

# BLACKFRIARS

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## DOCTRINE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

THE fidelity and purity of the Anglican witness to the Gospel of Christ is a matter of utmost concern to all Christians. Least of all can an English Catholic, anxious for the temporal and eternal welfare of the people of his own race and nation, be indifferent to it. It is estimated that, at the present time, some 20,000,000 souls in Great Britain and some 11,000,000 in other parts of the world, are directly dependent upon the Anglican churches for whatever they know, or humanly speaking are likely to know, of the message of salvation. When it is further remembered that, in nearly all parts of the English-speaking world, the Anglican community enjoys a prestige as an authorised representative of organised Christianity far in excess of its numbers, and is to millions of non-Christians the most familiar spokesman of Christianity, the character of its doctrine is seen to be a matter of almost cosmic importance. Distortions of the purity of the Gospel message and of the integrity of the Catholic faith by Anglican divines are as unseemly material for the headlines of sensationalist journalism as they are for the jibes and gloatings of the nagging type of proselytiser. On the other hand, it should be to the apostolic-minded Catholic a subject for praise and thanksgiving when, notwithstanding four centuries of independence from the unity of the *Catholica*, the Anglican churches still bear witness in an apostate world to the elements of the faith once delivered to the saints. To those who are conscious of all that that separation involves and of the quite peculiar difficulties with which Anglican clergymen have had to contend, the marvel is perhaps less that so much has been lost than that so much has been retained and even regained.

The recently published *Report on Doctrine in the Church of England*<sup>1</sup> should be read with these considerations in

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<sup>1</sup> Published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, price 2s. 6d.

mind. The Report is not indeed to be regarded as a statement, authoritative or otherwise, of the doctrine of the Church of England—this is expressly and repeatedly repudiated—but it is of value if only as indicating the beliefs and disbeliefs of some distinguished members of the mother provinces of the Anglican Communion, each of whom can doubtless claim some more or less considerable following in his respective opinion.

This however is not its main purpose. The object of Archbishop Davidson in appointing the Commission entrusted with its composition was clear as it was urgent: "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."

To what extent the Report will be found to meet this grave need it is difficult to say. It is clear that the Commission has succeeded in reaching a fairly considerable measure of (at least apparent) fundamental agreement on points where hitherto there had seemed to be little but flat mutual contradiction between the various "schools of thought" within the Anglican Communion. But an estimate of the value of this undoubted achievement to the Anglican body as a whole must depend on the extent to which the members of the Commission may be regarded as representing the divers trends in that Communion. On this there seems to be considerable divergence of opinion, even among members of the Commission themselves. For while the general Introduction to the Report assures us that "the members of the Commission were chosen as representing different traditions or points of view," the Archbishop of York in his own "Chairman's Introduction" tells us that "we escaped early from that false responsibility which consists in a sense that a man 'represents' some section of ecclesiastical opinion." The Archbishop is also reported (by *The Daily Telegraph*) to have told the Convocation of York that "People who held well-grounded convictions would not surrender those on the sole authority of a score of theologians," and Dr. Goudge,

writing in *The Church Times*, considers it precisely a merit of the Report that "the Commission was full of men who, so far from being representative, were of strongly individual outlook." All this, to a non-Anglican, makes the practical value of the document very hard to estimate, and he will be inquisitive to know just how far the professional theologians who composed the Commission are in touch with the sentiments of the rank and file of Anglican clergy and laity. But in justice to the memory of Archbishop Davidson it should be recognized that he had the courage to assemble a very heterogeneous collection of Anglican divines<sup>2</sup> (Papalists, of course, excluded), and the text of the Report confirms to some considerable extent the claim of the Introduction that these divines "have found that so soon as both parties to any controversy set themselves to find other expressions than those which have been traditional among them, they discover a far greater measure of substantial agreement than they had anticipated." It is salutary to all of us to be reminded that terms and phrases, accepted uncritically without a thorough thinking out of their meaning, often serve as much as barriers as they do as means to understanding and agreement.

