

# The 'Doctrinal Stance' of NCTM

The published statements of NCTM regarding its 'Doctrinal Stance' are as follows:

The 'Objects' outlined in the Inaugural Meeting Minutes and the Constitution make it clear that NCPI–NCTM believe in the authority of Scripture for faith and practice. They therefore hold to the historic Creeds of the Church known as Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian. Their doctrine is biblical and Reformed, without prejudice to the movements of God's Spirit which come at times of revival and renewal of the Church. Whilst recognising these and wishing to share in them as they follow the truth, they do not feel bound to accept theological rationalisations of any movement or group. They believe that a full-orbed theology must be Trinitarian, and that while theology is not the truth itself, it can deeply affect—for good or not—the approach of Man to truth, that is, to God himself.

We would think that this statement is sufficiently clear in itself, especially as it outlines the way in which the teaching of NCTM stands in the succession of apostolic doctrine as understood by, say, the Apostles' Creed. At the same time we acknowledge that, while most believers who call themselves 'Evangelical' would no doubt agree with the principles set out in the statement, not all would be in agreement when discussing the doctrinal priorities which such submission to the authority of Scriptures would seem to evoke. In other words, for all of us, there are some elements of revealed truth which we regard as basic and others, no less authoritative, which are subsidiary in the way in which we set priorities in ministry.

Asked the question, 'If you were permitted to preach one more "sermon", what would you want to say?' Geoffrey Bingham replied that he would preach about the Cross of Christ, which he has repeatedly clarified as 'preaching the Cross', that is, preaching it as the present power of God rather than merely preaching information about what God has done or might do. The other members of the NCTM team, coming as they do from many denominations and expressions of 'churchmanship' would all concur with that response. They would willingly argue that it is the work of the Cross which has come to them and which, in bringing them total forgiveness of sins, has brought them into the intimacy with the Godhead which is fundamental to being in Christ.

What must be stated is that a biblical understanding of the Cross of Christ cannot be had apart from a full view of 'the whole counsel of God', a phrase which implies more than an agglomeration of doctrines; rather it implies the whole revelation of God as it has come to us in the Scriptures and in particular as that revelation shows us the plan and purpose of God for the whole creation.

No theological scheme can be definitive; each scheme can only be a reflection on the truth, which is God himself in his revelation. However, while recognising this, the members of NCTM would generally see that the doctrine of the Trinity is determinative for our understanding of God, both in his eternal being and in his works in history. They would, likewise, acknowledge that the Trinitarian God has revealed himself first as the Creator and then as the God whose purpose in history is to bring his creation to its, that

is, *his* goal. To that extent, the doctrine which is known as ‘eschatology’ is regarded as indispensable from the very beginning.

The books of the Old Testament are, then, a revelation of the purpose of God to renew his creation and of his choice to do so through Israel, though always with all the nations of the world in view. The Cross of Christ is the Cross of the Messiah of Israel, by which the sins of the whole world are taken away. As such, desire to ‘preach the Cross’ is not merely with some immediate benefit in view, although that would be undoubted, but because it is through the vicarious and substitutionary atonement that the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh and the church, the Bride of Christ, is first brought into being and then brought to the climax of history.

In all this, NCTM seeks to present the whole counsel of God as revealed in what is known as ‘Salvation History’ and to urge that God can never be known apart from that history. While insisting that history is the story of the acts of God, we would always be endeavouring (i) to live in constant intimacy with the Triune God who has definitively revealed himself in the Scriptures and who yet remains true to his plan and purpose, and (ii) to proclaim the Cross of Christ as the power of God to bring the Bride of Christ to the goal he has established.

It is within this overall framework that we would see the many other facets of Christian doctrine finding their place. This would not imply that any aspect of the revelation of God is of greater or lesser importance, since God is one and all things relate to his self-revelation, but it does imply a certain organisation which, again, all Christians have to some extent.

As stated above, NCTM holds unswervingly to the authority of the Scriptures, but this should not be taken to mean that they either worship the Scriptures or understand the Word of God to be limited to them. The Scriptures are the definitive and authoritative revelation of God but we assert that God is free, and does indeed continue, to speak; apart from his speaking, all human communication of the revealed truths of Scripture would be and is ineffective. It is this which lies behind the statements made elsewhere that the church born at Pentecost was brought into ‘prophetic intimacy’ with the Triune God and that its passion to proclaim Christ did not derive from any legal constraint but from the living Word himself. In order to ensure that what is proclaimed is indeed the word of God, NCTM is always willing to have its preaching and teaching subjected to the scrutiny of the written word. From that position, NCTM does not stand critically over against any person or group but rejoices when the truth as revealed in Scripture is proclaimed.

Furthermore, NCTM would never seek to disenfranchise any person or group simply on the basis of differing doctrinal emphases. Plainly where there has been a departure from the truth of Scripture we are distressed but, at the same time, we do not attempt to be the conscience of the world, believing instead that our commission is to proclaim the truth as it is in Christ and to trust God to vindicate himself as and when he chooses.

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