

**FREEDOM IN THE CHURCH OR THE
DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, AS THE LORD
HATH COMMANDED,
AND AS THIS CHURCH HATH RECEIVED
THE SAME ACCORDING TO THE
COMMANDMENTS OF GOD**

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Freedom in the Church or The doctrine of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church hath received the same according to the Commandments of God by Alexander V. G. Allen

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FREEDOM IN THE CHURCH

OR

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

AS THE LORD HATH COMMANDED, AND AS
THIS CHURCH HATH RECEIVED THE
SAME ACCORDING TO THE
COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

BY

ALEXANDER V. G. ALLEN

PROFESSOR IN THE EPISCOPAL THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL IN CAMBRIDGE;
D. D. KENTON, HARVARD, AND YALE; AUTHOR OF "CONTINUITY
OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT"; "CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS";
"LIFE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS"; "LIFE OF
PHILLIPS BROOKS"; ETC.

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PREFACE

THE situation in the American Episcopal Church calls for serious consideration in the interests of theology and of true religion. There are many issues at stake. Honesty in the recitation of the Creed is by no means the only question. Deeper motives lie beneath the present disturbance than can be measured by the uncritical observer. No amount of practice in ethical theorizing qualifies for judgment on the complicated issues of religion. For religion constitutes a department of life by itself, independent of science, or ethics, or philosophy. There is danger that the cause of religious freedom and of freedom of inquiry in theology may be retarded indefinitely unless the emphasis be again placed upon freedom, the one predominant motive of the Reformation in the sixteenth century which gave us the Book of Common Prayer. The desire for freedom, the determination to guard the liberty of both

clergy and laity then manifested was only another form of the demand of Magna Charta, "Libera sit ecclesia Anglicana." Other words which expressed the purpose of the Reformers and were often quoted were those of St. Paul, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free;" and the words which follow, "And be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." Other kindred words come from our Lord Himself, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free, and if the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed." This freedom is called in question when an interpretation is placed upon the vows of the Ordinal, foreign to their original intent, as if they were a business contract with a corporation in accordance with whose terms the clergy resign their freedom in Christ for certain material considerations, instead of a guarantee of Christian freedom, as in the intention of the Reformers they were meant to be.

The difficulty about the Virgin-birth is but a symptom of a profounder disturbance which threatens to shift the base on which the Church was restored to its pristine purity at the Reformation. It is a difficulty not wholly created by the "higher criticism" or

engendered solely by scientific distrust of the miraculous. An effort has been made in the following paper to trace the difficulty to its remoter source in the history of theology in the ancient Church. It was through misinterpretation of the Virgin-birth and the undue prominence assigned to it that the transition was made to the sterile form of Byzantine Christianity or to the impotency of the Latin Church in the ages preceding the Reformation.

There is no denial in this treatise of the Virgin-birth. It is accepted as the miraculous or supernatural mode by which God became incarnate in Christ, as the resurrection and the empty tomb mark the exodus of Christ from the world. But criticism is directed against the misinterpretation of the Gospel of the Infancy or against arguments used for its support which not only go beyond God's Word written, but give to it a prominence which changes the perspective of the Christian faith as revealed in Scripture. The Apostles' Creed needs to be supplemented by the postulate of the larger faith in the primary and essential importance of the life of Christ, and not only of His birth and passion, — His life and character, His deeds and teaching; in other words, the historical Christ portrayed

for us in the Gospels. Out of this study is now arising a new conviction in the Divine leadership of Christ and of His mission to subdue the world unto Himself.

Attention needs to be called anew, and constantly called, to the distinctive character of the Anglican Church as differing fundamentally from the Roman Church on the one hand, and from the churches of Puritan descent on the other. Hence the preliminary chapter of this treatise is devoted to an effort describing the ruling ideas of the Church of England as incorporated in the Book of Common Prayer. The pressure of Puritan opinion and prejudice is in America so great and widely diffused and its attitude tacitly assumed to be identical with Christianity itself, that the Anglican Church has been and is at a disadvantage, and some of its cardinal truths regarded as no better than a baptized Paganism. The Church, also, suffers from being regarded as a diluted form of Romanism. It is neither one nor the other. Romanism and Puritanism are more closely related in their deeper spirit to each other than is the Anglican Church related to either.

A recent English writer has given the following hopeful estimate of Anglicanism and

its possibilities, and his words may apply to the American Episcopal Church as well:—

“It [the Church of England] can go forth courageously and face the world as it is, believing that God’s revelation of Himself once made in the person of Christ Jesus is being continually explained to man by that progressive revelation of God’s purpose which is continually being made by the Divine Government of the world. Steadfast in its hold on the faith and on the Sacraments by its unbroken link with the past, it exists for the maintenance of God’s truth and its application to the needs of man, not for the purpose of upholding its own power. A Church fitted for free men, training them in knowledge and in reverence alike; disentangling the spirit from the form, because of its close contact with sons who love their mother and frankly speak out their minds; not wandering among formulæ, however beautiful, which have lost their meaning; finding room increasingly for every form of devotional life, but training its graces into close connection with men’s endeavors and