

Canadian Churchman

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Editorial

A MOST significant statement is the MESSAGE FROM THE CHAPLAINS OVERSEAS to the Churches of Canada. It is signed on behalf of the Canadian Chaplain Services by eight Anglican (including Colonel Almond, the Director), five Presbyterian and one of the Methodist, Baptist and Congregational Communions.

"If we would hereafter truly fulfil the PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH as our Lord's ambassador, it must mean a reconsecration of all life to His service. We this day are not our own, but 'bought with a price,' and to be true to the heritage which is the gift of sacrifice, to rebuild a broken world demands the labour of rededicated lives made strong in the power of His Spirit. The purpose of the Church we conceive to be co-extensive with the world's hope and need. It can be nothing less than the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church of Christ is the great agency for the fulfilment of this Divine Purpose. She is not merely an institution, a repository of Creeds or Confessions, but the power house of God among men. As such she must be forever related to the Source of Divine Power, even Jesus Christ. Her purpose can only be achieved through the presentation and teaching of our Lord. We believe with a new conviction that Christ, if He be lifted up, will draw all men unto Himself. The world needs as never before the vision of God in Christ; the revelation of suffering and triumphant Love. Apart from the preaching of the Cross, the Church is without power to fulfil her mission."

The Church's EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY is emphasized by "the fact of a very widespread ignorance about even the simplest truths of Christianity in this twentieth century, which has been one of the most painful discoveries made by the Chaplains during the war. Thousands of men do not seem to know even the elementary meaning of the Christian Faith." The causes are given as the decline of Bible reading and religious instruction in the home, the inadequate Sunday School instruction, and the excessive demand made on the modern pulpit for "popular" sermons. The Message suggests the cheap little booklets on Christian principles, better Sunday School teaching, and, most of all, the restored emphasis on the teaching function of the minister. Faithful catechising is needed.

After stating that the fundamental Faith of the Church has more than met the situation and justified itself to all men, the need for a SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT of the Christian Faith is expressed on the ground that the Apostles' Creed "does not completely fulfil its purpose as a Confession of Faith, partly because many say it without understanding, or with reservation, and partly because many have difficulty in saying it at all. Nor are the latter mere nominal Churchmen. In most cases, indeed, they are men who firmly believe what is really fundamental in Christianity, but feel that certain clauses in the Creed are not consonant with the thought of to-day. . . . Not only are there the newer conceptions of God, Man and the Universe, but Providence and Prayer, Salvation, Heaven and Hell require a fresh presentation in the Church's teaching. On all these subjects opinion, both within and without the Church, has been finding a way of its own, chiefly because the official doctrine of the Church seemed at variance with the facts of life and the deepest promptings of the human heart."

It is a pity that at this point the message lacks its usual definiteness. Everybody will want to

know what are the certain clauses referred to. It is to be remembered that it is the Apostles' Creed which is in mind. We do not want to fasten an interpretation on the Message, but one wonders if it refers to the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. We have always regarded these clauses as statements of the teaching of Holy Scripture.

In the sentence we have italicized we wonder if the emphatic word is "seemed." The Apostles' Creed is the only "official doctrine" of the Church mentioned, and we seriously question whether its statements are or seem at variance with the facts of life, and the deepest promptings of the human heart. If "official doctrine" is to be taken as meaning the formularies of the Church then no one would dispute that they were written in the language of their times, and that their interpretation is the task of each new generation. Either the thoughtlessness or the difficulty of the worshipper is to be met by clear teaching. We are convinced that the teaching of the Incarnate Son of God is the core of Christianity, and we are sure that the Chaplains think so too. The "modern" man will come to his own by "thinking through," and we doubt if he can find a simpler statement of Christian principles than the Apostles' Creed, which confines itself to the plain statement of the teaching of Holy Scripture.

A notable emphasis on PUBLIC WORSHIP is a refreshing word. Reality must be the note. The value of both liturgical forms and informal and spontaneous worship has impressed itself on the Chaplains. The varying estimates of the Holy Communion are noticed.

