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Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

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THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF WORK

ONE of the important themes to be considered by a special commission of the second assembly of the World Council of Churches at Evanston in 1954 is ' The Christian in his Vocation ', and the Study Department of the Council initiated in 1949 an enquiry into the meaning for Christian faith of work in modern society. The firstfruits of this enquiry conducted by industrialists, sociologists and theologians working together were embodied in an essay of great wisdom and profound insight by Dr. J. H. Oldham entitled *Work in Modern Society* (*S.C.M.*, 1950). No precise attempt was made by Dr. Oldham to set forth the biblical conception of work and its significance or to enquire into its relevance to the conditions of modern technical society. It was clearly necessary for the task to be undertaken so that the requisite material might be assembled for the Bible study which the commission will have to do if its deliberations are to be fruitful. Canon Alan Richardson was invited to prepare a statement on the biblical witness to the place and meaning of work in the life of man, using the methods of enquiry which have been found useful in similar recent study enterprises. Documents have been circulated to scholars who represent different national and confessional traditions ; and in the light of the criticisms received from these sources the basic document has been redrafted and again circulated. It can thus be claimed that the essay as it now appears entitled *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* is the " outcome of a genuinely ecumenical traffic in knowledge ".[1] It has the important but limited aim of elucidating the biblical materials which deal with the subject of work after which the enquiry must be handed over " to the Christian laymen who bear actual responsibility in the modern world of industry ".[2]

The essay, following its title, attempts to set out under a number of heads the scriptural account of work and its meaning. It proceeds upon the assumption that the diversity of witness in the different strata of the biblical material is undergirded by a common understanding of " the life of man in the light of God ", which makes it possible to use the adjective ' biblical ' without doing violence to the variety of historical circumstances and personal attitudes through which witness to the divine truth has been mediated in the Bible itself. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the word doctrine should have been used in the title, for it suggests an ordered and comprehensive definition of work and its meaning of a kind that is not to be found in the Bible. Biblical thinking is not systematic in this fashion, nor is it

[1] Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* (S.C.M. Press, pp. 77, 5/-).
[2] ibid., p. 52.

addressed to questions in the shape which they have necessarily assumed for contemporary thinking. Some recognition of this incompleteness of biblical thinking, which does not detract from its supreme importance in determining Christian conceptions in every human activity, appears in the closing sections of the essay which expound the relation between work and worship. " Surely there must be some significance," observes Dr. Richardson, " in the fact that the sacramental elements in the Eucharist—unlike that in the other dominical sacrament of Baptism—are manufactured articles ".[1] But it has to be admitted that neither in the Bible nor in the Church of the early centuries was this significance perceived or discussed.

The idea of work in the scriptures has three principal references. First, there is the work which is attributed to God, the work of creation, and the governance of the whole created order. Dr. Richardson criticizes the use of the phrase ' creative work ' in much modern writing and suggests that there is no real analogy in the Bible between the work of God and the work of men. Is this because the biblical writers were so apprehensive of the dangers of idolatry in all forms of art and craftsmanship that they had little understanding of the processes of mind and hand which these required? Even in the few references there are to skill in craftsmanship, attention is concentrated upon God as the giver of skill and not upon the processes of skilled work or its products. Yet it is significant, even though it be deemed unbiblical, that men have found themselves obliged to use the words create, creative and creation about the supreme achievements of human skill and imagination.

Secondly, the work which men do arises from the way in which the world has been made. " Work is a divine ordinance for the life of man,"[2] and without work man can neither fulfil his function as a human being nor satisfy his material and spiritual needs. Thirdly, work, particularly in the New Testament, is used to describe the achievement of Christ, and then by an extension of this thought the work that men do for Christ in preaching, prayer, worship and service of the kingdom, work which strictly is the result of Christ's working in them. The New Testament presents vocation as the calling of God to repentance and faith, fellowship and service in the Church, and makes no comment upon the comparative worth of secular employments. Is this another illustration of the limitation of the biblical doctrine of work? The early Church soon found itself obliged to make such an appraisal and to decree that certain occupations were inconsistent with the Christian profession. If it is true that Paul was called to be an apostle and not called to be a tent-maker, is not the truth implicit in the biblical teaching that some men are called to be tent makers and that God wills them to struggle to understand what it means to be a Christian tent-maker and not a Christian who happens to be a tent maker?

It will be apparent that this brief essay provides plenty of material for study and discussion. Clerical study circles would be well advised to devote some time to a close examination of it both for the importance of its subject matter and for the way in which it presents an object

[1] ibid., p. 69.
[2] ibid., p. 23.

lesson in Bible study which is related to the concerns of modern life. It should serve as a wholesome correction to a good deal of loose thinking and sentimental religiosity which is passed off for the truth of the Gospel in many quarters and bring some much needed theological iron into discourses which are delivered on or near Industrial Sunday.

