

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. IV.

JUNE, 1924.

No. 6.

Sincerity in Theologians.

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The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church was in session at Dallas, Tex., last November. A report of a committee came before it which by implication found well-known bishops, hundreds of the clergy, and thousands of the laity guilty of a position regarding the creeds inconsistent with "honesty in the use of language." In other words, many Episcopalians in pulpit and pew, when they recite the ancient creeds, do not mean to say what the credal statements express. They attach their own meaning to them, and thus their recital of the Creed, as the committee report charged, results in "dishonesty and unreality." As a particular example the interpretation was cited which many Episcopalians give to the words of the Apostles' Creed: "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." They decline to accept these words in the literal sense. The bishops adopted the report of the committee and on the basis of it issued a Pastoral Letter, in which they warned the Episcopal clergy that they would be "liable to be presented for trial" if they held or taught any other than the literal interpretation of the words of the Creed regarding the Virgin Birth.

This started the recent inglorious newspaper controversy concerning the Virgin Birth. The controversy is not merely about a particular item in the Creed, but about a general principle of wide application that affects any confessional statement which an Episcopalian may make. The Episcopal attitude is that of Modernists and liberal Protestants generally. Almost immediately after the bishops' meeting Rev. Lee W. Heaton, of the diocese of Dallas, Tex., was presented for trial. The Bishop Coadjutor of Texas, Moore, in receiving the indictment, acknowledged that the presentment was warranted, but declared himself unwilling to con-

sent to a trial, inasmuch as "similar interpretations of the doctrine in question are held, taught, and preached" by bishops. He decided to wait until higher authority should point out the course of wisdom and justice. For a Pastoral Letter from the House of Bishops may be regarded "merely as a species of sermon addressed to the whole Church," but without binding authority. Only a decision of a General Convention or of a court of appeal created by a General Convention can have such authority.

In an article in the *New Republic* (March 5), entitled "Conscience and the Bishops," Dickinson S. Miller applauds the course taken by Bishop Moore, because he holds that the effect of it is "that the freer interpretation in his diocese is permitted by an act whose deliberate and responsible character is notably enhanced by its coming directly after the bishops' pronouncement and under the aroused attention of the whole Church. Unless Dr. Lawrence or other bishops or priests are now not only proceeded against, but condemned for their stand on the same doctrine, which is hardly likely, Bishop Moore's action, taken with what preceded it, remains a definitive and historic step." The writer also points out that the Pastoral Letter of the bishops has not met with a welcome reception in other quarters. "The Modern Churchman's Union and the faculty of the Episcopal Theological School of Cambridge, affiliated with Harvard, have issued protests. The rectors of the most prominent parishes, with few exceptions, in the largest cities of the country have either by word or act expressed their disapproval." The writer, moreover, insists that the liberal interpretation of creedal formulas is a practise of long standing in the Episcopal Church and may be claimed by individual Episcopalians as a sacred right. He relates an experience of his own. Being unexpectedly required one day by the dean of a university to take an oath, and being in doubt whether he could sincerely use certain expressions in the oath, he asked the dean for advice. The dean gave the expressions a broad and non-literal interpretation to which the writer could subscribe, and so he took the oath. This, he thinks, should always be done: the Church, that is, the present Church, through its officials must determine the meaning of "a historic and poetic symbol to express the truth." Individual clergymen must have "the right to interpret certain articles of the Creed in a symbolic, not a literal sense." "No one wishes to forbid the literal interpretation," he remarks generously, but "the wish is that the non-literal shall be permitted also." It is not necessary for advocates of the non-literal interpretation to quit the Church,