But it is precisely here, it seems to us, that the Report often fails as much as it succeeds in achieving even its own object. A reading of the document leaves us with an impression of weakness—of a falling between two stools—resulting from an attempt to pursue two distinct and incompatible objectives. While the members of the Commission

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<sup>2</sup> Defending the Report from the criticisms of the Bishop of Durham, the Dean of St. Paul's writes to *The Sunday Times* (20.2.38): "No doubt it is true that Protestant Fundamentalism was not represented on the Commission, but it was intended to consist of competent theologians, and I wonder if the Bishop would be able to name among Anglican Fundamentalists one who could be so described." Such an admission seems to make still problematic the Commission's competence to judge on "existing agreement and differences" within the Church of England, and also to prejudice the fundamental issue regarding the nature of theology and its relationship to faith. Notwithstanding all the errors and absurdities of Protestant Fundamentalism, we fancy it could still claim a pretty considerable following among Anglicans, and that its spokesman might have manifested at least as sound a conception of the nature and scope of theology as does the Commission.

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were clearly anxious to thresh out their differences thoroughly, they were no less clearly anxious to present a corpus of doctrine within a manageable compass *not* "composed primarily for expert theologians." As a consequence the Report includes a great deal of speculation, some of a very "strongly individual" character indeed, which can be of little or no importance or interest to the Anglican rank and file, yet presented with a tantalising superficiality which must necessarily fail to satisfy the trained and experienced theologian. It is naturally impossible to judge from the Report the extent to which the various subjects were threshed out, but the impression is difficult to avoid that a greater care to define terms might often have revealed a greater measure both of agreement and of disagreement. It must nevertheless be recognised in all fairness that the Commission was clearly not concerned to frame ambiguous formulas to which each might subscribe and each interpret differently. The moral honesty and sincerity of the compilers is transparent. But ambiguities, sometimes of a very grave nature, are by no means lacking both in the affirmations and the negations of members of the Commission. Their anxiety to preserve an atmosphere of amiability in the discussions, as revealed in Archbishop Temple's Introduction, perhaps acted as a brake to any eagerness to press matters too far, notwithstanding the fact that they were "very frank . . . brutally frank at times" in their comments. This impression is confirmed by the amount of space occupied in the Report with the difficulties felt by members of the Commission in accepting particular doctrines or formulas. These difficulties are sometimes so trivial that one is tempted to wonder whether any serious effort was made in the discussions to meet them. The success of the Report in achieving its aims might seem at times to suffer, not so much from too great an eagerness to reach agreement, but from too great a readiness to agree to disagree. The impression is difficult to resist that had the atmosphere of what Dr. Temple calls "the mingled devotion and hilarity of 'the Holy Party' " been tempered with a little healthy *odium theologicum*, the meetings might indeed have been

less agreeable, but the Report would have been more successful.

We must however take the Report as we find it with its merits and its defects. Without aspiring to a exhaustive and detailed criticism beyond the space and the abilities at our disposal, it should be possible—now that the journalists have forgotten it and the Rationalist Press Association has launched its new publicity campaign on the strength of their “sensations,”—to discuss its contents in a spirit of sweet reasonableness.

It should be noted at the outset that the Report makes no pretence to provide a complete compendium of Christian doctrine as held in the Church of England. Attention has been deliberately concentrated on those points on which there is more manifestly divergence of opinion or of belief among Anglicans. “The Commission was appointed because the tensions between different schools of thought in the Church of England were imperilling its unity and imperilling its effectiveness.” (The frankness of this pragmatism is typical of much in the Report itself.) “Consequently those subjects (on the whole) receive most attention in the Report which are, at this time, or have been during the period of the Commission’s labours, occasions of controversy within the Church of England or sources of confusion in Anglican practice.” (Chairman’s Introduction, p. 4.)

With this purpose in view, the Report has been divided into three main parts, headed respectively *The Doctrines of God and of Redemption, The Church and Sacraments, Eschatology*. The whole is preceded by twelve pages of *Prolegomena: The Sources and Authority of Christian Doctrine*.

