

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

It is a brave thing of any one to-day to try to 'rationalize' the Incarnation, to conceive and expound a constructive view of it and of how it came about. This is what the Rev. C. D. HOSTE, M.A., sets out to do in *The Partnership of Nazareth* (Longmans ; 6s. net), and any such serious attempt is well worthy of its record in these expository columns. Mr. HOSTE is a serious thinker, and his thoughts are clearly and simply expressed in this book.

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He begins by pointing out that, when in the long history of evolution man's life became a self-conscious life, its whole character was changed. For the first time man could think about himself, and in particular could arrange everything round a centre. This is what being a Person means, and the Incarnation is concerned with the personal life of man. But this personal life has not proved an easy thing. The problems and difficulties that are characteristic of personal life make living anything but a smooth business. Many of us ignore these difficulties as much as we can and try to fill our lives with interests that provide a way of escape.

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But in the Incarnation Christ came to share the problems of personality and to meet them. And He did this, be it observed, not by the aid of any exceptional power but using only the resources that human nature furnishes. He found a way out of the difficulties that beset human beings with only the help that any of us have. The chief problem of

man is the task of arranging all his experiences round a centre. What has really happened is that man has taken self as a centre round which his life is built up. And this has been the source of all the troubles that have vexed the life of man.

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How, on the other hand, did Christ meet and master the difficulties of life? By choosing another centre of His life. He centred His life on God. He made the Spirit of God the Spirit of His life. The story of His ministry is the story of this great personal and spiritual achievement, one so great that we are apt to lose hold of the truth that He was really human through and through, and that He was using only the powers of human heart and thought and will that came to Him at His birth. And this is the secret of *our* similar attainment. At the Cross and Pentecost God bestowed this victorious life on mankind, man's true life, worked out and perfected by the use of human means. And thus we become partners in the working out of the Incarnation.

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This is one of the main contentions of the book. The human race has a great part to play in the working out of the Incarnation to its triumphant conclusion. The Incarnation is a seed sown, which mankind is to tend and mature, a seed sown in the heart of the race, to bloom *there*. In the furtherance of this enterprise every human being has something to contribute. It is not a matter of God's action only, or of man's only, but of both, a partnership.

East Ham in May 1938. Following upon that a letter appeared in *The Times* over the signatures of Lord Baldwin and sixteen other eminent people declaring that the critical state of the world could only be met by 'moral and spiritual rearmament.' The subject at once attracted world-wide attention. Quite a flood of letters and manifestoes came from individuals and groups of people in all walks of life, and an international conference to deal with the subject was held at Interlaken in last September.

The phrase 'moral rearmament' is sufficiently vague to make a wide appeal without trenching too closely upon national and religious sensibilities. No doubt it is taken in different senses by different people. Obviously it cannot mean quite the same thing to General Chiang Kai-shek on the one hand and Prince Konoye of Japan on the other, both of whom have blessed the movement.

An interesting and informative article on 'The Meaning of Moral Rearmament' by Professor H. A. HODGES appears in *Theology* for May in which the writer warns against the notion which has appeared in some quarters that the movement simply means an effort to heighten the people's morale or rally the national spirit. This would really be a Totalitarian interpretation, making the State the supreme end. A far deeper and more Christian significance must be given to the phrase if it is to have any real value for the Kingdom of God. It must be taken as a call for individual and corporate Christian thought and action, both self-critical and constructive. 'Christians ought now, before anything else, to take stock of their position and think out afresh the meaning and implications of their creed.'

A few reflections on the subject may be timely. The international crisis which has arisen is known to everybody. Our nation in a mood of reaction after the Great War, and perhaps also in a spirit of hazy optimism, neglected its defences, so that when suddenly confronted by a hostile military power and the prospect of an immediate war, it found itself in a position of the greatest danger. It then became an urgent necessity to recover lost ground and make the nation again strong enough to meet any

emergency which might arise. Such is the situation from the national point of view, and from the Christian point of view it is similar. For a national crisis brings with it a spiritual crisis, and war especially is destructive not only of material things and human lives but of spiritual values also.