because, in the first place, that would deprive the Church of "the more enlightened and alert spirits," which are needed for the ever-widening scope of the Church's moral influence and leadership; and in the second place, there is no definite way of determining what the Church really means to say, and does say, by its creeds. The writer relates that in an inaugural address at St. Andrew's University in Edinburgh, John Stuart Mill said to the students: "Those of you who are destined for the clerical profession are, no doubt, so far held to a certain number of doctrines that, if they ceased to believe them, they would not be justified in remaining in a position in which they would be required to teach insincerity. *But use your influence to make those doctrines as few as possible.* It is not right that men should be bribed to hold out against conviction — to shut their ears against objections or, if the objections penetrate, to continue professing full and unflinching belief when their confidence is already shaken. *Neither is it right that, if men honestly profess to have changed some of their religious opinions, their honesty [!] should as a matter of course exclude them from taking a part, for which they may be admirably qualified, in the spiritual instruction of the nation.* The tendency of the age, on both sides of the ancient Border, is towards the relaxation of formularies and a less rigid construction of articles. This very circumstance, by making the limits of orthodoxy less definite and obliging every one to draw the line for himself, is an embarrassment to consciences. *But I hold entirely with those clergymen who elect to remain in the national Church so long as they are able to accept its articles and confessions in any sense or with any interpretation consistent with common honesty, whether it be the generally received interpretation or not.* If all were to desert the Church who put a large and liberal construction on its terms of communion, or who would wish to see those terms widened, the national provision for religious teaching and worship would be left utterly to those who take the narrowest, the most literal, and purely textual view of the formularies; who, though by no means necessarily bigots, are under the great disadvantage of having bigots for their allies, and who, however great their merits may be, — and they are often very great, — yet, if the Church is improvable, are not the most likely persons to improve it. Therefore, if it were not an impertinence in me to tender advice in such a matter, I should say, *Let all who conscientiously can remain in the Church.*" (Italics and emphases ours.)

The present condition in the Episcopal Church is described

as one of chaos and formidable revolt. The charge of dishonesty contained in the Pastoral Letter of the bishops is resented, and those who feel themselves marked by the letter are crying out that they are the real honest and conscientious members of the Church and are taking the Church to its progressive goal. But this state of affairs is by no means confined to the Episcopal Church. Long ago Protestant theologians have been charged with "counterfeiting" (*Falschmuenzerei*), because they would retain the standard confessional terms of orthodox belief after they had emptied these terms of their original and native meaning. It has come to this, that such expressions as "the Son of God" applied to Jesus, "the divinely inspired Scriptures," "justification by grace through faith," etc., are mere decoys to ensnare the unwary. Many theologians who use these terms do not intend to convey by them the meaning which the terms in their native sense convey automatically. Mrs. Eddy had the courage to append to her *Science and Health a Key to the Scriptures*, in which she tells the public what she means by such terms as "morning," "evening," "life," "death," "Jesus," "Christ," "God," etc. Those who have engaged in a discussion of Biblical topics with Christian Scientists were soon conscious of an undefinable bewilderment that was settling on the conversation. Both sides would be using the same terms and yet misunderstand each other continuously. For instance, the God or the Christ which the one side was talking about was not the God or the Christ which the other side was thinking about. Slowly a feeling of disgust, of rising anger, a suspicion of unconquerable stupidity on the other side, would steal upon the conversationalists, and the discussion not only ended in failure, but left the unpleasant conviction at least on the defendant of the orthodox position that his arguments were being trifled with and he was being made a fool of. Virtually the same situation is created for the reader of many a modernist treatise on a theological topic. His eye falls on many a well-known term of the old faith, on good, sound Scripture phrases. He finds cherished Bible-texts quoted, whose scope and bearing he understands full well. But the terms, the phrases, the texts, do not spell the same meaning in the treatise before him, and it is only by very close reading that he discovers that to follow his author intelligently he has to readjust his mind to a new vocabulary. Really modern theological treatises should have a glossary of terms appended at the end, giving the meaning which the author intends for each important term, and this glossary the reader should master before he begins

the perusal of the treatise. There is an immense amount of deceptive phraseology in modern theological literature. The use of this phraseology is not a mere accident, but a studied effort to sneak contraband teaching into the Church of Christ under cover of orthodox terms. Not all who use these terms are consciously dishonest; they may have become habituated to them through their theological training at the university or seminary. The perverted meaning may have been inculcated upon them as the correct meaning, and they may actually be amazed when they are confronted with the correct and real meaning. But in those who started this system of counterfeiting there was, no doubt, design. The design is the same as when the Father of Lies quotes Scripture and poses as an angel of light.

