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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

'THE most noticeable feature of present-day Church life everywhere is the twofold desire for unity and for a re-statement of the faith.'

With these words Principal Alexander MARTIN, Moderator, opened the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland this year, and with these words he closed it. The opening address was on Unity, the closing address on Creed. Both addresses are now issued under the title of *Assembly Addresses on Church Unity and a 'Fundamentals' Creed* (Edinburgh: Macniven & Wallace; 1s.).

Of the two addresses the more important to those who listened to them was the first, to those who read them it will be the second. In the first address Principal MARTIN said something, in the second he seemed to say nothing. Yet in the second, as we now see, he said more than in the first, and what he said is of more pressing importance.

Can anything be of more pressing importance than unity? Those who are in the heart of the 'Negotiations for Union' will say no. But they are wrong. Belief is more than unity, and comes before it. We heard much during the war about the trouble which the divisions of Christendom gave to the soldier. It was a popular argument, for it cost the soldier nothing, and it was unanswerable. But the more penetrating padres discovered that there was little in it. When they reached the soldier's real mind they found that what kept him from Church attendance was either selfish indulgence or unbelief.

It was generally self-indulgence. 'A long lie in the morning' was a more potent instrument for the emptying of the Churches than all other causes combined. But the better men, the more thoughtful, the more responsible men, were found to be absent because they were out of touch with the Church's creed. And there is not a padre now but acknowledges that the first necessity is to enable these men to see that the creed of the Church they are invited to attend is both intelligible and credible.

But, first of all, it has to be a creed. A form of words may be constructed which any man could understand and believe, but which would demand nothing of him. That would not be a creed. For a creed is not assent to a form of words, it is consent to a way of life. And the acceptance of the creed involves the will to live it.

Then it must be both credible and intelligible. Principal MARTIN does not find a single historical creed either credible or intelligible. Not that he

is inconsiderate of the past. Not that he is ungrateful to the Fathers. Not that he is indifferent to the value of 'Quod semper quod ubique quod ab omnibus.' He is ready to receive from the past all that the past can give him. But it cannot give him a credible or an intelligible form of belief.

For every past effort at the formation of a creed suffered from a vital defect. It rested upon a theory of revelation which is not now acceptable. To all former framers of creeds revelation consisted of a body of truths given once for all and found in Scripture. These truths had to be arranged and interpreted, and according to the variety of ways in which they could be arranged and interpreted was the variety of the creeds To us revelation is a very different thing. It is 'the progressive manifestation of the Living God in His essential character of righteous grace, in the history and experience, first of the Chosen People, and finally of Jesus Christ, together with the reaction of inspired minds and hearts upon the whole wonderful process.'

Now the first thought, on facing this new situation, is that the forming of a creed must be a much more difficult task than it used to be. It may even be a question whether on such a basis a creed can ever be formed. It will certainly be urged that no creed formed on this idea of revelation can become the instrument of discipline.

But it is not as an instrument of discipline that a new creed is called for. It is as an instrument of comprehension. Such a creed it must be as men can accept who are Christians—not such a creed as will exclude them unless they are Christians of some particular cast of mind or round of experience.

Dr. MARTIN sets out to find this creed. Two modern creeds arrest his attention. The one is the famous short creed of the late Principal James Denney: 'I believe in God through Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord and Saviour.'

Dr. Denney was confident that that creed 'would "be the inspiration and the standard of all Christian thinking." In particular, it was meant to serve as "the symbol of the Church's unity . . . safeguarding everything which is vital to New Testament Christianity, including everything which ought to have a place in a fundamental confession of faith," and composed of terms which "are the only basis of union broad enough and solid enough for all Christians to meet upon."'

But Principal MARTIN is not content with it. He is not prepared to break with the past so utterly. He doubts if it is wise to ask the Church in any age to reduce the expression of its faith to such a minimum. And after all it is not intelligible without much explanation. 'A few words only,' Dr. Denney thought, are needed to explain everything in it, but 'in point of fact several pages, even of his compressed argumentation, are occupied in its exposition and defence.'

