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DOCTRINE IN THE CHURCH

THE ARCHBISHOPS' 'COMMISSION

UNITY OF SPIRIT

"*Doctrine in the Church of England: The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922*" is published to-day. (S.P.C.K. 2s. 6d.)

A letter from Archbishop Davidson to Dr. Burge, then Bishop of Oxford and first chairman of the Doctrinal Commission, defined its reference as follows:—"To consider the nature and grounds of Christian doctrine with a view to demonstrating the extent of existing agreement within the Church of England and with a view to investigating how far it is possible to remove or diminish existing differences."

The Commission held its first meeting in September, 1923; the preface to its Report is dated October 1, 1937. After the death of Bishop Burge, Dr. William Temple, then Bishop of Manchester and now Archbishop of York, succeeded to the chairmanship. Other members died within the 14 years that the Commission was at work. The Report now issued bears the signatures:—William Ebor: (chairman), F. R. Barry, Henry Chelmsford, J. M. Creed, John Derby, John Glasgow and Galloway, L. W. Grensted, Wilfred L. Knox, W. R. Matthews, Walter H. Moberly, J. K. Mozley, Oliver C. Quick, C. F. Russell, E. G. Selwyn, Charles J. Shebbeare, Will Spens, V. F. Storr, A. E. Taylor, L. S. Thornton, Clement C. J. Webb. Thus the Report is signed unanimously by all who were members of the Commission when it ended its work. Four appendices are subjoined; it is stated that these are contributed by individual members, but their names are not disclosed.

DR. TEMPLE'S PREFACE

The Archbishop of York begins his preface by emphasizing the spirit of friendship which bound together the members of the Commission in an increasing degree as their work proceeded, and adds: "That fact is closely connected with the measure of agreement we have reached." That measure he regards as "encouraging." In explanation of the character of the Report he writes:—

Our terms of reference, as set out in the letter of Archbishop Davidson to Bishop Burge, did not include the question what varieties of doctrine or of interpretation are to be regarded as permissible in the Church of England. . . . Here and there a member or members of the Commission may doubt or even deny that the view held by one or more of his colleagues can be regarded as theologically compatible either with Catholic doctrine or with the tradition of the Church of England, and such a situation is apparent at some points in the Report. . . . We have interpreted our function as solely theological and not in any sense judicial.

Dr. Temple's preface is followed by an "Introduction" and "Prolegomena," the latter of which ends with some "resolutions on Assent," Nos. 3 and 4 of which read:—

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Assent to formularies and the use of liturgical language in public worship should be understood as signifying general acceptance without implying detailed assent to every phrase or proposition thus employed.

Subject to the above, a member of the Church should not be held to be involved in dishonesty merely on the ground that, in spite of some divergence from the tradition of the Church, he has assented to formularies or makes use of the Church's liturgical language in public worship.

The main part of the Report is divided into three principal sections devoted to the doctrines of God and of redemption, the Church and sacraments, and eschatology. The first occupies 57 pages, the second 103, the third 19. The main subdivisions of the first section are "God and the World," "The Fact of Sin," and "Redemption in Christ." On the subject of the Creation the Report observes:—

No objection to a theory of evolution can be drawn from the two Creation narratives in Gen. 1 and 2, since it is generally agreed among educated Christians that these are mythological in origin, and that their value for us is symbolic rather than historical. And on angels and demons:—

To believe positively, whether on the ground of Scripture, or on the ground of tradition as interpreting Scripture and as lending weight to an inherent probability, in the existence of spiritual beings other than human, is in no way irrational.

Nevertheless the Commission desires to record its conviction that it is legitimate for a Christian either to suspend judgment on the point, or alternatively to interpret the language, whether of Scripture or of the Church's Liturgy, with regard to angels and demons in a purely symbolic sense.

A similar diversity of belief is accepted in regard to miracles:—

It is felt by many that miracle has a special value, in that it is a striking demonstration of the subordination of the natural order to spiritual ends, and affords particular points at which God's activity is manifested with special clarity and directness. On the other hand, it is to be recognized that many others feel it to be more congruous with the wisdom and majesty of God that the regularities, such as men of science observe in Nature and call Laws of Nature, should serve His purpose without any need for exceptions on the physical plane.

CONTROVERSIAL POINTS

The second and third sections of the Report are those to which readers will turn with special interest, because they include points of doctrine about which controversy has been keen in modern times. It will be found that the Report discusses each of them carefully, adducing the various considerations which have to be taken into account, but seldom attempting to decide between the rival views. To leave such questions open was plainly the only course if the Report was to receive the signatures of all the members of the Commission. Concerning the Virgin Birth of Christ, for instance, the Report, after stating "the main grounds on which the doctrine is valued," continues:—

Many of us hold, accordingly, that belief in the Word-made flesh is integrally bound up with belief in the Virgin Birth, and that this will increasingly be recognized. There are, however, some among us who hold that a full belief in the historical Incarnation is more consistent with the supposition that our Lord's birth took place under the normal conditions of human generation. . . . We recognize that both the views outlined above are held by members of the Church, as of the Commission, who fully accept the reality of our Lord's Incarnation, which is the central truth of the Christian faith.

So again in regard to the Resurrection, which is described as "the central fact in human history," Yet . . .

when a fact is so closely linked with such momentous and far-reaching issues in heaven and earth, it is not surprising that opinions should differ when the question is raised how much in the record of it is derived from the sheer occurrence of the fact itself, and how much is due to the primitive interpretation of the fact in the minds which first perceived its transcendent significance and expressed it in forms inevitably belonging to their own manner of thought and speech.

