

FACULTY SUGGESTS PERMISSIVE CREEDS

Cambridge Episcopal Theological School Plans to End Dispute Over Virgin Birth.

LETTER SENT TO ALUMNI

Church Made the Creeds and is Greater Than the Creeds, Says Modernist Document.

Special to The New York Times.

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Jan. 5.—A suggestion that the Protestant Episcopal Church make the use of its creeds, which include an affirmation of belief in the virgin birth, permissive instead of obligatory is made in a letter addressed by the Faculty of the Episcopal Theological School of this city to its alumni, which was made public today. Such action, the letter adds, might lead to the "development of alternative forms to be tested by patient experience," and bring about "greater constitutional liberty and more adequate terms, in which to test and express discipleship."

The letter is signed by Dean Henry Bradford Washburn and Drs. Max Kellner, Samuel McComb, William H. P. Hatch, James Arthur Muller, James Thayer Addison, Norman Burdett Nash and Angus Dun, all the members of the Faculty except Dr. Edward Staples Brown, who is in Shanghai, China. The alumni of the school, one of the leading Protestant Episcopal seminaries, include many prominent clergymen of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

The letter was considered distinctly a Modernist document. Considered particularly significant was the assertion that the Church had made, and was greater than, its creeds, and that the present was not the first time that it had been confronted with changes in its belief.

Discussing the recent pastoral letter of the House of Bishops, the letter of the Faculty expresses confidence that the Bishops have tried earnestly to allay the fears of those who believe that the faith of the Church is in danger, but voices regret that it should have cast suspicion upon the right of some members of the Church to full membership.

Evidence Two-Sided.

"We must respectfully dissent from the statement in the pastoral that objections to the historicity of the virgin birth have been abundantly dealt with by the best scholarship of the day" the letter continues. "Reverently recognizing its place in the Gospel record and in the tradition of the Church, it is our judgment that the historical evidence is emphatically two-sided. For many, probably for most, of the laity and clergy of this Church, belief in the virgin birth is intimately bound up with faith in Christ and the incarnation, and is considered essential to a true appreciation of our Lord. Under such circumstances careless and confident denial would be both dogmatic and inconsiderate. The doubts, however, have been raised by a God-fearing search for truth in history and nature, and cannot be repressed by any official action or by any will to obey. It must be recognized that many honest men and women within the Church do not find belief in the virgin birth essential to their whole-hearted faith in Christ and in the incarnation. As such we hold a place within this branch of the Church of Christ.

"The Church is greater than the creeds. The central faith in God as He is found in Christ, upon which the Church is built, is not destroyed or diminished by doubts concerning the method of Christ's birth, of His return to God or of His future judgment. The Church made the creeds. The creeds did not make the Church. The Church was and is a fellowship issuing from the love and power of Christ which has shaped the creeds for its own purposes. What the Church has made it can remake. Tradition is still in the making; the inner life of the Church is still forcing itself to expression. We do not find the creeds perfectly adequate as expressions of Christian allegiance, as summaries of the Christian view of life, or as tests of discipleship. To leave the Church because of dissatisfaction with clauses in the creed would be to put the creeds above Christ and His Church, and to pursue a fruitless sectarianism.

Not the First Change.

"This is not the first time the Church has been confronted with changes in its belief, nor the first time it has allowed freedom of interpretation, nor the first time violence seems to have been done to its formularies. The Reformation brought changes in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, a doctrine which had been established for centuries and which men claimed was found in the Scriptures. The last fifty years have brought changes in the views of the Bible, a book which has been regarded as the inerrant Word of God from the first centuries until modern times.

"In any society, civil or religious, when the formularies in their original intention have ceased to represent the mind of the society or of a large section of it, the alternatives to literal adherence or withdrawal are interpretation and restatement. In the case of the creeds interpretation is not an attempt to explain away plain historical meanings, but a discovery, in the only language now authorized by the Church, of the underlying religious meaning. We believe that a large proportion of the Church now finds itself forced to this expedient in the use of various parts of our formularies. We agree with the Bishops that such use of language involves serious risk.

"All who find themselves forced to the expedient of interpretation are under obligation to work for greater constitutional liberty and for more adequate terms in which to test and express discipleship. Such liberty might be secured by making the use of the creeds permissive instead of obligatory, and in the development of alternative forms to be tested by patient experience.

"A freedom of this kind would secure the effective use of the creeds by those for whom they rightly have so great religious value without compelling others to whom they present difficulties to subscribe to them in detail or to repeat them on practically every occasion of public worship. As the Church throughout the major part of its experience has allowed wide latitude in its forms of liturgical expression, it is possible that it may become stronger and still more catholic if its congregations are allowed a generous range of liturgical freedom."

SEE A SWING TO PLATON.

Supporters of Russian Metropolitan Say Strength is Growing.

A great majority of the members of the Russian Orthodox Church in America are supporting Metropolitan Platon against the attempt of Archbishop John Kedrovsky to replace him and take possession of 250 churches in this country on authority alleged to have been sent him from Russia, it was asserted yesterday in a statement in behalf of Metropolitan Platon. It was said that 132 churches already had declared their support.

Bishops who have announced that they will stand with Metropolitan Platon and against Archbishop Kedrovsky are Archbishop Alexander of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Panteleimon, representative of the Patriarch of Jerusalem; Archbishop Afimios of Brooklyn, Bishop Stephen of Pittsburgh, Bishop Theophilus of Chicago, Archbishop Mandary of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Archbishop Benjamin, Administrator of the Russian churches in Canada.