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THE EVANGELICAL INTERPRETATION OF ANGLICANISM.

BY THE REV. GEORGE F. IRWIN, B.D.

BISHOP GORE described the last of his three volumes on the Reconstruction of Belief—*The Holy Spirit and the Church*—as “a challenge to men to think freely,” and he said: “Of one thing I feel sure. There will be no progress towards fellowship except so far as men are prepared to view the questions about the Creed and the Church, and the sacraments and the ministry afresh, laying aside their traditional assumptions as far as possible in order to ask again the question—What is the mind of Christ concerning the propagation of His religion? Does it not appear to be in a high degree probable that the New Testament documents interpret it aright, and that we cannot get behind them or away from them?”

That is a challenge which Evangelicals are prepared to accept, and that is a test of the truth of the teaching of the Church and of the character of its institutions which they willingly adopt.

Although it may seem an altogether unnecessary point to raise, it is essential at the outset to maintain that there is such a thing as the truth in regard to these matters. Lip service is often given to the fact that there is truth to be safeguarded, but in practice many act as if it was quite sufficient to have views, opinions, sentiments, or even feelings and prejudices on the subject. Pragmatists may be able to rest content with a relative truth—a truth of values. They may satisfy themselves that whatever works has in itself a sufficient criterion of its truth, and that in religious matters any teaching or practice which produces a desired devotional effect may be regarded as justifying its adoption. It is scarcely necessary to point out that this may lead to the acceptance of any extravagance in teaching, and to every kind of vagary in ritual, and may ultimately pass from Christianity altogether. When the symbols are evacuated of all real meaning they may become as valueless for religious purposes as we are told that the religious ceremonies and practices in the time of the later Roman Empire became for the Pagan worshippers. The Abbé Loisy's severance of the ceremonies and rites of the Church from any relation to objective fact has logically placed him on the list of the excommunicate, as it also placed Father Tyrrell.

I do not think I have needlessly emphasized this point, because it is fundamental. To get as near the truth—the objective facts—as we possibly can ought to be the aim of all, and especially of the Christian thinker and student. For truth should control our whole lives. It should guide our outlook, govern our thoughts, and regulate our actions in every detail.

The claim made on behalf of the Church of England since the

days of the Reformation is that it has sought to maintain the truth. In many forms the great divines have stated this. It was the meaning which lay behind Bishop Creighton's classical utterance that the Church of England was based on the appeal to sound learning. The passage in his *Life* bearing on the point runs: ¹

" His object was to set forth the principles of the Church of England. He showed how the English Church had been reformed in the sixteenth century by returning to the principles of sound learning which England had the unique opportunity of applying calmly and dispassionately because there the Reformation movement was not inextricably mingled as in foreign countries with grave political disturbances; that the work which this learning had to do was to remove from the system of the Church a mass of accretions which had grown round it; man, to meet his own requirements, had expanded the Truth which God had made known. The problem set before the leaders of our Church in the sixteenth century was to disentangle essential truth from the mass of opinion that had gathered round it. The fact that our Church had avoided 'the method of continually attacking error by negative assertions without any adequate affirmations to take their place' but aimed 'at setting forth the Truth in a simple and dignified system' had led to the groundless assertion that it expresses a compromise: 'Sound learning must always wear the appearance of a compromise between ignorance and plausible hypothesis.' All things cannot be explained, 'where God has not spoken, man must keep silence. It is one duty of the Church to maintain the Divine reserve, and to uphold the Divine wisdom, against the specious demands of even the noblest forms of purely human emotion.' "

The purpose of the present discussion of the subject is to come to some conclusions as to the foundations of Anglicanism, and to see if there is such a measure of agreement as may lead us to hope for fellowship and co-operation of all Schools within the Anglican communion in the future. My task is to state the position of the Evangelicals (so far as I understand it), as it bears on this particular problem. It is obviously impossible to go into all the points of difference, and I must therefore confine myself to the chief issue, which I shall try to state briefly and I hope fairly. The issue arises most acutely in regard to the institutional and sacramental aspects of Christianity. The Anglo-Catholic accuses the Evangelical of practically ignoring them, while the Evangelical says that the Anglo-Catholic over-emphasises them, and does not give them their true significance. The Anglo-Catholic says that the religion of the Evangelical is too subjective, that it is based on feeling, that its teaching of justification by faith is an appeal to an experience which gives too much importance to what may be merely feeling—a subjective condition without adequate basis, and lacking in the external objective expression found in the Church and the Sacraments.

May I say first of all in regard to this that I hope all will

¹ Creighton's *Life*, Vol. 2, pages 314-15.

agree that the basis of any religious life must be an individual experience of personal relationship to God, however it may be expressed, and without such an experience of a personal relationship to God there can be no reality in the religious life.