Regarding UNITY, the Chaplains at the Front did three things, none of which they found detrimental to religion: "(a) We have allowed men of all denominations to come to our Communions, taking their desire to communicate as a sufficient reason for receiving them; (b) we have had united worship at Church Parade, which involved our preaching to men other than those of our own Church; (c) we have worked together in all matters affecting the social and spiritual welfare of the troops."

The Message pleads that these practices should be authoritatively sanctioned and become the general practice of the Church. Undoubtedly there is a great tide running in the hearts of men, and we are afraid that some denominations will find their exclusiveness assisted by being left in a backwater.

With a magnificent passage on THE CHURCH'S VISION the Message closes. "The Church of Christ, for the fulfilment of her mission, the realization of her vision, needs this day a renaissance of spiritual idealism, a new and more gallant venture of faith. She must recapture the crusading spirit. It is our conviction that a flaming idealism alone can transform the cold, material facts of daily experience into high spiritual adventures for God's Kingdom. Our citizen soldiers were ready to brave and to venture everything for our cause. If for the work of the future we would enlist the qualities of their splendid manhood, it will only be through the presentation of an Ideal, and an adventure of faith great enough to capture their imagination and fire their hearts. Here surely is the opportunity of the Church to be true to her vision. In her keeping is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with its ringing summons to the perils and the ventures of allegiance to Him. It belongs to the Church so to confront men with the Jesus of history that they shall hear His accents, and catch something of the fire of His Spirit, and the passion of His Faith."

The Christian Year

The Answer of the Trinity

TRINITY SUNDAY

THE subsistence of the Trinity in unity is set forth in metaphysical terms of rare force and conciseness in the Athanasian Creed. The Doctrine of the Trinity contains a mystery which it is not within the scope of the human intellect to fully comprehend, but both heart and intellect find in it a sufficient and satisfying answer to all their needs. The three Persons in the Godhead answer to three cardinal facts of human life and experience.

I. The fact of personality demands explanation. No law or chance or force can adequately account for us as we are and know ourselves to be. The farthest theories of science take us but a short distance toward the mysterious origin of our personal life. Effect must bear an accountable relation to cause. That men cannot reap grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles, is a permanent law. The fact of personality, therefore, imperatively demands personality as cause. He who made us must be a Person. Hence it is but natural and right that the deepest instincts of our Being brush aside every rationalist theory, and every purely ephemeral suggestion, as to our origin and creation, and insist that the only adequate and satisfying answer is that a personal God made us. This personal God is the first Person in the ever Blessed Trinity.

II. The sense of sin is a deep rooted and permanent quality in human life, as experience proves. It may be greatly reduced, as some contend, in these days of worldliness and strain; but it can never be wholly eradicated. Conscience is a candle which no winds, however boisterous, can extinguish. This sense of sin is a conscientious knowledge of transgression against the will of a supreme and Holy God, as well as a violation of the moral order by which alone life can be sustained. Reason, as well as conscience, demands the vindication of that order, and reconciliation to an injured and wronged deity. The deepest need of the soul is, therefore, redemption from the power of sin, and restoration to the love of the Father. No one is sufficient for these things except one who came, spotless, from the heart of the Triune Godhead. The second cardinal fact is sin, and the answer is our Blessed Saviour, the second Person in the Trinity.

III. We are conscious that, as we are constituted in our human life, by our own efforts alone, apart from unseen spiritual forces, it is impossible for us to live among ourselves, or toward God, as we ought to live. We know, indeed, that with all the help and blessings Heaven gives, we still sin and come short of the Glory of God. But the spiritual desires of our heart, the fervency of our faith, and the urgency of our prayers and devotions, are so many open avenues by which enabling spiritual forces find lodgment within us, to sanctify our life for the great glory of Heaven's Kingdom. The answer to the third Cardinal fact, the great fact of human need, is the third Person in the Trinity. God the Holy Ghost. In the strength of His Preventing Grace we are, indeed, strengthened to live the life, and to die the death for which the Father made us and the Son Redeemed us.

All true work is sacred; in all true work, were it but true hand labour, there is something of divineness.—Carlyle.