

THE GUILD OF SCHOLARS
in the Episcopal Church

*A Statement of Its Organization,
History, Purpose, and Activities*

With a Foreword by
THE PRESIDING BISHOP

NEW YORK

The Guild of Scholars in the Episcopal Church

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BASIC OBJECTIVES

AT THE request of the Executive Committee, a statement of the Basic Objectives of the Guild was prepared by Mr. Theodore M. Greene in the spring of 1940. After being circulated among the members it was revised according to suggestions which they submitted, and in its present form was presented to the House of Bishops at General Convention. It may therefore be regarded as a sort of highest common denominator of the views of our members. There is nothing sacrosanct about it, however, and its phraseology, though not its fundamental ideas, may be further revised at our next conference.

For the present, those who would prefer an even more explicit declaration of our beliefs are assured that the Guild stands firmly committed to the view that the Anglican Communion is an authentic branch of the one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. This conception is absolutely central in our religious thinking. To affirm this doctrine and its implications for Christian theology, Christian worship, and Christian conduct is essential to our program. Opposing both the narrow exclusiveness of ecclesiastical faction and the spurious "breadth" of sentimental latitudi-

narianism, we stand for the catholicism of the entire Episcopal Church. This policy, firmly uniting scholars who in less essential respects exhibit various tones and hues of Churchmanship, finds expression in these statements.

I. The Vocation of the Christian Scholar and Teacher

HISTORIC Christianity has always expressed itself in three essential ways: in worship, in doctrine, and in conduct. Each of these is of major importance: the act of worship, as the Christian's individual and corporate communion with Deity; doctrine, both historical and systematic, as the Christian's conceptual articulation of his beliefs; conduct, as the Christian's attempt to exemplify the Christian spirit in his daily life. The health and power of the Church depends today, as it has in the past, upon the expressiveness and vitality of its forms of worship, the clarity and cogency of its doctrine, and the effectiveness of the Gospel in motivating and directing human conduct.

It goes without saying that both the clergy and the laity have distinctive contributions to make to the corporate life of the Church in each of these three fields. The responsibility of the clergy is partly liturgical and sacramental, partly theological and homiletic, and partly ethical. The corporate responsibility of the laity is correspondingly diverse. All Christian laymen are under obligation to participate in corporate worship and to exemplify Christian principles in their daily conduct. The layman is also under obligation to articulate his beliefs theologically to the best of his ability. For in the absence of such articulation, worship and conduct must both fail to express the spirit and temper of the

Christian faith. The clergy must continue to provide leadership in this theological domain. But it is precisely at this intellectual level that scholars and teachers among the laity have a unique responsibility and opportunity.

The distinctive task of the lay Christian scholar is to help to clarify the central tenets of historic Christianity, as embodied most adequately in the Nicene Creed, and to exhibit the relation of the secular and the religious to one another. It is his task to demonstrate the relevance of Christian doctrine to secular life and pursuits; it is equally his task to demonstrate the contribution of secular achievement to the larger Christian enterprise. He should, as scholar and teacher, ensure the appropriate recognition by the secular mind of the nature and import of the Christian faith; he also should assist the Christian theologian to do the fullest justice to the work of the secular intellect, both for its own sake and as contributing, directly or indirectly, to Christian thought and experience.

II. The Teaching and Preaching of Christianity on the Academic Campus

WE should accordingly apply ourselves resolutely to the attainment of these objectives in the following ways:

1. We should attempt to promote among our academic colleagues a far greater realization than exists at present that a knowledge of historic Christianity—as an event, a doctrine, and a tradition of corporate worship—constitutes a vital part of the intellectual and cultural equipment of every genuinely educated person, irrespective of his religious beliefs or disbeliefs.

This realization should express itself in the provision of as adequate an opportunity for the study of historic Christianity in our colleges and universities as is now provided for the study of other aspects, *e.g.*, the scientific, artistic, literary, philosophical, etc., of our cultural heritage.

Where courses in religion are already offered, we should do everything in our power to ensure the undiluted and sympathetic presentation of the Christian tradition, whatever other religious faiths are studied and whatever variants from, and criticisms of, the basic tenets of Christianity are also presented. Courses in Christianity should be taught by scholars whose own religious beliefs enable them to exhibit the reasonableness and the power of Christianity without distortion or prejudice.

