

“The Teaching of the Church of England”

(A survey of the paper read by the Lord Bishop of Gloucester before the Baptist Board and printed in our last issue.)

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IT is all to the good that Bishops and Baptists should foregather and that each should try to explain to the other his view of the doctrine which he teaches. The Paper read by the Bishop of Gloucester before the Baptist Board last December deserves particular examination as an attempt to present to our Baptist brethren the distinctive teaching of the Church of England. Unfortunately the very comprehensiveness of the English Church makes any such attempt exceedingly difficult. The Bishop of Gloucester both by his gifts as a Theologian and his position as a Bishop of that Church is specially qualified for such a task. Yet it will readily be agreed among the readers of THE CHURCHMAN that not even Dr. Headlam's great gifts have enabled him to give a fair or adequate account of the position and creed of the ordinary evangelical. It might well be thought presumptuous on the part of an ordinary Parish Minister to criticize the statement of so eminent a Churchman and divine as the Bishop. But one of our most cherished privileges alike as Christians and as Britishers is the right of private judgment. Dr. Headlam's paper deserves and challenges the scrutiny of us all.

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION.

The Bishop begins with the teaching of the Church of England concerning the Bible. He quite properly and naturally starts by quoting Article VI. He then states with emphasis that the Article does not teach the infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture. He therefore affirms that these things are not believed by the great majority of thoughtful Christians.

Now we may at once admit that infallibility and inerrancy are not explicitly laid down in the Article. But if “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation” it is a fairly obvious corollary that these qualities are implied in

the very fact of the sufficiency of the Bible. It is unfair to emphasize the omission of direct reference to these matters in the Article, for the Article does not appear to have been written to set forth a complete doctrine of Holy Scripture, but solely with the practical design of setting forth the Protestant foundation as being the Scripture only in opposition to the Roman basis of Scriptures plus tradition. Rome says that Scripture and tradition are parallel, equal and equally venerable sources of doctrine, and one without the other is not sufficient for salvation (H. Browne, p. 124). In blunt opposition to this the Article states that Scripture is sufficient and consequently by implication that there is no need of tradition. It is surely significant that from this point, the Bishop goes on to assert that there is room for a right use of tradition. This tradition he holds implies two principles. First, that the New Testament is the creation of the Church; and second, that the Holy Spirit is continually teaching the Church, and that therefore the teaching of the Church has authority.

With regard to the first point it must surely be obvious that the Church was brought into being and built up upon the teaching of the Apostles (Eph. ii. 20). Humanly speaking it was the Apostles who gave the New Testament to the Church. The Church is a witness and keeper of Holy Writ (Article XX), but not in any sense its creator, and it is unfortunate that the Bishop of Gloucester should have advanced this theory.

With regard to the Bishop's second principle, it is enough to remind ourselves that there is no element in the teaching of the Christian Church, or any section of it, that has any validity unless such teaching can be shown to be consistent with Scripture. We may well ask the Bishop to tell us of any single truth concerning either God or man that is not to be found in the Bible. And, of more immediate practical importance, tradition gives us no additional information as to how a sinner may be saved.

We may agree more fully with the Bishop in what he affirms as to the teaching of the Church by the Holy Spirit, but we ought sharply to distinguish between the general leading of the Holy Spirit, guiding the disciples into all the truth, and the particular anointing of special men for the writing of the Inspired Book.

THE CREEDS AND ARTICLES.

The section on the Creeds seeks to exalt these statements by comparison with the Articles. The Bishop indeed goes so far as to say, "What the Christian faith is, is taught us in Creeds. No Church should add anything to that belief."

Yet, after all, the Creeds, are very like the Articles both in their historic origin and in their incompleteness. All the various doctrinal statements of the Christian Church had their origin in times of controversy. The era of the Creeds was the era of controversy as to the Person of our Lord. The era of the Articles was the era of controversy as to His work. As to the incompleteness of the Creeds it may be sufficient to point out that in neither the Apostles' nor the Nicene Creed is there any mention of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and that the Sacrament of Baptism receives only a passing reference in the one Creed and is not so much as named in the other.