The other creed comes from the Presbyterian Church of England. 'Our English brethren,' says the Moderator, 'have shown themselves more adventurous in their intromission with doctrine than we have been. Having some thirty years ago made bold to draw up a series of *Articles of Faith* designed to summarise "the general system of doctrine which finds more or less full expression in . . . the long series" of Protestant Confessions, they have more recently made a further advance upon this. It is embodied in the Service for the Ordination of Ministers, and the procedure is as follows. As is most natural and right, occasion is taken of such a service to make public the Church's testimony to Christian truth, in the form, that is, of her traditional standards, along with the later summary referred to, as indicating generally the scope of her teaching and practice; there being coupled with this the recognition of liberty of opinion with regard to non-essentials, and also of the right and duty of the Church to interpret and modify all such doctrines and formulas as the living Spirit of Truth within her may direct. Next,

the ordinand is asked to accept these standards, "believing the substance of the Christian faith therein contained," and consenting to their application as a disciplinary instrument, should need arise. And, finally, he is required personally to own, and to undertake faithfully to proclaim, "the Gospel of the Love of God," defined as that "wherein He freely offers to all men forgiveness and eternal life, and calls them into the fellowship and service of His Kingdom through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, who died for our sins, rose from the dead, and is alive for evermore."'

Is Dr. MARTIN content with that creed? Yes, as 'partial and temporary.' 'The claims of the past and the rights of freedom are admirably combined in it; the chief use remaining to the Church's traditional standards is acknowledged explicitly; and, above all, the preacher is furnished with a message, in which is wrapped up the essence of New Testament religion, and which he pledges himself solemnly to make the burden of his teaching to his fellows. That, I submit, is a happy, if only partial and temporary, adjustment to have reached. And it compares favourably with most attempts which have been made elsewhere.'

But it is evident that Dr. Denney and the framers of the English Presbyterian creed had two very different objects in view. The English Presbyterians aimed at constructing a creed which should include all the fundamental doctrines of the Presbyterian Church, Dr. Denney a creed which it would be sufficient for every man who called himself a Christian to profess. And so, if Dr. Denney made a mistake, it was not in reducing his creed, it was in not reducing it enough.

The creed which marks a man a Christian may be very short indeed. For the virtue of the Christian religion is that it brings a man into unity of will with God. A sufficient Christian creed therefore would be this: 'I believe that through faith in Christ I am brought into communion with God.'

That is a creed. It is not consent to a form of words; it is acceptance of a way of life. It is an intelligible creed. It takes for granted three facts and three only, and they are in the line of clearness. The first fact is God, the second sin, the third Christ.

Now no man can look at a creed unless he believes in God. Nor is any man likely to search for a creed if he does not believe that he is a sinner. No theory of the origin or extent of sin is demanded of the believer in this creed, only the acknowledgment that he has sinned. And finally it takes for granted the fact of Christ, and that not as an example but as a saviour or reconciler—the one essential and inescapable fact about Him.

It is a short creed. But it is sufficient. For out of it come all the doctrines that are fundamental. And the advantage of so short a creed is that every Christian honestly professing it is allowed to find the doctrines in it as the Spirit of God and his own experience direct him.

The 'Gifford Lectures' in Glasgow are notable on account of the contributions made to them by the Cairds and by Mr. Balfour. To these must now be added the lectures delivered there in the years 1916 to 1918 by S. ALEXANDER, M.A., LL.D., F.B.A., Hon. Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Manchester. They have been published by Messrs. Macmillan in two volumes, with the title of *Space, Time, and Deity* (36s. net).

Professor ALEXANDER is a realist. 'My work is part of the widely-spread movement towards some form of realism in philosophy, which began in this country with Messrs. Moore and Russell, and in America with the authors of *The New Realism*.' This is the more to be observed that he was trained as an idealist—'a school of thought in which I was myself bred, and to whose leaders,

Mr. Bradley and Mr. Bosanquet, I owe so much of whatever capacity I may have attained, however unable I may have proved myself to see things with their eyes.'

