

DOCTRINE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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IN considering this Report of so influential a Commission on Doctrine as that responsible for its issue after fourteen years of serious deliberations, we do so with the respect which such a weighty document deserves.

It has naturally been awaited with keen interest, if not with anxiety, by Churchmen generally. Much of that anxiety might have been allayed had the terms of reference been borne in mind. These are made quite clear in the very lucid, able and careful survey and summary which the Chairman gives of the aims and history of the work of this Commission. The Commissioners were not asked to concern themselves with the limits of permissible opinion regarding doctrine in the Church of England or to pronounce authoritatively what that doctrine is, but, instead, to discover the varying views and doctrinal teaching actually held by the widely divergent schools of thought now existing in the Church, in order "to remove or diminish" these differences.

The Report is at great pains to assert that it has no concern with the "lawfulness" or otherwise of such views, but merely with declaring accurately and in clear theological terms precisely what these divergencies are. We may say at once that in our opinion this task has been accomplished very thoroughly, with considerable ability and with most commendable candour and impartiality.

But its permanent value in achieving its object of removing these serious differences is very questionable indeed. It is evident that the Commissioners have at times shown definite inconsistency in exceeding their brief and actually pronouncing a verdict that some types of current doctrine are not permissible in the Church of England.

We can only touch in a sympathetic, and in no antagonistic or controversial spirit, on one or two of the more salient features of a Report which will certainly receive for some time the serious consideration of all earnest Churchmen.

We are glad to see, especially in this year of the celebration of the fourth centenary of the English Bible, the very definite and repeated affirmation of the supremacy of Holy Scripture as supplying the Church of England standard of doctrine. This is a valuable vindication of the VIth Article, as it is also, later, of the VIIIth Article, since, when referring to the authority of the Creeds, the Report emphasizes their acceptance not so much as based on the decision of a Council as on their "true expression of Scriptural Doctrine."

As the supreme authority of Scripture is the foundation stone of the XXXIX Articles, we cannot but regard it as strangely inconsistent that the Report deliberately discounts their value and authority; especially when we recall that they were issued with the precisely similar object of the Commission—viz. “for the avoiding of the diversities of opinion and for the establishing of consent touching true Religion.” We cannot allow that the Articles were intended to be merely of temporary controversial import. Rather they were composed to settle definitely the recognized limits of Anglican doctrine. They were obviously designed for “teachers” and this is why they are made the chief item in the “Declaration of Assent.” In this connection, we are glad to notice that the Report in dealing with this “Declaration” wisely says that “the position of the authorized ‘teacher’ is distinctive,” as one who is bound to teach the authorized doctrine officially “set forth” by the Church. Therefore we would say that the new standard which the Report advocates of “the light of reason and of modern knowledge” can never be accepted as a superior alternative to the official doctrine of the Church “set forth” in the Articles and Prayer Book.

It is when the Report deals with the fundamental Christian doctrines concerning the Scriptures and the Creeds, that it reveals a serious and alarming divergence of views. We see at once that its professed “Unified” Statement is only secured by the repeated avowal of the widely divergent convictions of the Members of the Commission. It is, moreover, most disturbing to observe that there are some Anglican theologians who repeat the Creed and yet hold that such Catholic doctrines as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection “belong rather to the sphere of religious symbolism than to that of historical fact.”

On the subject of the Church, we are glad to note that the Report makes a full admission of its mystical aspect as “the whole company of those who share in the regenerate life,” “the unity of which is undestroyed by outward divisions.” But when speaking of the actual official Ministry of the Visible Church, we notice that the Report makes two or three carefully guarded, but none the less real, assertions of the necessity of an Apostolic succession of Ministers guaranteed through episcopal Orders, though this theory is neither Scriptural nor in accord with Reformed Anglican teaching—a fact which the Report candidly recognizes by quoting Hooker’s refusal to declare that “God has instituted any one necessary form of Church policy.” In fact the statements of the Report on the Ministry as the “organ of Unity and Continuity” are expressed in vague and questionable assertions, though they are coupled with the candid admission (which was held by Caroline Churchmen) that distinct corruptions of, or disloyalty to Christ’s teaching justifies the refusal of the historic episcopal Ministry and the adoption of a presbyterian alternative.

The Report gives an extensive exposition of the Sacraments and their validity, but it should be pointed out that this abounds in cryptic or equivocal statements. For instance, it is admitted that in the New Testament times the Christian *presbyter* was distinct from the Jewish or pagan *priest*; yet the Report affirms that a “priestly character was implicit in the celebration of the Eucharist from the beginning”—a

statement impossible to establish from the New Testament or from the language of our Articles or Ordinal. There is, however, a very useful, clear and impartial summary of the different views held and taught now in the Church on the "Real Presence" in the Eucharist, and the Report does well to emphasize the misleading ambiguity of this term which, it admits, all parties, *in some sense*, accept.