This evil in the Church has been foreseen; for the Church has been forewarned against it. Paul speaks of some who "preach Christ . . . not sincerely." Phil. 1, 16. *Ὁὐχ ἄγνῶς* was rendered by the old paraphrasts *non caste*, (Luther: *nicht lauter*), that is, not from a virgin heart of loyal faith in the Bridegroom, not with purity of affection for the heavenly truth, not with a clean purpose. Meyer considers the term synonymous with *καθαρῶς*. The preaching has become tainted, contaminated, polluted, evidently by the hybrid thought that is connected with the words preached. Paul instructs the young theologian Titus: "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity," chap. 2, 7. The Greek text has only two terms characterizing the doctrine which Titus is to present, *ἀφθογία* and *σεμνότης*, not three, as the English rendering suggests. *Αφθογία* is connected directly with "doctrine" by Luther: *mit unverfaelschter Lehre*. An undefiled heart, when preaching the holy Word of God, the solemn message of the blessed Gospel of Christ, will instinctively avoid everything not in harmony with the true subject and aim of the doctrine. But a mind that has lost the original chastity of faith will deck out its thoughts in glittering phrases and attractive diction, just as a vile woman studies the effect of special charms which she puts on to attain her lewd end. It is possible that Paul refers to such insincere tricks of theological declaimers when he tells the Corinthians, some of whom seemed to have a weakness for such stuff, that he came not to them "with excellency of speech or of wisdom" nor "with enticing words." 1 Cor. 2, 1. 3. Oosterzee quoted by Meyer, thinks that *ἀφθογία* refers to "the form of the doctrine which Titus preaches: it is to be pure, chaste, free from everything that

conflicts with the nature of the Gospel." On the other hand, *σεμνότης* most likely relates to the style of delivery, which is to be characterized by the quiet, unostentatious dignity of a reverent mind, which is afraid to "rush in fool-fashion where angels fear to tread."

Once more to the Corinthians, Paul, in a section that is throbbing with emotion and deep fervor, declares: "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward," 2 Cor. 1, 12; and again: "We are not as many which corrupt the Word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ," chap. 2, 17. The term for sincerity in both passages is *εὐλικρινία*, and Luther renders it both times by *Lauterkeit*. The compound Greek term is very descriptive: *εἶλη* or *ἔλη* is the splendor of the sun, and with *κρινία*, or the adjective form *κρινής*, from *κρίνειν*, denotes the immaculate purity of anything that is exposed to the light of the sun and thus examined. It is the state of being without speck, or flaw, or blemish. Another derivation of the term is possible from *εἶλος*, *εἰλεῖν*, which denotes a swift shaking as in a sieve; but the meaning is the same in the end: purity attained by careful segregation from adulterating elements. In the former passage the term is connected with the genitive *τοῦ Θεοῦ*, and by one of those happy agreements so frequent between the Authorized and Luther's version, both translations render this genitive (evidently the genitive of cause or authorship) by the adjective "godly," *goettlich*. This sincerity in theologians is a fruit of the sanctifying grace of God in them. In the latter passage Paul contrasts with his theological activity that of "many" (in the original *οἱ πολλοί* = the *known* many) "who corrupt the Word of God" and therefore are not sincere. Again we meet here with a strongly descriptive term: *καπηλεύειν*, rendered by "corrupt," *verfaelschen*; originally it meant the business of a retailer, particularly a vintner; in an enlarged meaning it signified "to negotiate." But since the vintner's trade was honeycombed with fraudulent practises, cheats, adulteration, the verb came to mean "to change the genuine quality by evil admixture" and thus, "to corrupt." The term is so used by the Greek philosophers when they refer to insincere presentations of the teachings of wisdom. Chrysostom mentions some who "mingle their own ideas with