Of these main divisions, the Second Part, on the Church and Sacraments, seems to us from every point of view the most successful. Inasmuch as it covers a subject-matter which has hitherto most sharply divided the various schools and traditions comprehended by the Anglican Communion, the measure of agreement which has been reached in this section marks a real achievement. It manifests, at the very least, a fairly wide field of common ground where hitherto

it had been commonly supposed that there was nothing but irreducible opposition and contradiction. In the treatment of these doctrines, moreover, the Commission seems to us to display a higher level of consistent thinking and of clarity and orderliness of exposition than are generally attained elsewhere in the Report. Finally, whereas the other two parts indicate serious retrogressions from the approximation of traditional Anglican beliefs to the full doctrine of the Catholic Church, Part II manifests, on the whole, a marked advance in the direction of Catholic ecclesiological and sacramental teaching. We may be allowed, therefore, to give to this section our first consideration, less to draw attention to its merits, which may be left to speak for themselves, than to indicate some its defects. At the same time we would suggest that in some parts its incompatibility with Catholic teaching is not so certain as on the face of it might appear.

The first main subdivision of this section, that on *The Church and Ministry*, opens with a *Prefatory Note* and a section on *The Church in Scripture* which, within the strict limits of the scope that has been set them, are wholly admirable. *The Christian Church in Idea and History* happily presents the Church as the foundation of Christ, in continuity with the Twelve, visible yet "essentially a Fellowship, constituted by a relation between God and Man, which in the last resort must be discerned and apprehended by faith." An attempt is made to account for the co-existence of visible disunity with essential fundamental unity by the analogy that "even if there is division in political organisation, the unity of a race or people may find external expression in a common outlook and common practices." There is no need here to draw attention to the unsatisfactoriness of the Report's conceptions of Unity and Schism, nor to sift the truth from the error in its presentation of Catholicity.<sup>3</sup> Apostolicity is recognised, in principle at least, as implying a link with the primitive Church "through an essential identity of doctrine, a continuity of order, and a fellowship in missionary duty." It is worth remarking that the con-

<sup>3</sup> Père Congar's *Chrétiens désunis* may well be consulted in this connection.

ception of schism as "division *within* the Body", understood as meaning division among those who are baptised into the one Body of Christ, does not exclude the fact (as the Report argues) that schism is "division *from* the Body" inasmuch as it means separation from the visible unity of the one Church and from its authorised pastors and institutions with consequent loss of fundamental rights and privileges to which Baptism entitles. A subsection treating in a general way of *The Institutions of the Church* (Scriptures, Creeds, Sacraments and Ministry), otherwise satisfactory, refers back to the unsatisfactory views of the *Prolegomena* regarding doctrinal authority, which we shall have further occasion to consider.

The subsection on *the Ministry*, covering as it does the visible organisation of the Church, is of great interest and importance, and the degree of unanimity here reached marks a definite consolidation of "Catholicising" tendencies within the Church of England. The statement of Principle (pp. 114-117) seems excellent and unexceptionable: full recognition is given to the "official" ministerial status of the apostolate as constituted by Christ, and to the fact that "a distinction corresponding to that drawn later between Clergy and Laity is there from the outset." A Catholic theologian would of course prefer a more exact statement of the relationship of what he would call "the common priesthood" to the official ministry: he would see it as a normal functioning of the powers imparted in Baptism and Confirmation rather than as an "episodic" activity of the Spirit in the Church (without thereby denying the existence of extra-ordinary charismata); but he will rejoice to find it affirmed that it must be exercised "with due recognition of the function of the regular Ministry," and that "the effective witness of Christian prophets and evangelists, either within the Ministry or without it, is given from within the Church, and is the expression of the continuous life of the Church which the regular ministry of Word and Sacraments sustains from generation to generation."

The difficulty of modelling the form which Church Order should take by appeal to the New Testament is expressed.

