Religion and science are in reality intertwined. They are the warp and woof of the fabric of civilization. In the service of high ideals they meet on common ground, and may be made sources of social good.

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Much is said in this connexion which is both true and wholesome. But one must demur at the vagueness with which religion is conceived. It must be entirely undogmatic, a completely fluid body of ideas, subject like scientific theories to a continual process of evolutionary change. 'Science,' said Huxley, 'commits suicide when it adopts a creed.' And similarly, in Sir Richard's view, 'there is really no finality in a Christian creed.' Even belief in the personality of God is not an essential. A certain ultimate consensus of religious sentiment and moral endeavour is envisaged. 'Different individuals and communities require different doctrines and rituals to bind them together in worship of any kind, but all such formularies are only ancillary aids to a universal faith in the possibility of ascending towards the highest good by human endeavour. It is on this principle that all great religions should be able to unite with the common purpose of promoting whatever may be called divine in the nature of man.'

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But is science itself so completely undogmatic? Must every question be for ever an open question? Can nothing be predicated with final assurance? Must judgment be held in perpetual suspense? Let us make every allowance for the fact that all human formulations must be inadequate to express reality. Let us freely admit that thinkers in every department, and especially theologians, have been all too prone to dogmatism, and have multiplied beyond all reason the articles of their creeds. Yet there must be some firm foundations in the world of thought which stand unmoved amid the flux of things, some truths of eternal value, truths to which a man may pledge his soul to live by them and to die for them.

In the field of history surely there are truths which have been finally determined. Certain events did or did not happen, and in regard to them further suspense of judgment is pedantic. It may be said that there is no mathematical certainty. Even the existence of Napoleon has been called in question. But probability is the guide of action, and it may amount to practical certainty. Now Christianity is a historic religion, and it bases itself on the great affirmation that Christ did suffer under Pontius Pilate and rose again on the third day. Sir Richard GREGORY regards the historical evidence as 'scarcely convincing,' but while he speaks in the language of scientific reserve his position is as dogmatic as the Christian affirmation, for it amounts to a practical denial that the Resurrection ever did happen.

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In his own field of science Sir Richard doubtless holds firmly the dogma of the rationality of the universe. Einstein has said that if he did not believe in the regularity of Nature's sequences he would cease forthwith to take any interest in physics, and Schrödinger goes so far as to affirm that 'even if Nature is really irrational, we could never, never believe it. Science cannot possibly be given up.' No theologian could possibly be more dogmatic.

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In the realm of ethics, too, Sir Richard speaks with conviction of 'spiritual values, love of truth and beauty, righteousness, justice and mercy, sympathy with the oppressed, and belief in the brotherhood of man.' These are not debatable, like opinions that are held provisionally, and may, on further enlightenment, be given up.

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There is danger of being too dogmatic, but there is also a danger of being too undogmatic and holding all convictions in suspense. With the prevalence of the scientific spirit in our time the latter may be the graver danger. Karl Barth, in addressing Dutch students a year or two ago, said they were doubtless vexed with him for pressing upon them the 'either-or' of existential thinking. They would prefer in days of quiet to play with ideas without committing themselves finally to either side, but in Germany, he warned them, men

had been brought through a crisis to the knife-edge of decision. That crisis has now come upon Holland and upon all the world to try the hearts of men.

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Principal Nathaniel MICKLEM of Mansfield College, Oxford, has written a book, *The Creed of a Christian* (S.C.M. ; 5s. net), which he describes as 'Monologues upon Great Themes of the Christian Faith.' He disclaims the idea that he is writing either theology or apologetic. But, in effect, the book is very good theology and excellent apologetic. It is popular in the sense that it is easily understood, and it is personal in the sense that the 'Christian' of the title is himself. And it is interesting for both of these reasons.

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The earlier chapters have a particular value because they deal with certain aspects of the idea of God which have a relevance to the world-events of our day. Religious people of a certain type are often criticised because of their parochial thought of God. They think that He is concerned about every little event in their drab and wretched lives. They are on the most familiar terms with the Maker of the Universe, know all that is in His mind, use His name as dope in their troubles, and have no sense either of God's Majesty or their own immeasurable insignificance.

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The truth in this criticism Dr. MICKLEM takes to be that the wonder of the gospel can best be seen through what is valid in the criticism. The pagan critic has at least a dim sense of Creation. The Christian criticised will know nothing but Redemption. Creation and redemption are the two poles of Christian thought, but Creation comes first. God is Father, but, if His Fatherhood is not interpreted in terms compatible with His Majesty and Power, it is misunderstood. Thought compels us to conceive of One who stands outside the world, a transcendent God, imparting to everything being, life, meaning.