But he is not greatly enamoured of his philosophical name. 'As to the terms idealism and realism,' he says, 'I should be heartily glad if we might get rid of them altogether: they have such shifting senses, and carry with them so much prejudice. They serve, however, to describe a difference of philosophical method or spirit. If idealism meant only that philosophy is concerned with experience as a whole, it has no exclusive title to be considered the true philosophic method; for all philosophies are concerned with experience as a whole. The real difference between idealism and realism lies in their starting-point or the spirit of their method. For the one, in some form or other, however much disguised, mind is the measure of things and the starting-point of inquiry. The sting of absolute idealism lies in its assertion that the parts of the world are not ultimately real or *true*, but only the whole is *true*. For realism, mind has no privileged place except in its perfection. The real issue is between these two spirits of inquiry; and it is in this sense that the following inquiry is realistic. But no sane philosophy has ever been exclusively the one or the other, and where the modern antithesis has hardly arisen, as with Plato, it is extraordinarily difficult to say under which head the philosophy should be classed.'

The lectures, which cover three winters' work, cover also much philosophical territory. The title under which they have been published is itself about as comprehensive as the title of a book could be. We shall not concern ourselves with it all. Of its three words, Space, Time, Deity, we shall pass to the third. In that word there is enough and to spare. And it is important enough.

In the controversy over the Person of Christ which is upon us the statement is frequently made, and frequently found persuasive, that 'all men are divine.' In that way the simple old argument for the divinity of Christ is expected to lose its effectiveness. The Unitarian concedes the divinity of Christ. But in the next sentence he adds that so are we all—we are all divine. In the new attitude to Christ, an attitude very conspicuous in the late Principal James Drummond, it is conceded that Jesus was more divine than we are. There was more of the nature of God in Him. But after all it is only a matter of degree. If Jesus was divine so are we, even though not in the same measure.

Professor ALEXANDER is not concerned with our controversy about the Person of Christ. He does not once name the name of Jesus throughout his book. He does not once appear even to think a thought of Christ. But he is concerned with God. And we have only to remember that when we speak of Jesus Christ as divine we mean that He was and is God, in order to find in Professor ALEXANDER, pure philosopher as he is, an outspoken and undeniable ally.

And yet it is Professor ALEXANDER'S desire that the distance between God and man should be shortened. If he has one purpose in these lectures it is to bring deity and humanity together. Nevertheless he finds himself compelled to say that there is one difference between them which is not a difference of degree merely but of kind. It is the difference of infinity.

Professor ALEXANDER does not mean that God is infinite, and man is not. Man is infinite also. But man's infinity is a different matter from the infinity of God. Professor ALEXANDER puts it in this way: 'We are finitely infinite; while deity is infinitely infinite. We are finite because our minds, which are extended both in space and time, are limited pieces of Space-Time. We are infinite because we are in relation to all Space-Time and to all things in it. Our minds are infinite in so far as from our point of view, our place or date,

we mirror the whole universe; we are compresent with everything in that universe. Though only a limited range of distinct things comes within our view, they are fringed with their relations to what is beyond them, and are but islands rising out of an infinite circumambient ocean.'

'An inch'—Dr. ALEXANDER uses this illustration—'an inch is infinite in respect of the number of its parts and corresponds to an infinite line of which it forms only a part. But it is itself finite in length. In the same way our minds, though finite in space-time, may be infinite in respect of their correspondence with the whole of things in Space-Time.'

But God is infinite without being finite. 'Not only is God infinite in extent and duration, but his deity is also infinite in both respects. Thus the infinity of his distinctive character separates him from all finites.' And the claim we make for Christ when we call Him divine is that He is infinitely infinite.

But granting that God is infinite both in Himself and in His relations, while man is infinite only in his relations, is there not another argument against the complete divinity of Jesus Christ? May there not be between man and God intermediate beings? And may not Christ be one of them?