divine matters" (*τὰ αὐτῶν ἀναμιγνύουσιν τοῖς θείοις*), and Ignatius and Gregory Nazianzen call them *χριστέμποροι*, "people who make a trade of Christ and His doctrine, perverting it for filthy lucre." The former describes the practise of these men thus: "They weave into their bland address their own irregularity, or delusion" (*τὸν ἰὸν προοπλέκοντας τῆς πλάνης τῇ γλυκεῖα προσηγορία*. *Trall.* 6, comp. 10). What Paul, then, declares in this text with unmistakable emphasis is that his activity has not been like that of theological cheats who "with selfish intention dress up what they preach as the Word of God palatably and as people wish to hear it." (Meyer.) He has had no share in any adulteration of doctrine, but he speaks ever from an honest heart and thought.*

In a sermon on the Epistle for Easter Day, Luther comments thus on 1 Cor. 5, 8: "He comprehensively calls sour leaven everything that originates in our flesh and blood and our old sinful nature and distributes it under the two heads of 'malice' and 'wickedness.' . . . 'Malice' he calls every kind of iniquity and sin by which plain wrong is done against God and our fellow-men. 'Wickedness' (*Schalkheit*), however, means every kind of evil, cunning, dexterous, concealed, venomous tricks that are employed in teaching God's Word so as to falsify and pervert it and lead the hearts of men astray from faith and the pure sense and meaning. As St. Paul, 2 Cor. 11, 3, says warningly: 'I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' Besides, it denotes other wicked doings, hypocrisy and similar offenses, as when one deals falsely and trickily (particularly under cover of God's name) and attempts to adorn and cover up one's intention, so as to have it called right, good, and Christian, and not wrong teaching, advice, or doing. That is what Christ calls the leaven of the Pharisees, likewise the leaven of Herod, etc. Of this there are innumerable instances in the world, especially in these last evil times. — Over against these he places these two: 'sincerity' and 'truth.' 'Sincerity' relates to everything in our life and actions that is right and Christian, that comes from a faithful

* Collateral material on the subject of Christian sincerity can be gathered from 1 Cor. 5, 8; 1 Pet. 2, 2 (where *ἄδολον* means "without guile," hence, unadulterated); Eph. 6, 24; 2 Pet. 3, 1; 2 Cor. 8, 8 (where *γνήσιον* denotes what is genuine). The English "sincere" is compounded from the Latin *sine cera* = without wax, and relates to pure honey.

and godly heart, well-intentioned towards everybody, not meaning to do wrong or injury to anybody, and dealing with others as he would have them deal with himself. 'Truth,' however, is anything that is not false or wily, that does not practise deceit and cunning, but regulates doctrine and life honestly and correctly in accordance with the Word of God. These traits must exist and manifest themselves in Christians, because Christians are in a new state and condition and celebrate the new Easter so that their faith and doctrine and life are altogether in accord with their new state." (12, 489.)

What the "honest" Episcopalians desire to do as teachers and leaders in the Church is simply treason, and this they wish to have legitimized. No business man would become party to a contract, no bank would accept a note, no government would accept the oath of an alien for naturalization in which the right were accorded to the party of the second part to put his own interpretation on the document, and that he might consider the whole transaction symbolic and poetic, or anything else than literal truth. What men would scorn as the sheerest humbug in every other human affair, that is to be supreme wisdom and genuine progressive thought in the Church, in theology. But it does not work altogether as the Liberalists wish: the people are finding out that the theologians have deceived, the churches have deluded them, and they have more ways than one of letting the Liberalists know that they see through their holy frauds. This happened to Roman theologians four hundred years ago and is happening to them again and again ever since. It is happening in our day to many Protestant theologians: they are being found out more and more as insincere teachers.
