

FOREWORD

There are people of somewhat serious intent who, looking for a spiritual home, make inquiry about the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. Very often they ask rather simplistic questions and expect easy answers - with the attitude that one choice or another will not really make all that difference. Sometimes clergy and other people connected with the church, because invited to do so, give only simplistic response. The rapid rise of secularism and materialism, and the growing marginalization of the institutional church pushes sound doctrine and the truth and promise of the Gospel into an arid and vapid context. Yet, at the same time there hastens a growing interest and response to several systems of adult education and adult training for lay ministry in the Episcopal Church. One- to three-year night and weekend courses explore the faith and its many facets and implications.

Many university and college chaplains, alert to this response, do not hesitate to recommend and use the same intensity of commitment, study, and mental discipline to prepare adults for baptism or church membership as would be required for college degree studies. An established **catechumenate** sets the content and pace of studies.

The author of this book is so committed. The Rev. Donald Owens has been chaplain of Saint Anselm Canterbury Association at the University of Oklahoma in Norman for 19 years. He has built patiently and wisely on the positive experience of competent predecessors. Based upon his own experience and heartened by the response from students, he has gradually developed a teaching method and a corpus of studies, and this outline of the Faith. The Table of Contents lists 10 chapters requiring 14 lectures. The book itself will prove very useful beyond the lecture method, and will provide sound answers to an inquirer. Every chapter has insight and depth and is well written. Back of the discipline of so thorough a study stands discipleship-a call to each student from Jesus of Nazareth, God Incarnate, Messiah, Savior, and Lord of His Church. His call is two-fold: *Come. Come follow me* and *Go, go into the world*, backed by a promise: *I am with you always to the ages of ages*. That promise has been kept and will be kept by the power of the Holy Spirit as Christians discover ministry and pursue it.

A glance at the ten topics presented here shows the promise evident in all of them.

The first chapter outlining the foundations of the religion of Israel and of the Christian Church reveals complicated ethnic and national impact. The religion of the Law and the Prophets makes way for Covenant and for monotheism. The impact of Christ-Messiah ushers in a new age, a challenge to universal response. The introduction to the Bible is a complicated and honest look at the evolution, collection and meaning of the textual material.

General church history and English church history tell us much of who we are and where we have been-for better or for worse-including the glory of world mission and building universities, chaplaincies,

and hospitals wrapped in British colonialism, and the destruction of native cultures.

The introduction to the Eucharist places the Breaking of Bread at the center of primitive and contemporary Christian worship. Holy Baptism is presented as a full initiatory rite, and the Baptismal Covenant a description of our relationship to God, to one another, and to humankind, with an accent on penitence, conversion, ministry, and the exercise of forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and justice. The Great Vigil of Easter is a mighty summary of deliverance Gospel, death to life, a *total* Catholic liturgy. Other chapters present sound material well written and clear in meaning.

Discussion of Christianity's seven General or Ecumenical Councils is important because the human mind, functioning as it does, wonders, experiments, and sometimes embraces error and ever dangerous conclusions in the 20th century as in earlier days. Bad choices of thought patterns do damage. A vacuum in theological understanding often invites weird "isms," and dangerous commitments and practices. These make up the Appendices B, while Appendices A provides a list of the canons of the Bible.

The Glossary, Appendices, and Index help make this book a useable study for the private reader.

There is a further implication in setting forth this basic venture in Christian study. A student who makes a suitable response to most of this material can very well apply the same habit and response to an ever richer and more inclusive appreciation of the Christian impact upon human affairs, and add his or her individual commitment to true worship of God, and service to people.

During the last 90 years a rich deposit of long lost liturgical material, texts and forms for worship has been discovered (or re-discovered). These enrichments push the center of liturgical revisions and enrichment to a period including the first seven centuries, as over and against previous weight of Medieval influence. Thus new revisions are really much older than Prayer Book forms gathered into the First Book of Common Prayer of 1549 by Thomas Cranmer and repeated in subsequent revisions of the Prayer Book until 1979. This authentic old material was put to use in this latest (1979) revision. Much of this revision has ecumenical influence through the use of English texts and translations for both Catholic and Protestant worship.

This outline provides a sound basis for lectures by chaplains and parish priests, and a valuable textbook for serious and mature seekers for Christ and his church.

The Rt. Rev. W.R. Chilton Powell Advent 1994