The argument looks odd, but it is becoming familiar as a way out of a dilemma. For the reader of the Gospels, whoever he may be, finds it very difficult to think of Jesus as neither more nor less than such an one as we are. This service the historical method has rendered us. No truly disciplined scholar can come to the Gospels now with the determination to find in them the Christ he already believes in. And when he comes with open mind, although he realizes what is involved in saying that Jesus was altogether God, he is quite unable to believe that he was only man.

But Professor ALEXANDER will have nothing to do with intermediate beings—beings that are neither altogether gods in heaven nor altogether men on earth. That way lies polytheism. And there is no philosopher in the world that would send us back to the belief in many gods, locate them where you will. 'The conception of finite gods and that of infinite God are different conceptions in metaphysics. Either there is an infinite God, which is an ideal, and there are then no angels or finite deities; or if there are finite gods, the infinite or supreme ideal has ceased to be God.'

Let us face the alternative. Either our Lord Jesus Christ is God as no man is God or He is man as no God is man. Once already in the history of the world was the attempt made to find satisfaction in gods that were half gods and half men. There is no likelihood that it will ever again be made with greater ability or greater earnestness. But the Greek attempt was a failure. Even Zeus himself, King of gods, could not be cleared of the frailties and the follies of mankind, and at last had to submit to a Superior under the name of Necessity or Fate.

Is infinite infinity the only difference between God and men? It may be so. It may include all differences that exist. But it is not the way in which we recognize the difference.

But Professor ALEXANDER does not agree with Berkeley in the affirmation that we know God by the same kind of evidence as we know each other. The world of nature, said Berkeley, is the external sign by which we know God; and just as nature reveals God to us by its aspects and actions, so a man is known to us fellow-men by his conduct and his character. Dr. ALEXANDER, we say, does not agree. To him there is one faculty or instinct by which we know God as there is another and altogether different faculty or instinct by which we know men. The one he calls the religious emotion, the other the social emotion. And so distinct are

they that a man may have the one faculty and not the other—have it, he seems to say, or lack it by nature, by the very constitution of his mind. 'A man (these are his words) may be partially or wholly deity-blind, as he is tone-deaf, or has no attunement with scientific truth: he may lack the emotional suggestibility for deity.'

If a single word were demanded for the social emotion he has none to offer, and has to fall back on Assurance. But there is a word already in use for the religious emotion, and he accepts it without hesitation. It is the word Faith.

Is there any real difficulty in understanding what our Lord meant when He said: 'Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him?' Is there any difficulty in seeing that it must be so?

There is no difficulty. For 'the work of the Holy Spirit in the moral processes of men's lives always meets them in the terms of their own experience, and mediates its behests in the very thoughts and aspirations which are a normal part of their lives in the light of the actual situation in which they find themselves. There is nothing forced about it. There is nothing artificial about it. It is all so deeply a part of the very structural quality of a man's own nature that he feels as if the voice of God is simply the voice of his own inner life. God meets every man on the level of his own thinking and feeling and willing in this inner demand which the Holy Spirit makes in the developing and growing life.'

And so, 'a man might fail to accept Jesus himself as Lord and Master of his life because he had never heard of him, or because he had never had a real opportunity to understand him or his summons. But if a man repudiates that inner voice which speaks in the terms of his own experience, and in the language of his own struggle, he has turned from the very central reality in his own soul. To turn from that voice in final refusal is to slay the very spirit of goodness in a man's own life.'

Then President L. H. Hough (whom we follow) in his book on *The Eyes of Faith* (Abingdon Press), uses this illustration. 'An electric lamp contains a thin fibre which glows with the electric flame. When that fibre has burned out there can be no light. There is a subtle fibre in every life capable of responding to reality. When a man treats that in such fashion that it burns out, there can be no moral light in the soul. It is not that such a man goes to hell. It is a much more fundamental thing. He becomes hell. Wherever he is there is the inferno. Like the Ancient Mariner, he has slain the albatross of his own ideal. Only he is without regret, for he has slain the capacity for regret as well. The capacity so to repudiate the Moral Voice, so to slay goodness in the soul, represents the supreme imperial expression of evil in human life.'