What are these spiritual values which are threatened, and what are the moral dangers against which we must now rearm? Let our experiences in the last war supply the answer. In that dark and evil time passions were roused until the claims of Christian love were forgotten or expressly denied. To preach on 'love your enemies' was to invite the charge of being pro-German. There were even leading preachers who declared that the only law applicable to these enemies was the law of the Amalekites. It is customary to-day to lay special blame upon the makers of the Treaty of Versailles, but the fact is that the whole nation and all the allies were keyed up to so high a pitch of hatred and revenge that any more merciful treaty would have been torn to shreds and its makers cast out of office.

There was also a most notorious sacrifice of truth. Anything that would discredit and blacken the enemy or confirm the national morale was legitimate propaganda. Nothing was too dreadful to be invented and believed, until it became next to impossible to attain to the truth. And to crown all, when at last after unparalleled effort and sacrifice, the War was won, and the victory made as complete as force could make it, somehow the long-wished-for fruits of victory did not appear. It was found that there were things which force could not achieve, all the things most essential to human welfare.

Are these lessons all to be lost? If the crisis which confronts us to-day should unhappily come to a head in strife will the same old passions flare up and blind the minds and hearts of the people to the claims of righteousness, truth, and love? These are very serious questions which press for urgent and immediate consideration by the Church and every Christian conscience. It appears from

many evidences in the Press that Church courts are devoting much thought to the part which the Church may be called upon to play in any crisis that may arise, and practical schemes are being worked out so that the various churches may most effectively place at the nation's disposal their resources in men and buildings. Few, perhaps, will be disposed to be critical of this. But one would welcome more evidence that the churches are giving equally definite and special attention to questions of moral and spiritual rearmament.

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The proper time for rearmament, as every one now knows, is before war begins. The whole life and work of our country to-day has resolved itself into a gigantic struggle to be in readiness if and when a crisis should arise. Otherwise it may be too late, and irreparable loss and damage may result. Are the churches spiritually arming to meet the crisis? Will they sail through the storm of world passions on an even keel? Are the minds and hearts of Christian people being sufficiently enlightened and fortified that they will be able to maintain their faith and not be swept away? These are surely the questions to which, more than to any others, the Christian mind should be most vigorously and prayerfully addressing itself to-day.

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Take one or two practical points by way of illustration. Are the churches to-day pondering deeply the problems which arise in connexion with the use of force? Is there any common Christian mind on the subject, or in the event of a crisis arising are we to see again the pacifist spirit ranged against the militant with much mutual bitterness and misunderstanding? It may not of course be possible to attain unanimity, but surely every effort should be made in united conference and prayer to attain as large a measure of agreement as possible. Force in itself is a morally neutral thing, and in point of fact is sometimes used by the most extreme Pacifist for purposes of discipline. Its use would then seem to be not so much a principle as a practical problem of degree, in regard to which Christian people if they cannot see eye to eye should be able to differ conscientiously and in charity.

Closely akin to this is the interpretation to be put upon Christ's great law of love, especially in its application to enemies. It is no exaggeration to say that the average Christian when his passions are roused, as in war time, simply ignores this law or vehemently repudiates it. He labours under a double misapprehension. He confuses Christian love with natural liking, and he is apt to feel insulted when, as he imagines, he is bidden like Hitler and his ways. He also fancies that to love your enemy means not to withstand him by force but to let him have his way, and this also he rebels against. If this is anything like a picture of the popular mind there is here great scope and need for very definite teaching on the meaning of the Christian law of love. Theologians have been wont to distinguish between the 'love of complacency' and the 'love of benevolence.' There are some, they said, whose character and ways are pleasing to us, and for them we have a natural liking. But it is a Christian duty to cherish towards all men, even those whom we dislike, a steady spirit of benevolence or goodwill. This distinction can hardly be held to have captured the popular mind. It needs to be explicitly taught and its implications shown. Love may resist, may discipline, may severely punish with a sincere desire of doing good even to the enemy. For as Socrates clearly saw and declared, nothing worse could befall a tyrant than that he should be suffered to go on prospering in his evil way. How extraordinarily hard it would be to maintain the spirit of love under the stress of war only those who have passed through the fiery trial can imagine. All the more reason why every Christian mind should be armed against the time of strain.