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The mistake of the pagan critic is that he does not recognize that there is a gospel in creation. He represents God as so great that it is inconceiv-

able that He should concern Himself with the petty details in the lives of ordinary and undistinguished persons like ourselves. This is perhaps natural, but it is shallow. Does it detract from the glory of God that His interest should extend to the least that He has made? And, if all the universe proceeds from Him by His Word that it may fulfil His purpose and express His thought, how shall He not love everything that has come from Him? And if man is among these creatures of God, is it strange that He should be so interested in him in his sore need as to stretch forth His saving hand to redeem him? Creation comes first, with its disclosure of God's greatness, but Redemption comes after to show what God is like.

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But what of the tragedies and disasters and miseries of life? The 'higher pantheism' may be very comforting till we look out on Nature, red in tooth and claw, and on the sufferings she creates. Dr. MICKLEM refers to a 'lamentable article' published in a religious journal and written by a Christian minister in which a drastic solution to such difficulties is proposed. We must restate our theism, he says, and throw overboard lumber that is hindering faith. We cannot believe that the heavenly Father is responsible for floods that drown a million Chinese and infusoria that destroy His innocent children by stealthy infection.

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'No living man can hold in his mind and harmonize into one God-consciousness the loving God-Father and the God of the cosmic forces that rule this universe. We do not find His hand in external things, for God is a Spirit, and not responsible for the non-moral and non-spiritual forces of this physical scheme of things. Cowper was not right. God does not plant His footsteps in the sea, and ride upon the storm. God is not in wind, or in the earthquake, or in the influenza, or in the storm, fire, or in the Chinese floods.'

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Something may be said for this as the expression of a mood or an emotion. But in reality it is a clear denial of the Christian faith. It postulates two rival gods, the God of Nature and the God of Kindness, the God of Creation and the God of Re-

demption. It finds no support in the words of Jesus. And Dr. MICKLEM sets over against it a noble passage from the Institutes of John Calvin which must be here reproduced for the sheer pleasure of our readers.

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'This is the comfort of the believer to understand that the Heavenly Father doth so embrace all things with His power, that nothing befalleth but by His appointment, and that he is received into God's keeping, and cannot be touched by any hurt of water or fire or sword, but so far as it shall please God the Governor to give them place. . . . And from hence proceedeth the boldness of the saints. For when they call to mind that the Devil and all the rout of the wicked are so everywhere holden in by the hand of God as with a bridle, that they can neither conceive any mischief against us, nor put it in train when they have conceived it, nor can stir one finger to bring it to pass but so far as He shall suffer, yea, so far as He shall command, and that they are not only holden fast bound with fetters, but also compelled with bridle to do service, here have they abundant springs of consolation.'

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That is great writing. It may not offer a satisfying solution of the mystery of evil, but at any rate its doctrine of God is not a shallow one. The one true God, we say, is Creator and Redeemer; if He were not Redeemer, He would not be our Father; if He were not Creator, He would not be God. There is a certain tension or polarity in the Christian faith. Our Lord could see in the transit of the seasons, in bird and flower and family life, the signs of God's blessed and universal Providence. At the same time, He could speak of a woman as having been bound by Satan these many years.

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Here is the paradox—things are as God made them, yet, in so many regards, things are not as they ought to be; nothing can happen apart from the will of God, yet is God's will flouted every day. It was God's will, we say, to create a world wherein man must learn through strife and suffering, wherein character must be an attainment and the sins and follies of men must involve others in their issue.

The paradox is seen most acutely in the faith and victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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He proclaimed God's fatherly rule over all His creatures, His unconditional charity (sending His rain on good and bad), His accurate interest in us so that the very hairs of our head are numbered. Yet it was in such a world so governed, beneath a Providence so complete and beneficent, that the impossible fate of Jesus Christ happened. Where was the Providence, the protecting hand of God, when Judas betrayed, the disciples fled, and the Lord was left defenceless among His enemies? Here, if ever, God's will was flouted, and creation shown to be no work of His.

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Yet such was not the thought of Jesus Christ Himself: 'Let this cup pass . . . yet thy will be done . . . Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.' Here, again, is the paradox—it is not the Father's will that any of the things should happen to Jesus that did happen—Judas, Peter's denial, Pilate's weakness. Yet it was the Father's will that Christ through His Cross should be victorious and by dying triumph over sin and death. As Calvin says: 'Had it not been by God's will that Christ was crucified, where were our salvation?'

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Dr. MICKLEM would have us see the true philosophy of history in the Cross of Christ. In this we see how the world is governed. Germany, Russia, Japan may pursue the way of force. Secularism may pursue the economic way of salvation. Atheism may explain the universe without reference to an Author, a fallacious simplicity of view may posit two rival gods, but the Christian faith alone is truly rational. There is mystery all around us, but we shall not find a refuge from it in the vague ideas that make God unreal, inoperative, an alien in His own world. We are all in the hands of God. Apart from His permission no evil can oppress us. In spite of sin and tragedy His purposes stand sure, for He is the God of Redemption as of Creation, and, though the way be hard and mysterious, yet in the end 'everything in His Temple shall cry Glory.'