UNITY AND CONTINUITY

UNTOWARD events during the recent years of war brought the peoples of Norway, Denmark and Iceland into much closer touch with the people of Great Britain than ever before. The name of one ecclesiastic, Bishop Berggrav of Oslo, became known and honoured in all the churches for his courageous witness to the Christian faith and his steadfast resistance to Nazi intimidation. No doubt these facts promoted a desire to strengthen the links between the national churches of these three countries—Lutheran in confession and episcopal in order—and the Church of England. In the years before the war considerable progress had been made in establishing closer relationships with the other Scandinavian churches of Sweden, Finland, Latvia, and Estonia. Of all these churches, the Church of Sweden alone possesses an historic episcopate with unbroken succession, comparable to that which exists in the Anglican Communion. Nevertheless there is good Anglican precedent, particularly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for regarding these churches as genuine members of the church catholic and for advancing to the conclusion that relations of friendship, mutual aid and intercommunion are both possible and desirable. But such relations were never in earlier times the subject of formal ecclesiastical deliverances or of canonical regulation. Indeed, in the great period of Anglican isolation, which lasted for more than a hundred years from about the middle of the eighteenth century, they seemed to be of little importance. Events both secular and ecclesiastical in the last half century have drawn the Church of England out of its former isolation and compelled it to consider in a formal and official way its relation to other churches.

A resolution of the last Lambeth Conference[1] requested the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a committee to confer with representatives of the Churches of Norway, Denmark and Iceland " for the purpose of considering the relations of these Churches with the Anglican Communion ". In accordance with this resolution a conference met at Oslo in March, 1951, composed of representatives of the Church of England appointed by the Archbishop and representatives of each of the three Lutheran Churches. The report containing the letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury from the members of the Church of England, the minutes of the conference and two useful historical statements was published last year and merits careful attention from all who are concerned with the Churches' growth in mutual understanding.[2] The Anglicans, in addition to the customary requests that sympathetic and careful study should be given to the report by

[1] Resolution 72 (Report, p. 45).

[2] *The Church of England and the Churches of Norway, Denmark and Iceland.* Report of the Committee appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1951 (S.P.C.K., 1952, pp. 35, 4/6).

the church and that conversation with these churches should be continued, also found it possible to recommend that communicants in good standing in the Churches of Norway, Denmark and Iceland, should be made welcome at Anglican altars without any further restriction. Bishop Ramsey, who was a member of the conference, defined this proposal as the exercise of economy which did not settle the question of a formal relationship of communion between the churches.[1] The Lutheran delegates acknowledging " that when we arrive at the root of the matter you are through-and-through determined by the one and common standard of faith, the Holy Scripture, and have the full and pure Gospel and the sound Christian creed," were prepared to recommend to their authorities that Anglicans should be " welcomed fully and freely as partakers in the Lord's Supper in our churches " ; and that despite the difficulties presented by their existing regulations, Anglican clergy should be permitted to preach and administer the sacrament in Lutheran churches.[2]

The one serious difference between these historic national churches and the Church of England was and is over what is claimed in episcopal succession. The Lutherans made clear to the Anglicans that they set a high importance upon the office of bishop as chief pastor, guardian of the faith and organ of unity. Nor were they indifferent to the importance of succession in office from one bishop to another for the continuity of the life of the church. But they testified that the breach in succession by episcopal consecration in the sixteenth century was made deliberately at that time as the only way possible of rescuing the office of bishop from those corruptions by which it had been degraded in the later medieval centuries. They were not prepared to allow that in a true sense they had lost anything essential to continuity. For this reason they showed hesitation in accepting the suggestion of the participation of Anglican bishops in the consecration of their own bishops if this were to be interpreted, as undoubtedly it would be, as the conferring of true ministerial succession upon a church which had lost it.[3] It became evident in the course of discussion that such terms as continuity, succession and historic episcopate were in need of further examination and more careful exposition. What seems to emerge from the record of these proceedings, as a subject of the first importance, is the need for Anglicans seriously to consider whether true succession may not have to be manifested at times in forms which appear to contradict the principle they should serve. True order may be vindicated (as the Norwegian and Danish Lutherans hold) through a breach with tradition rather than by conformity to it. True continuity may have to be maintained in what has the appearance of discontinuity rather than in unbrokenness of form.

THE COMMON VOICE OF CHRISTIANS

THE existence of the World Council of Churches prompts the question, " Can the Churches which have thus come together and professed their intention to stay together, offer a common message and engage in common action in and for a torn and distracted world ? "

[1] ibid., p. 34. [2] ibid., pp. 32-33. [3] ibid., p. 8.