Lacking the ability to recognise the "universal Church" in the concrete, the Commission finds that appeal to the *orbis terrarum* in deciding the matter likewise "raises insuperable difficulties." But although the Church's "order and structure are necessarily such as to provide the means through which Christ may exercise His oversight and pastoral care," and "in this sense provision for pastoral oversight—*Episcopate*—is an essential element in the life of the Church," nevertheless "the acceptance of any Order of Ministry cannot be based on considerations of evangelistic effectiveness alone, apart from any regard for continuity and unity," and "continuity of ministerial commission embodies in the sphere of Order the principle of Apostolicity in the sense of continuous mission from Christ and the Father." Moreover, "the ministers of the Church in all later generations have possessed a pastoral authority as themselves holding commission from the Lord in succession to the Apostles, and the status of ministers in this succession has been guaranteed from one generation to another by a continuously transmitted commission." This thoroughly Catholic doctrine is however qualified to the extent of the admission of "possible circumstances . . . where fundamental loyalty to the Lord may involve rebellion against the existing ministry, and even the establishment of a new ministry, as the lesser of two evils." How this qualification can be reconciled with the foregoing is not explained, nor is the ethical principle which it presupposes—that it is lawful to commit a positive if lesser evil for the avoidance of a greater one—justified. The further declaration that the Commission "cannot accept a conception of ordination which is exclusively hierarchical, as though the ministerial succession alone constituted the essence of the Church apart from any continuing body of the faithful," seems to us so ambiguous as to be meaningless, but may be presumed to have soothed those members of the Commission who were troubled at having so far committed themselves to Catholic principles.

"The institution of Episcopacy" is neatly distinguished from the "monarchical diocesan episcopate." We think that



we interpret the mind of the Commission aright in saying that the former is considered to belong to the *esse* of the Church, the latter to its *bene esse*. But the inherent appropriateness of the monarchical episcopate, and its character as "an element in the given totality of the Christian tradition," are strongly emphasised.

The Papacy is relegated to "Note B." of this section. Papalists being excluded from the Commission, it seems to have found no difficulty in reaching the foregone conclusion that "the Church of England was right to take the stand which it took in the sixteenth century and is still bound to resist the claims of the contemporary Papacy." It is added: "The account which we have already given of the nature of spiritual and doctrinal authority supplies in large measure the ground of our conviction on this point." It would be interesting to know the process whereby this conclusion was deduced.

The second subdivision of this Part, that on the Sacraments, occupies, with the relevant appendices, some 97 pages out of the 216 of the whole Report. It is possible to call attention only to some of its principal features.

*The General Doctrine of the Sacraments* is a really finely-worded dogmatic statement, thoroughly Catholic in tendency. "In the Sacraments . . . Christ, availing Himself of the principles of our nature, offers to men through the Church the redeeming powers of His life in ways appropriate to their various needs." Emphasis is laid on their social function: "Inasmuch as the Sacraments belong to the Church, they afford in special measure an instance of that corporate action without which the corporate life of the Church as of any other society must atrophy . . . Christ now acts in the world through His Body the Church. The Sacraments belong to the Church, being part of its corporate life, and having their meaning within that corporate life. The way, therefore, to attempt to reach an understanding of the Sacraments is to consider their place in the corporate life of the Christian society, and to proceed from this to their value for the individual . . . The Sacraments are social and corporate rites of the Church in which by means of

divinely appointed signs spiritual life flows from God. The external signs are not arbitrary or irrational, but symbolize the promised gift which by means of the sacrament is pledged to and bestowed upon those who receive it with faith." A memorable phrase is that "The psychological value of Sacraments is derived from the fact that they are not psychological processes." "The sacraments are rightly called 'effectual signs.' As signs they represent the gifts of grace offered through them; as effectual they are instrumental means whereby God confers those gifts on worshippers who receive them with faith." A reference to Billot in the appendix hints that difficulties felt regarding the manner in which the Sacraments confer grace might be met by a theory of dispositive causality such as was taught by St. Thomas at least in his earlier years; and difficulties regarding the institution of the Sacraments (other than Baptism and the Eucharist) by Our Lord Himself would probably be set at rest by the application of the familiar distinction between institution *in genere* and *in specie*.<sup>4</sup>

When, however, questions of valid administration come under review, the Commission shows more serious divergences of opinion. The distinction between efficaciousness, validity and regularity of administration is acknowledged, but there seems to be considerable confusion in its application. Baptism by the unbaptised seems to have given the Commission a great deal of trouble owing, it would seem, to a healthy if misplaced terror of "magic"<sup>5</sup>; and some

