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Editorials

A THEOLOGICAL NEED

ONE of the most disturbing developments of our time is the abandonment, by the individual, of moral responsibility. By this is not meant that the ordinary man refuses to accept responsibility for his personal actions but that the realm of personal action has become so limited that individuals accept tremendous changes in the moral atmosphere of the world with apathy. When, some time ago, a man murdered his mother, the shock the act caused was not on account of the matricide so much as that, in order to accomplish his end, the murderer introduced a time bomb into the plane on which his mother was travelling, completely destroying the machine and some forty other people. The fact is, however, that he was simply using for his own greed a pattern of life which has become normal in the modern world—travel by air. When that pattern is made the instrument of mass destruction we are stirred into alarm. This is an indication of our condition.

Our situation has arisen because we have largely lost our theological concern for life. So many of the recent developments in knowledge and affairs have taken place among immediate political and national pressures that we are involved in tragedy as a *modus vivendi*. The struggle for survival in World War II removed the theological content from such words as freedom, justice and humanity, while uniting in uneasy equilibrium powers whose interpretation of those words were vastly different. The threat of destruction removed, the development of knowledge, and material and natural resources have been employed in the ideological struggle between those who were once allies. All this has been accepted as inevitable and the contemporary problems of atomic warfare, the supply of arms, food and economic help to smaller nations and the meaning of international responsibility become political questions to which we are related only by vague apprehension. The internal problems of an industrial civilisation become matters of adjustment of power and even education is dominated by the demands of a scientific age in search of security. The patterns of our life are dangerous and can lead to destruction.

We cannot, if we would, return to an uncomplicated existence. No one would suggest a return to horse and buggy days because an air-liner can be destroyed by a self-centred individual. But the reality of our personal involvement needs to be much more clearly appreciated, even if the realm of our personal action is narrowly limited. It is necessary, if elementary, to remind ourselves that people are the ultimate terms in problems of human relations, that the moral consciousness of people is the real authority behind governmental action, an authority which no government dare outrage but which, through ignorance or indifference, can lose its rightful power. The

Church exists to arouse this moral consciousness so that justice, freedom, security and fulfilment are terms of wider than national or hemispherical meaning because they are rooted in the Gospel. The indictment against us is that international policy rarely, if ever, has to justify itself to us on moral grounds but only on grounds of military and national security. Canadian ebullience in anticipating an increasing significance in world affairs due to the development of tremendous natural resources makes us peculiarly vulnerable to a lapse of moral consciousness.

What we need is the recognition that all problems are ultimately theological. Whatever the limitations on our direct action, ignorance of the issues involved is culpable. It is the task of the Church, in preaching and writing, to pick out present and recognisable problems in various areas of human relations and to subject them to a searching criticism in the light of the Gospel, enlightening us both as to their inevitability as well as to their true, human meaning. The fatalistic indifference of ordinary folk in regard to a future in which they see little hope but from which they expect no escape is moral defeat. If there is to be any significant conversation between the Christian hope and the paranoia of the world it must be upon the background of an informed conscience. We can expect no sudden and magical solution for our condition but, in the realm where some meaningful personal choice remains, that of vocation, we can bring back the responsibility of real choice.

J. G. C.

THE HISTORIC LIFE OF JESUS

THE difficulties of writing a "life" of Jesus are well known. That the New Testament Gospels are not biographies is a commonplace of modern scholarship. Form critics assume that the traditional knowledge of Jesus and of what he said was preserved in the primitive Church in isolated units; and they warn us that as it now appears in the Gospels it is coloured and formed by the doctrinal opinions of the primitive Christian community. Bultmann has said, "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either." Not all who have made use of the form-critical method have shared Bultmann's scepticism. Indeed there has been a veritable spate of learned articles in which his position has been criticised and especially his attempt to demythologize the New Testament. The volume of scholarly literature has grown apace. Many more of us are aware of its existence than have opportunity to study it. Some have been touched by the contagion of uncertainty if not of mild scepticism. In their thought and devotion they have come, imperceptibly perhaps, to rely less confidently upon the witness of the Gospels and upon the person of him to whom they bear witness.

For such there should be a measure of encouragement in the recent work of certain scholars interested in this area of New Testament research. It may indeed be, as Vincent Taylor has suggested, that we are "entering upon a period of greater constructive activity." One thinks of such works as Dodd's article on "The Framework of the Gospel Narrative" now published in his *New Testament Studies*; of Hunter's *Work and Words of Jesus*; of T. W. Manson's study of the public ministry of Jesus, *The Servant-Messiah*; and of Vincent Taylor's *Life and Ministry of Jesus*, an enlarged version of his article under the same title in the *Interpreter's Bible*. Most recently T. W. Manson has contributed to the series of studies in honour of C. H. Dodd, *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, a survey of the tendencies in present-day research in the life of Jesus. Out of his long study he makes the following affirmation:

I am increasingly convinced that the Marcan story presents in the main an orderly and logical development; and that this development or framework has as good title to be considered reliable historical material as any particular anecdote incorporated in it.

And he ends his discussion with these words:

There is no escape from the historical inquiry. And there is no need to be despondent about its prospects. We may venture to hope that as it progresses, we shall find that the Ministry of Jesus is a piece of real history in the sense that it is fully relevant to the historical situation of its own time, to the hopes and fears, the passionate convictions and the gnawing needs of our Lord's own contemporaries. And just because it was so relevant to their life, we shall find it relevant to our own.

The other day a Canadian bishop explained to one of his more recently consecrated fellow-bishops that when he had to make decisions where he had no precedent to guide him he was guided largely by his knowledge of the character and teaching of Jesus. This for him was a practical guide in his high office. It is probably not without significance that when he ordained a young man deacon he not only presented him with a Greek New Testament as the liturgy and custom required but gave him as well a copy of Turner's *Work and Words of Jesus*. A missionary in discussing the manner of the presentation of the gospel to prospective converts explained that it was first of all necessary to tell them stories about Jesus. Then when they had come to know and admire him it would be proper to explain the meaning and purpose of his life and death and resurrection. A recent questionnaire showed that one of the questions young teen-agers most frequently wished to have answered was: Did Jesus really live? What was he really like?

The urgent and vital importance of the life of Jesus for the life of the Christian and the Church which the above may be taken to illustrate but emphasises the truth of some words of F. C. Burkitt, written long ago in a

preface to a life of Christ with which he found himself in not too great sympathy. "To make a Portrait of Christ, each man for himself, is the duty of every Christian, of whatever school of thought and practice. It cannot really be done second-hand, by others, if the Figure is to have any vital or compelling influence."

M. T. N.