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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

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pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

WHAT was the Colossian heresy? Dr. Maurice JONES essays to tell us in his *Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians* (S.P.C.K.; 5s. net). Its chief promoters may not have been Jews, but there were decided Jewish elements in it. We gather this from the references to circumcision, to ritual and sumptuary legislation, and to holy days. Yet the enemies here are not those of the Judaistic controversy; the great key-words 'faith,' 'works,' 'righteousness' are absent, nor is there any indication that the Colossian heretics tried to impose circumcision on Gentile believers.

The principal elements, then, in the heresy were extra-Judaic. We gather that its code of morals was largely ascetic, dealt much in the 'don'ts' dear to the heart of the generation just before our own. 'Handle not, nor taste, nor touch.' The heretics, too, seem to have been a circle of the elect, laying claim to wisdom and insight beyond those of ordinary mortals, and basing their claim in part on visions.

The eclectic nature of the heresy was doubtless one of its attractions. The Hellenistic Jew found in it a religion that paid attention to the ceremonial law, in the matter of circumcision and the observance of feast days and Sabbaths. The cultured Greek would have a natural interest in a system which claimed to be not only a philosophy, but *the*

philosophy. For the Phrygian followers of the orgiastic cults of Attis and Cybele there were the 'delights of ecstasy and the privilege of mystic vision'; while the dabbler in Gnosticism would find himself at home with the æons and spiritual beings that filled the gulf between God and man.

In the Colossian heresy what place was given to Christ? It is not clear; but if we may assume that when Paul speaks of Christ in the Epistle he has the heresy in mind, it seems evident that these Colossians gave to Jesus a place in their religious thought very like that given by the modern Hindu reformers. For Jesus they have nothing but honour and reverence, but they have no sympathy with the unique claims that the Christian makes for Him. The Colossian estimate of Jesus was affected by their whole conception of angels, and it is in this conception that Dr. JONES finds the head and front of their heresy.

The birth and infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke are full of angels and visions. Our Lord believed in angels and referred to them repeatedly; but the plain truth seems to be that His communion with God was so immediate that in His practical life He found little or no place for angels. We cannot be too grateful that the Gospel narratives of His actual ministry so faithfully represent His

own attitude on this point. It might so easily have been otherwise.

To Jesus angels were not necessarily good angels. At least, if the Judgment scene in Mt 25 is a correct record of the words of Jesus, He conceived of the devil as having his retinue of angels. How does Paul stand in this matter? Dr. JONES suggests that Paul's eagerness to counter the Colossian 'angel' heresy tended to deflect his own views on angels; we may even say, led him to become himself a mild heretic on this subject. If Paul had been writing an academic essay on angels, no doubt he would have represented them as being on the whole on the side of God (we had almost said 'On the side of the angels'). But Paul's controversy with the Colossians unwittingly led him into a controversy with the angels.

But, after all, Paul's zeal against the Colossians was only one factor that led to his distrust of angels, which may have been more deep-seated than we are apt to think. Paul, following the apocalyptic scheme of the 'two ages,' repeatedly speaks of the pre-Christian world as being controlled by evil spiritual powers, 'the rulers of this world,' 'principalities and powers in the heavenly places.' It is true that he does not usually call these powers 'angels'; but in at least one passage (Ro 8³⁸) he brackets angels with the powers of darkness that hinder the Christian's access to God.

And we can see how angels came to be suspect in the mind of Paul. According to a Jewish doctrine, elaborated from Dt 33², angels had presided over the introduction of the Law, and were its guardians and the administrators of its decrees. But two interpretations might be placed on this function of angels. On the one hand we have Stephen's view (Ac 7⁵³) that this mediation of angels added a new dignity to the Law. As against this we have the view of the writer to the Hebrews (2²), that the Law mediated by angels was inferior in dignity to the Gospel that came direct from the Son.

It is in this second light that Paul regards the matter. We see from Gal 3¹⁹ that the part played by angels in the promulgation of the Law stamped it as to that extent an inferior agency. But Paul did not rest there. If Christ has freed us from the Law, He has freed us from the angels that controlled the Law. These angels apparently were to him the very principalities and powers that were dethroned in Jesus' death on the Cross (Col 2¹⁵).