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Another danger involved in the present crisis may be put in Lord Baldwin's words. 'Can the Democracies resist tyranny without becoming themselves enslaved?' And he gave the answer, 'They can only do so if the spiritual effort they put forth is greater than, and in control of, their material effort.' The danger is obvious that in the stress of a world war everything must be subordinated to the supreme interest of national safety. The conditions of modern war make it necessary to control

and regiment the nation to the last degree. Freedom of speech is restricted. Sunday is conscripted and inroads are made upon every department of life. The military mind is naturally autocratic, and resistance is not easy when the nation's life may be at stake. Hence it is no fancied danger that in a world war the people might be drilled and mechanized into an army which, while it emerged

victorious, found that it had lost all that was worth fighting for, its civil and religious liberties. The task of material rearmament which is taxing our statesmanship to the uttermost is surely not so arduous as the task of moral and spiritual rearmament which faces the Church if all that the Christian faith has taught us to count most dear is to be safeguarded and maintained.

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## The Christian Attitude to non-Christian Religions.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REVEREND E. G. PARRINDER, MISSION PROTESTANTE DE L'AFRIQUE OCCIDENTALE FRANÇAISE,  
COLLÈGE DE PORTO NOVO, DAHOMEY, FRENCH WEST AFRICA.

WHEN the Jerusalem Conference assembled ten years ago it was with bewilderment and dismay that the representatives of the older Lutheran and Reformed Churches of Europe discovered an attitude of, what seemed to them, compromise and syncretism towards the non-Christian system of religion on the part of the missionaries of Great Britain and, especially, America. They were troubled by the prevalence of a 'very uncertain tone about Christianity itself,' and urged that unless a man has a definite and unwavering Christian message to proclaim 'he simply ought not to go out as a missionary of Christ.' It was with these warnings in mind that the International Missionary Council appointed Dr. Hendrik Kraemer to prepare a statement for the Madras Conference, setting forth the fundamental truths of Christianity, and defining the Christian message to the non-Christian world.<sup>2</sup>

This book has been before the public for nearly a year, and has had excellent notices in the press. It is questionable, however, whether the delegates to Madras have all felt comfortable about the claims of the work to represent the missionary outlook of the whole of Christendom. Dr. Kraemer's aim is, doubtless, to rescue his American and

British brethren from the morass of humanism; but it is possible that his categorical condemnations of all the other world religions will eventually serve to widen the breach that was already discernible ten years ago. His book is scarcely an eirenicon; it is a challenge, but a challenge that may alienate many of those who sympathized with his plea at Jerusalem for the uniqueness of Christianity. We certainly are not content to renounce every specifically Christian doctrine in a desire for empty uniformity with all religious thought of every type. We do believe in the necessity of Christ for every man, and are not satisfied by airy talk about comparative 'values,' and therefore we may consider that Dr. Kraemer's emphasis is, generally, in the right direction. But it is difficult to agree that all other religions are of no value, and their sacred books worthless in comparison with the Old Testament.

It is in his outline of the Christian faith at the beginning of his work that Dr. Kraemer arrives at the position that finally renders impossible any sympathetic approach to the non-Christian faiths. The Bible is the only legitimate source from which to seek an answer to the question, What is the Christian faith? The Bible is radically religious and theocentric, not propounding theories but simply bearing witness to God. It is this intense 'Biblical realism' that challenges man to decide for or against God. In his insistent, almost wearisome, reiteration of the fundamental Biblical realism Kraemer denies that such realism and witness

<sup>1</sup> This is a subject of such importance to-day that a fuller article by Principal W. S. Urquhart, D.D., lately of the Scottish Church College, Calcutta, will appear shortly in the 'Problems of To-day' Series.

<sup>2</sup> *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Edinburgh House Press).