Some of the medieval writers leave an impression that religious experience was mainly confined to the mystics, and that for the average man such an experience was of less importance than the acceptance of the Church's provision for his needs in the presentation of the Sacrifice of the Mass as an objective external fact in the benefit of which he shared. Indeed, some modern writers seem as if they were tending in a similar direction, in their desire to emphasize the objective element in religion.

We may decline to give any name such as Conversion to the experience of forgiveness and the establishment of a true harmony between the soul and God, but that there must be a turning of the heart to God as an essential of any vital religion ought to be a matter of general agreement. Newman in his Evangelical days and many other Evangelicals who afterwards became Tractarians regarded that experience as fundamental, and it coloured all their later thought and life, which without it would have lacked intensity and depth and influence.

But it is a mistake to say that Evangelicals ignore the institutional and the sacramental. They recognize them as necessary in any adequate conception of Christianity. For they realize that every experience, if it is to be effective, must find objective expression, and only by some mode of expression can it secure the permanence necessary for its continuous manifestation in successive generations.

The chief differences between the Evangelical and the Anglo-Catholic conceptions lie in the interpretation of the institutional and sacramental. The Anglo-Catholic conception, if I do not misrepresent it, is, that the Church has a supernatural character as the extension of the Incarnation, combining both the divine and the human, and that a permanent form has been given to the Church in the Apostolical Succession, by means of which the gifts of grace are conveyed in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the validity of which is secured and guaranteed by this succession. (I have omitted the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, for I presume its validity does not depend on the Apostolical Succession as it can be administered in cases of necessity by one of the laity.) The Holy Spirit's work is within the sphere of the Church as thus constituted, and is normally evinced only through the Institution thus properly organized.

It is this conception of the Church which the Evangelicals cannot accept. They do not regard the teaching of our Lord or of the Apostles as requiring us to accept the organization of the Church as it has come down in the episcopal succession, *as of its essence*. They value episcopacy as a useful form of Church organization, (one can scarcely in England say of Church government, in view of the present condition of our Church). We can all admit

that the Papacy performed useful services in medieval times, but we do not regard the Papacy as of the essence of the Church. Just in the same way as we value the monarchy in England as the best form of our constitution, but none of us would maintain the divine right of kings as it was held in the times of the Stuarts.

In short, the conflict is between the conception of the Church as depending on certain theories of the permanent necessity and value of some of its characteristics in certain ages—which is the Roman claim, and the conception of the Church as the medium of the Holy Spirit's continuous work in the teaching of truth in every age, and the adaptation of the organization of the Church under the Holy Spirit's guidance to the most effective performance of its work.

It may not be out of place to say here that the Apostolical Succession was not at first regarded as a means of the transmission of grace but as a guarantee of sound doctrine—the truth. In the claims of various bodies of Christians in early days the instruction to questioners was, to go to the Catholic Church which traced its succession of bishops back to Apostolic times as it was more likely to have preserved and to teach the truth. The case of the Church of Alexandria shows that the succession of bishops was not necessary to the existence of a Church.

In very early days the Judaizing section of the Church desired to impose the practice of Jewish rites as necessary upon all members of the Church. One of the earliest protests for the truth and against the imposition of unlawful terms of communion was that of St. Paul against this section, on the ground that they were adding burdens which should not be placed on members of the Christian Church.

In Canon Newport White's recent *Life of Newman* he points out that in the year 1839 the position between the Church of England and the Church of Rome was, in Newman's view, that the Anglican said to the Roman: "There is but one Faith, the ancient, and you have not kept it." The Roman said to the Anglican: "There is but one Church, the Catholic, and you are out of it."

That states succinctly the position at the Reformation. The Evangelicals contend that at the Reformation, by the very test which Bishop Gore wishes to apply, the test of Scripture, there was a rejection of medieval accretions of erroneous doctrine. On the positive side there was a return to the New Testament expression of religious experience in the Pauline phrase "justification by faith," and by the assurance of forgiveness the truth thus accepted left no place for the medieval penitential system, the mediatorial work of the priesthood, the repeated offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, or the remedial pains of the Roman purgatorial system. They believe that this restoration of the truth was the work of the Holy Spirit leading men to a fresh recognition of truth, a return to the Christianity of the New Testament. They cannot unchurch any of those who have such a personal experience of Christ, and they believe that if we will only follow fully the dictates of the

Holy Spirit, the Church as an institution will be adequately organized on the principle of the primitive fathers that where Jesus Christ is there is the Church.