In the wide sweep of the Apostle's thought (Col 1²⁰) heavenly beings as well as earthly were reconciled when He made peace through the blood of His Cross. And so we reach the curious result, that angels not merely required to be, but actually were, included in the reconciliation secured by Jesus. So far had Paul been carried by the Judaic controversy and by the Colossian heresy from his earlier view, in which, like the Evangelists, he associated angels with the glory of Christ's Second Coming. If Paul's view on the subject has no other interest, it is at least a measure of his diagnosis of the danger of the situation created by the place given to angels in Colossian thought. Dr. JONES shows that, *mutatis mutandis*, the Colossian heresy is not so foreign or far-off to our generation as at first hearing it sounds.

The *Modern Churchman* for August contains an article on the Atonement by the Rev. Canon R. H. KENNETT, D.D., Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge. Dr. KENNETT is not going outside his own field when he writes on this doctrine, for he is mainly occupied with its roots in the Old Testament. Those who have followed Augustine's famous dictum, 'Novum testamentum in vetere latet; vetus testamentum in novo patet,' have approached the whole Bible with a prepossession towards a theory of the Atonement from which, in modern times, a healthy sense of justice instinctively recoils.

Before the days of Pentateuchal criticism it was impossible to understand that the first chapter of

Genesis was originally meant to supersede the second and third chapters; and accordingly the story of the Garden of Eden, literally understood, warped Christians' whole conception of God's relation to man. Because of the venial fault of one man millions were to be exposed to the risk of never-ending torture, and God was reduced to the necessity, while safeguarding His Divine prerogative by maintaining the letter of His arbitrary sentence, of seeking expedients to avert its most terrible effects. Nevertheless, God has relentlessly to cast off His children unless 'atonement' is made.

But what is atonement? In the Old Testament it does not necessarily imply expiation. It means *covering*; and denotes the covering over of what is offensive, or the covering over of the face of the injured person so that he may not see what is offensive. Read Gn 32²⁰. Now in many passages of the Old Testament Jehovah is presented to us as an arbitrary oriental autocrat, and very naïve ways are employed to placate Him, to cover His face—sometimes arguments and sometimes sacrifices.

This is the idea which found expression in sacrifice, not expiation but the desire to conciliate God and make Him change His purpose. Very human emotions, and not always exalted ones, are attributed to Jehovah in some parts of the Old Testament. In the twenty-first chapter of 2 Samuel there is a terrible story of the demand made by the Gibeonites for the death of seven men of the family of Saul in revenge for a massacre of the Gibeonites ordered by Saul. This savage demand was acceded to because there was a curse upon the land and only in this way could it be removed. 'And after that' we read 'God was intreated for the land.'

Now the great prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries before Christ definitely repudiated this whole system of sacrifice as an ordinance of Jehovah. They demand nothing in the way of expiation for man's sin but only repentance and amendment.

And our Lord occupied the same standpoint. The whole of His teaching, so far from being merely the coping-stone of the sacrificial system, is the direct negation of it. He drew no illustration of His saving work from it. He never, so far as we know, took any part in it. In His dealings with sinners He never made any reference to it.

This does not mean that God is complacent or easy-going with sin or sinners. Repentance and the way back after repentance are hard. Also, it is to be remembered that the redemption of a soul is often possible only through the suffering, or martyrdom, of quite innocent persons. And it is in this sense Jesus has redeemed us. He gave His life that He might free us from the bondage of the fear of death and from the debasing superstition which arises from ignorance of the true character of God. If we have faith to believe the witness of Jesus about God we are at one with the Father. In the death of Jesus is the greatest proof of the love of God. And in vision of that truth we are saved 'by His blood.'

In *The Journal of Theological Studies* for the last quarter there was an article by the Rev. A. CALDECOTT, D.D., which may be taken as a pendant to Dr. KENNETT's on the 'Atonement,' but which has an interest of its own. The subject is 'The Significance of the "Cleansing of the Temple."' There are two possible estimates of this event. Was it comparatively an unimportant event so far as influence on the development of the history goes? Or had it more importance than appears on the surface, exercising a decisive influence on the history of the closing week and on other matters also?

In *The Quest* of January 1921 a learned Christian Jew, Dr. EISLER, argues strongly that the action of Jesus was in reality a decisive repudiation of the sacrificial system of Judaism, and Dr. CALDECOTT is inclined to this opinion also. He adduces in confirmation various facts. One is the marked way

in which the Sadducean officials of the Temple come to the front in the closing stage of opposition to Jesus.

Then there is the rapidity with which the officials were able to draw over to their side the multitude assembled in Jerusalem for the Passover, and to excite them to fury. 'Ah, thou that destroyest the Temple,' cried the mob. This hostility can hardly be accounted for by a mere protest against the profanation of the Temple. Can we account for it on any less hypothesis than an attack upon the sacrificial system itself?