It is often assumed, by Christians as well as by a critical listening world, that a positive answer should be returned to this question. The facilities for common counsel and organization which are now available for Christians of differing traditions and nationalities might suggest that this assumption has in our time been brought within the bounds of possibility. Yet participants in the ecumenical movement, whether on the world scale or in small local groups, speedily discover that their encounter with Christ in the other man is an encounter with a Christ who, paradoxically, both does and does not seem to be the Christ they have learned to know in their own tradition. National, cultural, economic, and ecclesiastical factors have profoundly influenced, and in some measure, distorted the version of Christianity which the separated traditions profess and expound. Ecumenical encounter, if it is to be anything more than a superficial getting together of people who enjoy moving across accepted denominational barriers, must inaugurate a process of critical questioning and self-examination in all the Churches. The demand for a common message, for one Christian voice capable of giving a clear definition of Christian duty, may be a false demand and the Churches, in their struggle to meet it, may find that what is given them to say is neither what they would wish to say, nor what the world hopes to hear. Churches are servants of the Word and not masters of their message.

The second assembly of the World Council to be convened in America in 1954, will be obliged to grapple with this problem in its attempt to define the meaning of hope at a moment in history when hopelessness seems to be the only temper possible in face of the lowering aspect of human affairs. Bishop Newbiggin of South India has recently[1] defined the message of the Churches to the world as a word which comes from beyond the boundary of the world " concerning One Who died and rose again and will come to judge the quick and the dead. It does not affirm one trend in world history as against others but brings the whole of human life under judgment and mercy. It deals with issues vaster even than the survival of civilization on this planet ".[2] It is the proclamation in accents of the twentieth century of the primitive Christian confession, " Jesus Christ is Lord ".

It follows that the true emphasis is upon what Churches must seek to do together, and in thus doing will be manifested their common witness to the world. First must come the renewal of their missionary endeavour to offer Christ to every man. Secondly, there must follow the unceasing struggle to make the unity which they possess in Christ visible and effective, not in order to become a pressure group of unprecedented size and importance in world history, but that the Gospel may be interpreted in all its fullness, free from the distortions of national or sectional interests. Thirdly, in shared experience and united prayer, realistic help must be given to ordinary Church members to enable them both to perceive and know what is the will of God for them in home and job, in industry and politics, and so to offer their obedience to the Lord " who is at the right hand of the Father, who shall come again to judge, and whose kingdom shall have no end ".

[1] *Theology To-day*, Vol. IX, No. 4, January, 1953, pp. 512-518.
[2] ibid.

LANGUAGE UNDERSTANDED OF THE PEOPLE

THE appearance of a new English version of the Four Gospels amongst the Penguin Classics is a significant event in the publishing world, and affords another striking illustration of the determination of biblical scholars in this generation that the ordinary man shall have the opportunity of reading the Word of God in an idiom that he can understand. The work of translation can never stand still, for improvements in the texts to be translated and a better understanding of the original languages which have come about through years of scholarly toil are matched by changes in the language into which the translation is to be made. The form in which Bibles are generally produced and the imposition upon the text of a scheme of chapters and verses which is no part of the original writing can easily confirm the impression made by the archaic language of the King James' Version that the book belongs to a world which has long since passed away. It once had a living message to give but it now bears all the marks of being 'dated'. It is difficult for Christians who have been brought up to revere the Bible in its traditional form to realise how these features of it hinder the acceptance of its message in so many minds. To handle a Bible or New Testament which in its form is identical with other books and in its language uses the words and expressions of familiar contemporary speech is to realize the relevance of the biblical message to modern conditions. The well instructed Christian will often find his mind stimulated and his conscience pricked by a modern version when his familiarity with the majestic cadences of the Authorized Version has blunted his spiritual perceptions.

The question still remains whether any of these new versions which are of this age and not of the ages, should be brought into regular use in public worship. An American writer who is not unfamiliar with the American Revised Version has observed that "the King James' Version is the only English version that is entirely worthy of the Church and its liturgy. The King James' Bible stands in its own right as great literature. Moreover it now has over three hundred years of usage in its favour. It provides, as perhaps does nothing else in the English world, a sense of the unity and continuity of the Christian life and of our part in that uninterrupted tradition. Its words and phrases are vocal with ecumenical significance. It speaks to us in the language of the ages".[1] Perhaps it is important to realize that there is a mystery in the Word of God which can never be fully realized. Perhaps archaic language can make men realize that here is truth to which they must submit and not truth which they can grasp without great difficulty and of which they may be tempted to think they are the masters.