2. We should impress on college preachers and chaplains the imperative need today for a definite and affirmative proclamation of the historic Christian faith. Only thus, we believe, can the Christian Gospel be effectively presented to undergraduates, and only thus, can their spiritual need, of which they are becoming increasingly aware, be satisfied.

3. We should recognize the right and duty of Christian teachers in the secular disciplines to discover and make clear, on all appropriate occasions, the relevance of Christianity to their several subjects of instruction. If propaganda be defined as the dogmatic assertion of a single point of view and the deliberate or involuntary suppression or distortion of alternative points of view, we condemn all propaganda, whether religious or secular, as fundamentally incompatible with the academic spirit. And if evangelism be

defined as the endeavor to inculcate belief through persuasion, as opposed to honest, competent, and forceful presentation, we believe that evangelism, whether religious or secular, has no place in a lecture room or a class room. As scholars, we are committed to the impartial, open-minded, and critical search for truth in all its forms; and, as teachers, we conceive it our duty to encourage at all times the student's critical exploration and evaluation of every academic subject. It is for this very reason that the religious, and, more specifically, the Christian point of view should be presented to the student on all appropriate occasions, since otherwise a predominantly secular emphasis, frequently anti-religious and anti-Christian, must result in a serious distortion of the student's total perspective. Our academic goal is enlightenment, and true enlightenment is precluded whenever the approach to a subject with religious or Christian implications is exclusively secular, or, as frequently happens, explicitly anti-religious.

Academic objectivity, in the true sense of the term, involves a clear recognition of the basic assumptions and fundamental principles of interpretation. Whatever his subject matter, a scholar cannot avoid making certain basic assumptions, though he may do so inadvertently, and these assumptions inevitably reflect his ultimate beliefs concerning reality and our knowledge of it. It is the duty of the scholar and teacher to make explicit these ultimate beliefs and to exhibit them to his readers and pupils. If by academic objectivity were meant the absence of all belief and commitment, such objectivity would be unattainable, and all attempts to achieve it would be disastrous because they

would involve the blurring of significant distinctions and the exclusion of all evaluations. True academic objectivity involves the clear recognition and honest presentation of the major premises and basic normative principles requisite to any coherent interpretation of any subject matter. The Christian teacher and scholar is therefore as free, indeed, as obligated, as any other teacher and scholar to indicate his Christian beliefs whenever, and to the extent to which, these beliefs are relevant to his interpretation of the subject-matter under investigation.

III. *The Importance of Secular Pursuits*

THOUGH our prime obligation in a secular world is to urge the priority of the Christian Faith, it is also our duty to promote, especially in the Christian community, due recognition of man's secular and humanistic achievements. Bearing in mind that it is only within the general framework of Christianity that secular activities can achieve genuine importance, we believe it to be part of our Christian task to foster the secular pursuit of truth in every field and to cooperate in all other constructive humanistic activities. The distinctive character and value of secular truths and humanistic achievements merit analysis and enjoyment for their own sake, and only in proportion as they are understood and fostered can they be made to contribute as richly as possible to Christian doctrine, worship, and conduct. We would emphatically deny the complete autonomy or self-sufficiency of the secular; we do not believe that the human can get along without the superhuman or that man can achieve the good life by his own unaided efforts, at however

exalted a cultural plane. But we do acknowledge the importance of secular endeavor and we conceive it to be our duty, as Christian teachers and scholars, to promote the understanding and support of such endeavors, particularly within the fields of our several major academic interests.

IV. *Conclusion*

THE task envisaged here is perennial, but it is peculiarly urgent today. There is a desperate need for spiritual leadership, and especially in the academic world. We are therefore determined to make a resolute effort, both individually and collectively, to preserve and clarify the profile of historic Christianity in our own thinking, writing, and teaching. To do so we must better acquaint ourselves with responsible work in the several fields of Christian scholarship, and we cordially invite scholars in our theological seminaries to assist us in this connection. We also are resolved to do everything in our power to promote constructive secular activities within the general fabric of Christianity and to relate, and to cause to coalesce in fuller experience the secular and the religious without losing the distinctions between them and with due recognition of the ultimate priority of the Christian Faith.