In the days of the Prayer Book controversy of twelve years ago, Bishop Guy Warman stated that once the Prayer Book had been modified to suit the ideas of the revisers the next thing would be to get rid of the Articles. The Bishop of Gloucester is not quite so outspoken as that. But he does seek to show the generally subordinate position of these formularies. The Bishop omitted to tell his Baptist hearers of the emphasis which the "Declaration of Assent" gives to the articles, or that on the first Sunday of a Clergyman's introduction to the Cure of Souls in a Parish he is obliged formally to read the Articles to the people and publicly to declare his assent to them.

THE SACRAMENTS.

In the section on the Sacraments the Bishop would have done well to quote the statements of the Articles rather than the quite unauthoritative report of the Committee on Faith and Order. The Bishop mentions attacks on Sacramental teaching, but as he does not give details we do not know what he had in mind. At any rate he appears to think that the statements made by the Committee of Faith and Order are unassailable.

With regard to the number of the Sacraments the Bishop quotes the answer in the Catechism, "Two only . . . Baptism and the Supper of the Lord." It seems a pity that the

Bishop could not have left it so. But later he adds, “ While there are some in the Church of England who would dogmatically say there are only two Sacraments, most theologians would say that there are two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself, and other ordinances which may be called Sacraments, for in them Grace is given in answer to the prayers of the Church, and there is an external act or sign.” This might give the idea that grace is a something which can be, so to speak, retailed by the Church to the participant. It seems necessary therefore for the sake of accurate theology for Evangelicals to keep on affirming that grace in the New Testament sense of the word is not a something which can ever for one instant be separated from the Giver of grace.

In dealing with the question of baptism the Bishop merely states that the Church of England believes whole-heartedly in infant baptism. He did not deal with the vexed question of baptismal regeneration which is, one would imagine, a point on which the Baptist brethren would have had a good deal to say. Nor does he deal with the blunt statement of our Prayer Book, “ Seeing now this child is (or persons are) regenerate.” The difficulty in this declaration is to be met, so Evangelicals believe, by reference to the appropriate and explicit teaching contained in the Articles. We may presume that this omission is due to the Bishop’s reluctance to acknowledge the Articles as being an authoritative statement of Church of England doctrine. Another noticeable omission in this connection is that of any reference to the parallelism between Christian baptism and Jewish circumcision which is suggested by St. Paul in Col. 2.

HOLY COMMUNION.

In the brief section on Holy Communion there will be more general agreement with the Bishop’s exposition. It is to be supposed that many Evangelicals would agree with the Bishop’s statement that the Twenty-eighth Article condemns Zwinglianism. Even the Tutorial Prayer Book agrees with the dictum. But to the present writer at any rate this seems to be quite unjustified having careful regard to the language of the Communion Service itself.

THE MINISTRY.

Here the Bishop’s position is one which should commend itself to Evangelicals generally. Particularly is the Bishop’s

condemnation of any theory of tactual apostolic succession to be noted. He is emphatic that at an Ordination it is Jesus Christ Himself Who ordains, and Who bestows the gift of the Spirit. One criticism on this section may perhaps be permitted. The section would have gained enormously in value if it had been made clear that the Church of England recognizes that in the New Testament there is identity between Presbyters and Bishops. It would have been helpful if the Bishop had reminded his hearers of Lightfoot's *Essay on the Christian Ministry*.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

This section of the Bishop's address will also command general assent. Two points only seem to need comment. The first is that the term "united" is used with reference to the Church in a somewhat ambiguous sense. There is surely a distinction to be made between unity and uniformity. Evangelicals hold firmly that there is and can be but one living and true Church which comprises "the blessed company of all faithful people," including the Baptists, whom the Bishop was addressing. Probably the Bishop would agree on this point, but it would have been nice if he had told the Baptists.

The second point to be observed is the reference to the term "Protestant." The Bishop speaks of the Church as Protestant only in a negative way, "because it is obliged to protest against the improper claims of the Church of Rome." But both the etymology and history of the word give to it a definite and affirmative significance.

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POSTSCRIPT BY THE EDITOR.

We cannot let this article appear without extending to the author our deep sympathy in his great loss through the departure of Mrs. Howden to be with Christ. As he has taught and comforted thousands in like circumstances: nay more, enabled a great company to embrace Christ, and to walk joyfully through the valley of the shadow; so let us pray that the same comfort through the same Comforter may bless him at this time.

In order to spare him further labour, we have not submitted the proofs of this article to him for revision.