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<sup>4</sup> The Commission appears to recognise that the sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*, through the language of some among them is sometimes equivocal. It should be remembered that the Church has made no definitions regarding the *manner* of causality whereby the Sacraments confer grace. It is not universally agreed that St. Thomas implicitly retracted the view that their causality is dispositive and not perfective. The Council of Trent defined the institution of each of the seven Sacraments by Our Lord, but theologians are not agreed that this institution was in each case "specific," i.e., by explicit determination of the sign (matter and/or form), some holding that this was in some cases left to the power of the Church. On direct historical evidence alone, the question is clearly incapable of proof either way. (cf., for instance, Diekamp, *Theol. Dogm.*, Vol. IV, pp. 21 sqq.)

<sup>5</sup> This is the more unexpected, since the essential opposition between "magic" and the Christian sacraments had been excellently stated elsewhere.

members would go so far as to affirm the validity of lay celebration of the Eucharist. It is rather bewildering to find that the Commission, usually of so sceptical and hyper-critical a temper, adheres unanimously to so difficulty-ridden a theory of "baroque scholasticism" as that of *intentio exterior* as propounded by Catharinus. The irrelevance of the references here made to Hooker suggests that the issue of the intention demanded for inherent validity has been confused with the totally different one of the criterion whereby intention may be presumed.

The treatment of Baptism is very summary, and suffers considerably from the Commission's defective views regarding original sin which had been expounded in the first part.

On the other hand, "In connexion with the doctrine of the Eucharist we have included more technical discussion than elsewhere, partly because it is through exact thinking that we may most hopefully advance towards unity, but partly also because the mere technical discussion illustrates the difficulties confronting those who would penetrate into this mystery, and may thus deepen our humility in any controversial statement of our own views or reflection on the views of others." (Chairman's Introduction, p. 15.)

Two main questions pass under review: the sacrificial character of the Eucharist and the Eucharistic Presence.

A long, but necessarily inadequate, treatment of the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist emerges in no very definite pronouncement. The faulty method has been followed of attempting to reach a concept of sacrifice by induction, and then applying it to the data of Scripture and of the primitive Church regarding the Eucharist, the latter being sometimes somewhat tendentiously interpreted.<sup>6</sup> The treatment is largely dominated by the misunderstandings regarding the Atonement which had appeared in the First Part of the Report, and by a healthy fear of anthropomorphic interpretations of "satisfaction" and "placation." No account seems to have been taken of the thorough purification which the Anselmian concept of satisfaction underwent at the hands of Aquinas. But the general upshot of the discussion,

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<sup>6</sup> Notably in the interpretation of Irenaeus.

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indefinite as it is, appears to mark a real advance towards a recognition of the celebration of the Eucharist as in some undefined way the performance of a ritual sacrifice closely linked to the offering on Calvary.

Affirmations regarding the reality of the Eucharistic sacrifice must necessarily be conditioned by beliefs regarding the Eucharistic presence, while beliefs regarding the sacrificial powers of the Christian Ministry are in their turn conditioned by beliefs regarding the reality of the sacrifice. On the Eucharistic presence, three schools are recognised as existing, and as having the right to exist, within the Anglican Communion, viz., those who hold to the Real Presence, to Receptionism and to Virtualism respectively, while "Many Anglicans would point to the fact that their Church does not require them to hold any particular theory as to the manner of the Eucharistic Presence, and would say that for their part they find it quite unnecessary to do so." But the Commission has succeeded in emphasizing "the agreement of all these schools of thought in holding that in the Eucharist Christ is active and accessible in a special manner as Giver and as Gift, and accordingly that the Eucharist affords a natural and appropriate occasion for the Church's thankful adoration of Him as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." For all its jejuneness such measure of agreement, where hitherto there had appeared little but flat contradiction among Anglican representatives of the various "schools," indicates a real advance towards Anglican unity in doctrine, and, we think it may be said, towards the permeation of Anglicanism as a whole by some at least of the main Anglo-Catholic tenets.