It is intimated, however, that "the majority of the Commission are agreed in holding the traditional explanation—namely, that the tomb was

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empty because the Lord had risen"; and in his personal introduction to the Report the Archbishop of York states:—

"In view of my own responsibility in the Church I think it right here to affirm that I wholeheartedly accept as historical facts the birth of our Lord from a Virgin Mother and the resurrection of His physical body from death and the tomb. . . . But I fully recognize the position of those who sincerely affirm the reality of our Lord's Incarnation without accepting one or both of these two events as actual historical occurrences.

In recent years the centre of controversy between the more advanced Anglo-Catholic and other schools of thought within the English Church has been the reservation of the sacrament, either for communicating the sick or for that form of worship known as "Devotions," or for both. Accordingly it is probable that many Churchpeople will look eagerly for guidance from the Commission on these vexed questions. They will find, however, that the members considered that to supply explicit guidance was outside their province. Such conclusions as they have reached on the subject are stated in language which safeguards them against being too definite. Thus, having given three interpretations of Eucharistic doctrine, the Report continues:—

Some of those who incline to the third of the interpretations mentioned see in it no warrant whatever for teaching that the Eucharistic presence of Christ remains with the consecrated elements after they have been reserved, until in their use for communion they are again taken up into that Eucharistic action in which they become the Body and Blood of Christ. Others, on the other hand, to whom also this general line of interpretation is congenial, would maintain that the reserved Sacrament ought never to be, and properly never can be, dissociated from its Eucharistic use, and that therefore there is no valid objection of theology to be brought against those who would make it at all times a focus for their worship of Christ, who in it gives Himself to be their spiritual food.

Again, of the question whether the practice of "Devotions" is theologically justifiable:—

To that question we are unable to give a decisive answer, because we are not agreed upon the application of the determining consideration. That consideration is that the special sacramental presence of the Lord is to be sought only within the context of those sacramental acts with which the original promise of it was associated. Upon the truth and importance of that principle we are fully agreed; we are not agreed whether or not its application provides a sufficient theological justification for the practice of "Devotions."

Here as elsewhere the Report admits that the members of the Commission failed to reach agreement on the principal points of modern theological controversy, and that only a majority could have signed the Report had it attempted to offer authoritative guidance on these matters instead of merely setting forth the divergent views. Emphasis is placed upon the fact that all the members were able to accept the statement on the ministry. Yet with this must be compared the admission on another page that on the necessity of episcopal ordination as a condition of valid sacrament "there is divergence of opinion among us." But the Archbishop of York is able to write:—

It was a special satisfaction to us, and we hope it may be of service to the Church, that we are able to present an agreed statement on Confession and Absolution, even if here again individual members would wish to add to what is said.

The agreed statement includes the following paragraph:—

There has been no change in the formal teaching of the Church of England. While the regular practice of auricular confession has now become more frequent, and is by no means confined to one school of thought within the Church of England, it is important to recognize that it is a ministry of the Word which is open to all but obligatory upon none.

In reviewing the work of the Commission the Archbishop of York writes:—

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If we began our work again to-day, its perspectives would be different. . . . Theology in the half-century that ended with the War, was such as is prompted by and promotes a ministry mainly pastoral; we need and must work out for our own time a theology such as is prompted by and promotes a ministry at least as much evangelistic as pastoral. As that work proceeds new problems will arise and new divisions cutting across all existing party cleavages. Then our successors in another doctrinal commission may attempt the reconciling work that in our own field was committed to us.

A PROTESTANT VIEW

The Rev. E. G. Bowring, secretary of the Church Association, in a statement on the report last night, said that it was vitiated by ignoring the standards of doctrine in the Church of England. The XXXIX Articles were brushed on one side and were subordinated to the Prayer-book. The truth was that, subject to Holy Scripture, the XXXIX Articles were the standard of doctrine, and that the Prayer-book was the standard of worship in the Church of England. The Commission not only deified the Prayer-book, and instead of the authorized standards they set up three vague and illusory sources of appeal—namely:—(a) The light of reason, (b) modern knowledge, (c) universal tradition. The report repudiated the inerrancy of the Bible. On the question of the miraculous element in the Bible the Commission was divided.

UNEMPLOYMENT FUND SURPLUS

TRADE UNION PROPOSALS

FROM OUR LABOUR CORRESPONDENT

The general council of the Trades Union Congress gave evidence to the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee yesterday in support of its proposals for the use of the surplus of the unemployment fund.

The council suggests the abolition of the three days' waiting period; an all-round increase of benefits; equal contributions and benefits for men and women; and amendment of the anomalies regulations in respect of married women with a good industrial record since marriage. To-day the general council will submit evidence in support of its proposals for amendment of the agricultural workers' insurance scheme. The proposals include the abolition of the six days' waiting period, full benefit for all children, an increase of the benefit rates for single men between 18 and 21 and for all adult men and women.

Sir William Beveridge, the chairman of the Statutory Committee, informed the Minister of Labour last November that by the end of the year the Unemployment Fund would probably have a surplus of £62,000,000 and that there was a likelihood that in 1938 at least another £20,000,000 would be added, bringing the total to £82,000,000. At the same time Sir William Beveridge indicated the probability that the Committee would recommend a large reduction of the debt if, by an amendment of the insurance legislation, Parliament made it possible for such a reduction to bring about a reduction of the annual debt charge. The law has since been altered in the manner suggested.

The debt amounts to about £100,000,000, and the annual debt charge, including sinking fund, is £5,000,000. What is saved on debt charge would be available for disposal in benefits. At present the fund's surplus is invested in short-term securities and earns not more than 12 per cent., whereas the interest on the debt is 34 per cent.

Maie Bayliss, 42, committed from Wood Green on a charge of receiving three handbags and other articles knowing them to have been stolen, was, at the Middlesex Sessions on Wednesday, found *Not Guilty*, and she was discharged.