ALTERIS ORBIS PAPA

THE solemn words of greeting with which Pope Urban II acclaimed Anselm Archbishop of Canterbury as the patriarch of another world were destined to manifest a strange prophetic quality in later

[1] Scott Francis Brenner, *The Way of Worship* (New York, 1944), p. 150. Cf. *The Nature and Purpose of the Gospels*, R. V. G. Tasker, p. 109, "its retention (i.e., the Authorized Version) in worship helps to emphasize the bridge that must be crossed before we can 'apply the gospel to modern life'".

centuries. The archbishopric of Canterbury has become one of the three or four most important and influential offices in the whole of Christendom. Its importance was already assured before the reformation. After the rupture with Rome, the archbishop retained his ancient dignity as the first of the king's subjects and the counsellor to whom the monarch should especially resort for guidance and admonition in the fulfilment of his responsible charge. To this position was added the prestige which flowed from the ecclesiastical headship of a national church which had successfully vindicated its independence. In the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, ancient privilege and constant association with representatives of the ruling classes emphasized the position of the Archbishop as an officer of state, sometimes at the expense of his spiritual position. The successors of the twelfth century patriarch of another world had become prince-bishops, living in dignified state.

The last of these prince-archbishops, William Howley, died in 1848 when disorders at home and revolutions abroad signified the beginnings of a new order in church as well as state. The half century which passed between his death and the death of Queen Victoria, witnessed the transformation of English life in every aspect. Population rose from fourteen millions to over thirty-two millions, a national system of education had been instituted, while by its early and rapid industrialization the country had achieved a supremacy in the world and a prosperity beyond all dreams. Archbishops Tait and Benson, successive holders of the primacy between 1868 and 1896, laboured not without success to awaken the Church of England to the opportunities and responsibilities of a new order. The volume of work and range of influence of the Archbishop was greatly enlarged during this quarter of a century.

The death of Queen Victoria in 1901 was generally felt to mark the close of an epoch in English history. To it has succeeded half a century of turmoil and strife in which most of the old landmarks have been obliterated and the former spirit of optimism quenched. It has been a period of constantly increasing difficulties for the church. For more than forty years of this period the office of Archbishop of Canterbury was held by three great churchmen of outstanding ability, Randall Davidson, Cosmo Lang, and William Temple, about each of whom a notable biography has been written. The life of Davidson was written by the Bishop of Chichester, who succeeded in producing a masterly work of equal interest to the general reader and to the historian. The publication last year of the third edition of this book,[1] in itself a striking tribute as well to the skill of the biographer as to the interest of the subject, provided Bishop Bell with the opportunity to write a new preface in which he offers some reflections " on the development of the office of Archbishop of Canterbury " between the enthronement of Davidson in February, 1903, and the death of Temple in the autumn of 1944.[2]

These reflections concern themselves with four aspects of the work

[1] *Randall Davidson : Archbishop of Canterbury*, G. K. A. Bell (3rd Ed., O.U.P., 1952, 35/-, pp. xxxvi + 1442).

[2] ibid., pp. v-xviii.

and influence of a primate: political and national, ecclesiastical, ecumenical, and personal. It has been a period in which with the arrival of democracy general interest in Church affairs in the nation has given place to a widespread preoccupation with social and international problems, with a consequent effect upon the way in which an archbishop could exert influence in places where decisions are made. This may be illustrated by the contrast between Davidson, who was most assiduous in his attendance in the Lords, gaining the reputation of being "a House of Lords man" because he regarded it as the proper place in which the Primate of All England should appeal to the conscience of the nation, and Temple, who treated its sessions as of secondary importance in his programme of engagements and preferred to make the platform, the wireless, or the press the vehicle of his views on secular affairs. The pace of public life has quickened and the pressure of affairs has so greatly increased since the days when Davidson was on intimate terms with prime ministers and in many private discussions able to exert some influence on national policy as well as in church affairs. The link between primate and prime minister of recent years has been very much less close than in the early years of this century, so that increasingly the influence of the archbishop in the nation has now to be exerted in quite new ways in which the personal qualities of the holder of the office will count for more and more.

The other aspect of the office of archbishop to which Bishop Bell directs attention is the immense burden of affairs which inevitably rests upon the holder. The great complexity of ecclesiastical as well as national business with which the archbishop must deal has led some people to suggest the need of a headquarters staff to assist him in his work. This is no new suggestion, for Archbishop Benson toyed with the idea of a 'cardinalate' as long ago as 1887. But the truth is, as Archbishop Lang once remarked, "the job is really impossible for one man, yet only one man can do it". The need to lighten the burden is obvious, so that time for leisured counsel and thought may be secured; yet no plan "which is not initiated or at least heartily welcomed by the Archbishop of Canterbury of the day"[1] can hope to succeed.

[1] ibid., p. xviii.