The Catholic reader will be sorry to find this welcome evidence of "clear convergence, both doctrinal and devotional" followed closely by a Memorandum ("not offered as expressing views held by the whole Commission") containing a distressing misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation as expounded by St. Thomas. (He may, however, experience some relief at the reflection that the Transubstantiation here

condemned is not the Transubstantiation in which he believes.) It is recognised that "A careful examination of the theory of Transubstantiation, as stated by St. Thomas Aquinas and defined by the Council of Trent, vindicates it from any charge of superstitious grossness or materialism," but it must be questioned whether the composers of this Memorandum have given it that "careful examination" or interpreted it in a way that is other than gross and materialistic. Lack of space forbids our making a thorough critique of their contentions, but the following points should be noted:

1. While the doctrine of Transubstantiation meets the difficulty that the Body of Christ cannot be in two places at once, it is not designed to that end, but simply to elaborate, in fundamental terms of *Being*, the data of Scripture and Tradition regarding the real Presence.

2. Substance is *not* here to be understood in its secondary sense as "that which makes the object to be what it really and essentially is," but in its primary sense as "that which is," the existing "thing" or "subject" of which the rest is predicated, viz., the bread itself. By the elementary mistake of confusing *substantia secunda* with *substantia prima* there is little difficulty, of course, in making nonsense of the whole doctrine.

3. Sensible properties are indeed accidents; but accidents as such are not sensible properties. An *accidens* is a "happening," a secondary determination—"magis entis quam ens"—conditioning the "thing," and for that very reason not identical with it.

4. Hence no philosopher, ancient or modern, "thinks of the substance of any physical object as a fixed core of being which remains the same behind all the changes which affect its accidents or sensible appearances."

5. Transubstantiation, so far from "overthrowing the nature of a sacrament" precisely justifies the position of the Eucharist as *the Sacrament par excellence*, by reason of the permanence of the sensible accidents having their own existence and signifying the Body and Blood of Christ. They (i.e., the *species*, which are both sensibly perceptible and real) are precisely the *sacramentum* or sign as distinguished from the Body and Blood which is the *res* which they signify. (Father de la Taille's fine essay, *The Real Presence and its Sacramental Function*, published in *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion*, pp. 201-217 could doubtless have dissipated the difficulties of the Commission on this score.)

6. "The language of Roman Catholic devotion that the consecrated species are commonly thought of as a veil which hides, rather than as a sign which declares, spiritual realities" can certainly be misleading, but it is not typical of Thomist theology in which the emphasis is on the sacramental significance of the species. Yet such language is justified by the fact that signs, because they are not the reality signified, to that extent hide the reality, in the Eucharist as in the other Sacraments. (Cf. St. Thomas's "Sub diversis speciebus, *Signis tantum et non rebus Latent res eximiae.*") This in no way makes the species a "disguise," nor their perception to involve a deception, though what is signified by the figures is of course (as in the other Sacraments) not apprehensible except by faith.

One suspects that a more accurate understanding of the meaning of Transubstantiation might have solved many of the difficulties felt by all parties on the Commission, and have spared them much of the novel and curious speculation recorded in the appendix *On the Meaning of the Terms "Body" and "Blood" in Eucharistic Theology.*

It is good to find that what the 25th Article calls the five "commonly called sacraments" receive less frivolous, and indeed honourable, treatment in the Report. It is recognised that "there is a real gift of grace bestowed in Confirmation," as well as in Christian marriage. The section on *Confession and Absolution* reveals again an unexpectedly wide acceptance of Anglo-Catholic beliefs, and includes some good matter. Though the treatment of these Sacraments falls short of a full and exact confession of Catholic belief in their regard, the tendency is definitely in a "Catholicising" direction.

But the advance towards a fuller acceptance of Catholic principles regarding the Church and Sacraments is paralleled by surrender of ground historically common to Catholic and Protestant in other matters still more vital and fundamental. No approximation in beliefs to Catholic doctrine can compensate for any uncertainty, let alone error, regarding the nature of belief itself in the grounds of Christian faith. Consideration of this must be postponed to a further article.

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