The Roman Church puts the institution—as an end in itself—before its primary purpose, the teaching of truth. It seeks to impose unlawful terms of communion, as the Judaisers did in the earliest days.

The claims of truth are however always exigent, and in England, under the guidance of scholars—some of them brought up in the medieval teaching but enlightened by the Holy Spirit—such as Ridley and Cranmer at the beginning, and later by such thinkers as Jewel and Hooker, the essentials of the Anglican position were laid down, based as we have seen on the appeal to Scripture and sound learning.

The institutional and the sacramental were retained, but were re-interpreted in the light of the rediscovered truth.

With regard to the Sacramental teaching of the Evangelicals, I believe it is much misunderstood and misrepresented. The much misunderstood term “Zwinglian” is often applied to their view of the Holy Communion and its benefits. Or they are told that they hold it to be a “bare commemoration,” though what that exactly means I have never been able to discover. Any adequate interpretation of the word Grace bars out the possibility of a bare commemoration to any faithful Christian. Or again such question-begging terms as Virtualism and Receptionism are applied to their view of the benefits received at the service.

I think the majority of Evangelicals would accept the teaching of Hooker as given in his *Ecclesiastical Polity*,¹ which was the acknowledged Anglican teaching until recent times when he was pronounced to be defective in “Catholic theology.”

They would adopt as their own the familiar lines, attributed, but with very inadequate authority, to Queen Elizabeth.

“ Christ was the Word that spake it,
He took the Bread and brake it,
And what the Word did make it
That I believe and take it.”

They would even acquiesce in that old High Churchman of the Laudian School, Jeremy Taylor’s description of the presence in Holy Communion.

In reference to the Roman doctrine he said:—

“ We say that Christ’s body is in the sacrament really, but spiritually. They say it is there really, but spiritually. For as Bellarmine is bold to say, that the word may be allowed in this question. Where now is the difference? Here; by ‘spiritually’ they mean ‘present after the manner of a spirit’; by ‘spiritually’ we mean ‘present to our spirits only’; that is, so as Christ is not present to any other sense but that of faith or spiritual susception; but their way makes His body to be present no way but that which is impossible and implies a contradiction. . . .

¹ Hooker’s *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, lxxvii. 6.

“They say that Christ’s body is truly present there as it was upon the Cross, but not after the manner of all or any body, but after the manner of being as an angel is in a place; that’s their ‘spiritually’; but we by ‘the real spiritual presence’ of Christ do understand Christ to be present as the Spirit of God is present in the hearts of the faithful, by blessing and grace.”

But they cannot accept what is called the Sacramental system as maintained by those who claim to represent Catholic theology, for various reasons. They believe it to be illogical, obscurantist, and untrue to the interpretation of Scripture.

If we commence with the Sacramental principle which is now practically a shibboleth in general use with a section of the Church, What is it exactly? and do those who use the term apply it consistently?

We are told that it is the conveyance of the spiritual through the medium of the material. The illustrations which are used by Bishop Gore and others are, that a kiss is the sacrament of love, a handshake is the sacrament of friendship, and the flag is the sacrament of nationality. If the term symbol were used instead of sacrament the meaning would be clearer. But if we admit the use of the term as legitimate and go on to apply it to the Sacraments of the Gospel there is a curious inconsistency. In Holy Baptism the water and the sprinkling are a symbolic act indicating the mystical washing away of sin. The new birth is not a magical process, and the beginning of a life of grace depends upon the sowing of the seed of eternal life in the heart. But no one holds, I think, that the grace is in the water, or that the water is in any way mysteriously changed, any more than that the handshake is the friendship or the flag the nationality. When, however, we come to the Sacrament of Holy Communion the elements are no longer the symbol, but in the view of “Catholic teaching” they become the actual Body and Blood of Christ which are then present in, under or with the elements. There is here an inconsistency in the use of the Sacramental principle which I have never seen adequately explained.

But we are told that it is on the analogy of the Incarnation, of which the Sacraments are the extension: the connection of the human and the divine in one Person. But is there not a considerable difference between the union of the human and divine in a personality, and the union of a personality with portions of inorganic matter. In what way can the divine be present with, in or under the bread and wine? What real meaning can there be in calling down the Holy Spirit upon material things? Can any mental process realize the association of grace, which is ultimately the contact of personality with personality, being in any way mediated by inert matter, in any sense other than symbolic? I am of course familiar with Newman’s explanation of the Presence (*Via Media*, Vol. 2, p. 220). It is quoted in such a recent work on the XXXIX Articles as Preb. Bicknell’s: “If place is excluded from the idea of the Sacramental presence, therefore division or

distance from heaven is excluded also, for distance implies a measurable interval and such there cannot be except between places. Moreover, if the idea of distance is excluded, therefore is the idea of motion. Our Lord therefore neither descends upon our altars, nor moves when carried in procession. The visible species change their position, but He does not move. He is in the Holy Eucharist after the manner of a spirit. We do not know how; we have no parallel to the 'how' in our experience. We can only say that He is present, not according to the natural manner of bodies, but *sacramentally*. His Presence is substantial, spirit-wise, sacramental; an absolute mystery, not against reason, but against imagination, and must be received by faith."