What was the attitude of Jesus to the Blood-sacrifices before the last week? It is coming to be recognized that He must have been frequently in Jerusalem (Canon Scott Holland's recent book on St. John confirms this). Jesus must, then, either have approved the sacrifices by attendance at them or have avoided them. Which is true? Jesus discussed all kinds of religious questions—the Sabbath, Fasting, Divorce, the Resurrection—but He never mentions the sacrificial system at all except to quote with commendation Hosea's disparagement of it.

In the Church of the Apostolic period any regard for this system had completely disappeared. Could this have happened without some authoritative pronouncement from our Lord? That pronouncement would be before our eyes if we give the Cleansing of the Temple its maximum significance as a vehement protest against the continuation of the sacrifices themselves.

The attitude of the four evangelists to this incident is interesting, but the most interesting thing in this connexion is John's assigning it to the beginning of the ministry. Dr. CALDECOTT is convinced that there were two similar 'cleansings.' But they were similar only superficially. The first was a minor protest, and it attracted only slight attention. It attacked only minor abuses, and has therefore been correctly designated a

'cleansing.' It did not seem sufficiently important for the Synoptics to record.

But the second, radical and momentous, John found already recorded in its place. The first was to him simply an example of a quite early claim to authority on the part of our Lord. But having 'used this up' and given it its proper place, he omitted it in his account of the last week, though it was before him in the Synoptic tradition.

The argument in this article is suggestive and attractive. Objections to it are obvious enough, however. Why did Jesus say not a word on this occasion to indicate that He meant to strike at the sacrificial system? Is not the activity of the Sadducees at the end natural on the supposition that Jesus' whole teaching struck at their privileges and that He could not be condemned without their intervention? Is not the hostility of the people explained sufficiently by the discovery that Jesus refused to encourage their material ambitions? And, finally, is the indignation of Jesus not accounted for by the exploitation of the poor which He saw in this hateful traffic?

Men read from various motives, some unabashedly for pleasure, others to gratify curiosity, others to enlarge their knowledge, others to develop character. How many are there who regard reading as a religious obligation? Yet such seems to have been the view of Jesus.

Six or seven times in the Gospel of Matthew He confronts opponents with the question, 'Have ye not read?' When His disciples were accused of breaking the Sabbath by plucking ears of corn on that day, when the Pharisees cunningly requested Him to make a pronouncement on divorce, when the chief priests and the scribes manifested sore displeasure at the children who shouted Hosanna, when He pilloried His opponents in the parable of the husbandmen who slew the lord of the vineyard's son, when the Sadducees sought by a silly question

to cover Him and His faith in the Resurrection with ridicule—on all these occasions, and probably on many others of which we know nothing, He parried their malicious thrusts with the question, 'Have ye not read?'

Reading is a duty, for the simple reason that no man is sufficient to himself. No man has a monopoly of wisdom, and the story of the past is full of inspiration and warning. If one has an opportunity of studying it, to ignore it is an act, at best, of thoughtlessness, and, at worst, of arrogance; it implies an intellectual self-satisfaction and a moral complacency which are the sure marks of an essentially shallow nature. The wisest of us cannot dispense with the garnered wisdom of the ages. It is partly because the lessons of the last seventy years have not been read, marked, and inwardly digested that the world presents the sorry spectacle that it does to-day.

But there is reading and reading. The opponents of Jesus were doubtless quite familiar with the passages to which He called their attention. They had read them many a time. But they had read them as ancient history, they had not seen how directly they bore upon their own life and conduct, they had not come under their searching and illuminating power, they had not submitted their souls to the wisdom which they enshrined. They knew them from memory, but not by heart, and so they did not know them in any vital sense at all. It is possible to read and to remain unilluminated, to gather from our reading no guidance for conduct, no wisdom or insight into the issues of life.

For if we look closely at these several challenges of our Lord, we see that the wicked stupidity of His opponents was largely due to their failure to understand the real meaning of the great words and the moving tales with which they must have been thoroughly familiar. Had the Pharisees truly understood the originality of 'what David did,' they would never have made themselves ridiculous by challenging the hungry disciples for plucking

the ears of corn on the Sabbath day. Had the Sadducees read the great words in Exodus, 'I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob,' with minds enlightened to an appreciation of their immense religious potentiality, they would never have been so rash as to attempt to trip up Jesus with their almost comically improbable story about the woman with the seven husbands. Intelligent reading would have kept them from asking foolish questions, the answers to which left them looking ridiculous and discomfited. And what such reading might have done for them, it may do for us.