There is no thought of our time that can with more confidence be spoken of as both new and true than the thought of God's weakness. No doubt we must be careful in the use of our words. Weakness if misunderstood may be unworthy of God. It is so in the mind of Mr. H. G. Wells, or at any rate in some of his utterances. But the weakness of God is a Pauline phrase, and we say, if rightly guarded, it is both true and new.

It is certainly new. The conception of God which until recently ruled in the minds of men was that of God's omnipotence. It is the conception which overtops every other in the minds of uneducated men still. God can do what He pleases. The story of the Sunday school teacher who was asked how any one could pray on the housetop, and answered that with God all things are possible, may be fabulous, but it is consistent with popular theology.

But now, when Miss Helen WODEHOUSE, D.Phil., Professor of Education in the University of Bristol, publishes the sermons which she has preached on Sunday afternoons to women in training for the profession of teacher, she calls her book by the title of that sermon which speaks of God as unable to do what He desires to do. She calls it *God the Prisoner* (Allen & Unwin; 5s. net).

God is in prison. He is bound with chains. The poet, speaking of prayer, says:

For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

It is just as true to say that God is bound by gold chains about the feet of man. Does He sit in the sky? If He does, His feet are chained to the earth. He cannot do what He will with us, and yet He cannot throw us off. 'We think of him sometimes as able to shake us off so easily, to withdraw at any moment from an obstinate nation or an inhospitable heart. Hosea taught us the opposite many centuries ago—"*How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?*" We and God do not find it easy to get away from each other. And the real point is that we do not ever get away. He is involved in everything upon earth; bound up in it hand and foot.'

He is involved in it. He cannot get away from it, being God. And yet He cannot do what He will with it, we who live upon the earth being men. Why did God allow the war? 'I think,' says Dr. WODEHOUSE, 'that we get nearest the truth, amongst short answers, if we say that he could not help it. When the weakest elements in our self or in humanity get into a tangle, then the best and strongest have to work it out and pay for it. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." The greatest self in us, and the best in mankind, is the bondservant of the rest—the chained slave. But however we think of the authorship, there is no doubt where the suffering lies. If you picture God as Love standing outside the fighters, then by virtue of love he must suffer with every one of them. If you picture him as immanent in them, then in the courage of the men on both sides, in the loyalty of the women on both sides, in the patience of the animals and the children, God is enduring. He is torn in pieces, divided against himself—or not against himself, perhaps, since splendour and tragedy on opposite sides do not destroy each other—but still divided; rent and broken. "This is my body which is given for you."'

What can be done then? What can we do? Dr. WODEHOUSE sees two things that we can do.

First, if we picture the world as full of obstacles, we can picture God as being with us in the midst of them. 'If chains and hindrances exist, God bears them. It is his work in which we are hindered, and he is hindered in us. The chains of our fear, our stupidity, our ignorance, bind him. His expression through us is obstructed by our bad memory, our irrelevant worries, our delicate health, our hatred of beginning work. Defects in the organization of school and of society hinder him. He is handicapped by foolish fashions, and by our past and present faults and mistakes. He in us is tied and bound with the chain of our sins.'

Again, God is in prison, and *we can come to Him*. 'Every good deed, outside us or within us, works towards setting him free. He is in prison in the neglected child, in the school that needs reform, in the ignorant and unsympathetic parent, the irritating pupil, the irritable fellow-worker. He is in prison in the weakness of our self; and every patient strengthening of our feeble mind and will, and every cutting away of a false opinion or a bad habit, strikes off one of his chains. He is in prison in a badly organized society. It is said sometimes that improvements in social machinery are valueless, because all good depends on character. Yet the answer has been made (by Bishop Gore), that social machinery may roll away the stone from the grave of Lazarus. Yes, and more; it may roll away the stone for Easter.'