But what meaning does this statement convey to anyone who tries to understand it? Is it not justly open to the charge of obscurantism?

The greatest problem of all is: What is the Presence in the elements? It is claimed that it is the presence of Christ in His heavenly and ascended body. On one occasion Bishop Gore, when addressing a gathering of clergy, emphasized the fact that all that was essential to the Holy Communion was present on the occasion of its institution by our Lord. If that is so, the question was put to him, how could he explain his belief that the glorified humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ was present in the elements, when the Ascension had not yet taken place and His ascended body was not in existence. The Bishop had to admit that he had given considerable study to the point but had never been able to give a satisfactory answer to the question. His words were: "That is one of the most difficult and subtle theological questions which you could ask. . . . I find it an extraordinarily difficult question to answer. I have read a certain number of books on it, from which I have got exceedingly little light. As it is not a very relevant question I think I would rather not answer it."¹ In the opinion of many of us, it is the most relevant of all questions, as the whole of our teaching regarding the use and significance of the Holy Communion depends on it.

These are a few of the difficulties which present themselves to the mind of an Evangelical, and they seem to indicate that there is something seriously wrong somewhere in the Catholic interpretation of the Sacraments, especially as (and I apologize for the necessity of pointing out the fact), if the claims made for the Sacramental system were true, the fruit of it in the lives of those who accept it and are daily present and communicate at Holy Communion should without question surpass in sanctity and holiness that of those who either deprive themselves of this means of grace, or are unable to accept this teaching. No one will, I think, claim that this is the case.

What is the hope then for future fellowship among the various Schools in our Church? Where views so directly opposed to one another are held it is exceedingly difficult to anticipate unity.

¹ *Reservation*. Addresses to the Clergy of the Diocese of Chelmsford, p. 81.

Fellowship is impossible where those who hold views acknowledged to be developments on the teaching of Scripture desire to impose them on those who cannot accept them. It may be said that there should be mutual toleration. This is true, but the meaning of toleration must be understood. We are agreed that it should not be synonymous with indifference. At a recent meeting of the Manchester Diocesan Conference the Bishop said: "The real spirit of toleration is to say 'I feel I would derive great benefit from such and such a practice, but I must refrain from it, unless you with full goodwill agree to my following that practice while we remain in fellowship together,' and the other should exercise the utmost charity in his answer."

S.P.C.K. is issuing a series of small books as "The Churchman's Popular Library," at 1s. in duce and 1s. 6d. in cloth. Dr. Lowther Clarke, formerly Archbishop of Melbourne, has written *Death and the Hereafter*. The subject is one which in every age has appealed to the curiosity of men. The unknown beyond the grave will always give rise to speculation and especially to those whose relatives have already passed within the veil. It is due to this desire for knowledge of the condition of the dead that the Church in medieval days developed the doctrine of Purgatory and its consequent teaching as to the efficacy of masses for the repose of the souls undergoing the torments so vividly described by writers, not all of them ancient. Dr. Lowther Clarke observes throughout the strict reserve placed upon us by the due regard which we must have for the limitations placed upon us by God's revelation. Again and again he does not hesitate to say that he does not know, when some point comes up on which we have no source of information. He deals with the practical questions regarding preparation for death and the teaching of Scripture and of the great authors who represent the wisdom of the past. His notes on the teaching of some of the New Testament writers is clear and helpful. His warnings against teaching which goes beyond our knowledge is valuable, yet he seems to us to have broken his own rule in this respect in his treatment of prayers for the departed. However much we may sympathize with the natural desire to make petitions for those who have died, we cannot assume such a knowledge of their present position and needs as Dr. Clarke does and from which he deduces the nature of the prayers which we can offer on their behalf.

The second of the series is *What Mean Ye by these Stones?* It is by the Rev. J. M. C. Crum, M.A., Rector of Farnham, Surrey, and contains "Suggestions to Readers of the Old Testament." It is written from the modern point of view, and will give those who desire to have an idea of the lines upon which the Old Testament will be popularly treated for the benefit of general readers, an adequate statement of the method to be employed.