The Report also faithfully records the fact that the narrower interpretation of a "Presence" of Christ in the "elements" was revived by the "Oxford Movement." We cannot but notice that in the Report's treatment of the practices of Reservation and Adoration, or "Devotions," there is too great a display of subtle reasoning and of "hedging and fencing." It is also rather significant that while in general the Commissioners state their declared policy of merely registering varying doctrinal teaching in the Church of England, they make conspicuous exceptions to this rule with regard to Reservation, which is treated as a normal and legitimate practice, in spite of the "Archbishops' Opinion" of 1900 distinctly condemning it. They also even consider Adoration as an extra-liturgical devotion capable of an inoffensive use and interpretation. We must remind them that only ten years ago this very cult was strongly condemned and clearly forbidden even by the Revised Prayer Book.

We notice that the Report resorts to sweeping assertions and to much special pleading concerning a widespread use and desire for "Auricular Confession." We must point out that in this case it departs from its usual fairness in its deliberate refusal to distinguish, as *our Prayer Book clearly does*, between a provision for occasional "spiritual consultation" for troubled consciences, and the permission of "Auricular Confession" on the request of a distressed sick person whose conscience is specially troubled by some weighty matter.

We gratefully recognize the extensive and laborious study displayed in this lengthy Report and are especially grateful for the valuable theological exposition from recognized experts, which should make it a useful book of reference on some deep doctrinal subjects. We also appreciate to the full the transparent sincerity and honesty of purpose which have actuated all the Commissioners; but we must sadly confess that we feel that the revelation of such indefinite, conflicting and even contradictory doctrinal views as held in the Church of England to-day, afford small hope of bringing the different sections to a "common mind"; especially as the Commission lacked any real representation of a large section of faithful Churchpeople whose convictions are definitely Evangelical.

The lamentable position of a Church so seriously divided, as this Report reveals, on questions of such fundamental importance as the integrity and interpretation of Scripture, and on some of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian Faith, will never be remedied by rejecting, as the Commissioners do, appeal to official Anglican doctrine. To do so would reduce the Church of England to a sort of nebulous *tertium quid* willing to harbour, if not welcome, hazy, and widely divergent and conflicting, and often manifestly unscriptural, teaching. Further,

we cannot but feel that this unhappy position has developed through a culpable episcopal policy of drift and compromise. If the Commission wished to allay or diminish existing doctrinal differences they should have stated clearly what was the actual official "doctrine of the Church of England" to which every clergyman has solemnly bound himself. They would then have been compelled to re-echo the statement of Thomas Rogers in 1607 (Archbishop Bancroft's Chaplain) who in describing what he called "The Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England" declared that "The doctrine of the Church of England is known by the Thirty Nine Articles. Other doctrines than in the said Articles is contained, our Church neither hath nor holdeth." We fear that a Church which speaks on fundamental questions of Faith with two or more uncertain and mutually opposing voices cannot expect to command the confidence of her children or recover real internal unity and concord.

WHY GOD AND WHERE? By Joel Gomborow, B.Sc. Yegia Cappaim, Jerusalem. *Thynne & Co.* 5s.

The writer keeps before him the title of the book and seeks to answer the question by a close examination of the most recent scientific knowledge. He has done some close thinking on many of the intellectual problems of the day and has much to say that is both striking and illuminating. The writer is out to help students to an intelligent faith in God and revelation. His chapters on Where is God?, Design and Evolution, and the Problem of Evil, will well repay the careful reader.

The book seeks to cover a vast field of knowledge, and while some subjects would seem to deserve fuller treatment, there is much to stimulate the student for further study. The reader will admire the frank and courageous way in which the problems are faced, and the suggested answers given.

T. S.

THE NEBUCHADNEZZAR SYMPHONY AND OTHER STORIES. B. M. W. Grautoff. *Thynne & Co., Ltd.* 1s. 3d.

Miss Grautoff certainly grips one with her vivid writing. These five stories should stir the souls of those who read them; further, the authoress touches unerringly human weaknesses and human needs. The sub-title of the first story which gives its name to the book is "Self-made." In reflective moments, many men have come to the conclusion uttered by the hero of that tale. "I have come to see that there is no such thing as a self-made man, the powers we have are *given* and can be taken away at a stroke. Our only assurance is in Him, and we've got to acknowledge it." In the same manner, spiritual truth underlies every story. The book deserves a wide publicity and a good sale.

E. H.