It is significant that the reading which Jesus presupposes in self-respecting people is the reading of the Bible. 'Did ye never read in the *Scriptures*?'—the Old Testament Scriptures, of course. In Genesis, in Exodus, in Samuel, in the Psalms, and in many another book He found words of permanent wisdom; and still, as of old, the Bible is capable of being a lamp to the feet and a light to the path of those who read it. Not the smallest tragedy of our tragic modern world is the general ignorance of this incomparable Book. Professor PEAKE, in his Preface to Principal Mumford's *Metrical Version of the Book of Job*, very truly speaks of 'the widespread neglect of the Bible which is so ominous a feature of our time.' Thousands of those who worship with more or less regularity in our Churches have not read what David did; they have only the most nebulous ideas of what Moses and Elijah did, or of what Amos and Isaiah and Paul and even Jesus said. And this failure to make the acquaintance of the great and daring ones of the olden time helps to explain the conventionality, the ineffectiveness, and the sterility of much of our religious life to-day.

It is also significant that Jesus should stress the biographical element in the Bible. Truth is most effective when it is 'embodied in a tale,' especially in the tale of a life which has left its mark for good upon the general life of the world. 'Have ye not read *what David did*?' What vistas of possibility this simple phrase opens out to the preacher! If, say once a month, he were to give us an inspiring

biographical study, to sketch the life and achievements and to lay bare the inward impelling motives of some of the saints, the missionaries, the preachers, the poets, the statesmen, the reformers, who have lifted humanity a little nearer to God ; if he were to tell us what David did, and Isaiah, and Paul ;

what Columba did, and Xavier, and Livingstone, and Mary Slessor ; what Savonarola did, and Luther, and Knox, and Calvin, and the Wesleys, and many another who wrought righteousness in his day and generation : how much fuller, richer, and more competent our own lives might be !

Reality proved By Identity.

A STUDY IN EVIDENCE FOR THE HISTORICAL TRUTH OF THE GOSPELS.

BY THE REVEREND J. A. WOOD, M.A., LATELY CANON OF LAHORE.

IN all ages, from the days of Tatian in the second century to the present, a favourite problem has been the relationship of the four Evangelists to each other, and many have been the attempts to combine the four narratives into one continuous whole. Against all such endeavours has stood the opinion of those who have laid stress on the differences which mark off S. John from the Synoptists, a difference emphasized from an almost equally early age with Tatian's *Harmony* by Clement of Alexandria, who insisted on the spiritual character of the Fourth Gospel. The further the literary study of the Gospel proceeds, the more obvious it becomes that it is only by a most violent *tour de force* that the words of a mystic seer writing an appreciation, rather than a life, of His Master may be fitted and compacted, clause by clause, or even section by section into the daily chronicle, which fills the pages of the Synoptists. On the other hand, while the literary contrasts between S. John and the other Evangelists become more evident, there is an artistic agreement which demands an adequate explanation.

A portrait which is true to the original will enable us to recognize the features of the individual portrayed in other representations also. A crayon sketch by a master-hand will enable us to identify the likeness produced by any other competent artist in marble or in bronze, in oils or in water-colour. Suppose also that we have before us two representations of an ideal character, one in bronze and another in oils, with an entirely different pose in each, and yet that we can trace an exact correspondence feature for feature between the two, we shall without hesitation say that these are both from the same

living model. Such correspondence is impossible in works of imagination.

In this paper I propose to apply a similar test to the portraits of our Lord drawn in the Synoptists and in S. John. If on a close examination we find that these portraits drawn in such different media, and so often, from their difference of style, declared incapable of combination, are in fifty points feature for feature identical, then it would seem a not unfair deduction that they are both drawn from life.

The method proposed is independent of the appeal to evidence as to the existence of the Gospels in the first century. It takes the Gospel narratives as they exist to-day, and says : ' Granting that these portraits may in some degree have been retouched by other hands than the original artists', yet because, while obviously independent, they correspond in the minutest detail they cannot be works of imagination, representing only their authors' conceptions of a Divine Man, but must have been drawn from one living original.'

The argument I here outline has grown out of a study made some years ago of the human features of our Lord's character. To be truly man, our Lord must have possessed an individuality of His own, just as He had physical characteristics by which He could be recognized. That individuality was no mere colourless average of human dispositions, but was one with many and varied features fully developed. Pursuing this study, I noted more than fifty features of interest and noted all the references in which I found each trait of character to be exhibited. I started naturally with the Synoptists ; but, when I came to S. John, I found, as my