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# John Cosin.

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**T**HE Church of England which I honour and reverence above all the other Churches of the world, for she bears upon her, more signally than any other that I know does, the marks of Christ which, when all is done, will be our greatest glory." ²

Such was the definite testimony which one of the most outstanding churchmen of the seventeenth century made in 1656 when he was in exile for his faith in his Mother Church. Its author—John Cosin—was the eldest son of a wealthy tradesman of Norwich, where he was born on November 30th, 1595. Both his parents were devout churchpeople and they educated him at the local Grammar School. From there, at the early age of fourteen, he went up to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he showed such diligence and ability in his studies that he was elected a Fellow of his College. Such a promising student attracted the notice of Bishops Overall and Andrewes, and although only twenty he was appointed by Overall both as Secretary and Librarian at Lichfield. He was a diligent reader and collector of books and by his great industry he soon won the esteem and full confidence of his Patron, Overall, who as Professor of Divinity at Cambridge had done much to counteract the strong Calvinistic teaching which prevailed there, and who exercised a profound influence over young Cosin, who always affectionately referred to him as his "lord and master." But Overall died in 1619, and in 1624 Cosin became Domestic Chaplain to Richard Neile, Bishop of Durham. From this time his promotion was rapid. The same year he received a prebendal stall at Durham and in 1625, before he was thirty, he was appointed Rector of Brancepeth and Archdeacon of East Riding. The next year he married Frances Blakiston, daughter of a brother prebendary, who died in 1643. He secured his D.D. in 1628.

He was very active in his Archidiaconal Visitations in enforcing discipline on the clergy, and he soon discovered great laxity in the Church services and life. He found many clergy who were ministering without episcopal ordination. Others had anticipated the very prevalent modern custom (or "irregularity") of omitting nearly all the opening Exhortation, and also chose what psalms and lessons they desired. Fully aware of Puritan prejudices, Cosin made special inquiry about the use of the Sign of the Cross in Baptism and also whether the surplice was always worn for weddings, funerals and Holy Communion—an incidental evidence of Cosin's practical interpretation of the requirements of Elizabeth's 1559 "Ornaments Rubric" regarding Eucharistic vestments!

Although Puritanism was strong at this time, there was also a definite reaction towards Popery, influenced largely by the King's marriage to a Romanist Princess—Henrietta Maria of France. The frequent ornate Roman services in the Queen's Chapel provoked adverse criticism of the simpler English rites, and so the King was anxious to make the Anglican Service as attractive as possible. In

response to a Royal request Cosin in 1627 published his book of "Private Devotions," containing special "Hours" Services and introducing a few ancient liturgical features, including prayers for the departed; and this book was widely circulated. It at once aroused the intemperate denunciation of the Puritans as a "Romanising" book of "Cozening" devotions. This attack was mainly of a captious, cavilling character and nothing definitely popish was discovered in the book, although the Puritans actually declared Mattins and Evensong to be so! Cosin in this manual had reaffirmed the Reformers' principle, enunciated by Cranmer in his Preface "Of Ceremonies," when he said: "Our Church, at the Reformation, cast not away her good customs with her bad, nor forwent her religion and Christianity with her Popery, but let pass the one that was new, and preserved the other that was old."<sup>2</sup> A year later, an elderly Prebendary of Durham, Peter Smart, in a sermon, made a most vituperative, libellous and extravagant attack on Cosin, accusing him of introducing popish ceremonies and practices in the Cathedral. He affirmed that Cosin had changed the position of the Holy Table, calling it an "altar," that he had worn *embroidered* copes and had lit numerous candles during the service, had sung the Nicene Creed and taken the Eastward position, although Smart, rather singularly, admitted that it was not "material which way a man turn his face when he ministers and prays, if it be left a thing indifferent without superstition."<sup>3</sup> Smart specially denounced the "worshipping" of the Lord's Table "with ducking to it, though there be no communicants nor any man there." He declared that such a practice made the "altar" an "idol." Cosin denied that "he bowed at all at the said Table, and holdeth it altogether unlawful to be done", but he admitted "bowing on going out and coming into the Church in reverence to God Almighty."<sup>4</sup>

It was an unardonably unchristian attack, only too typical of the current methods of religious controversy. In it Cosin and his friends were denounced as "seditious and schismatical Arminian sectaries, and blind guides and rotten members of the Church." But similarly Cosin's party had condemned Smart and the Puritan preachers as "Judases, seditious and disobedient persons."<sup>5</sup> Smart was unable to substantiate many of his specific charges. Cosin declared that he had never worn an "embroidered" cope and that he was not responsible for the lighted candles which, however, were needed for artificial light. He also said that he had not interfered with the Communion Table and had always stood at the North Side of it to perform all parts of the Service there, although he admitted that he had occasionally taken the Eastward position for the Consecration prayer only. The Bishop of Durham supported Smart's indictment and was preparing to censure Cosin and his friends, when the King intervened and refused to allow the prosecution to go forward. The overzealous Prebendary was punished most unmercifully for his uncharitable attack. The formidable and tyrannical High Commission Court imprisoned him and fined him £500, and also excommunicated, deprived and even degraded him. But ten years later, when the Long Parliament was in power, the ill used prebendary was reinstated, and in his turn he petitioned the House of Commons against Cosin

for his superstitious and popish innovations at Durham. An M.P. also accused Cosin of seducing a scholar to Popery. This latter libel was easily refuted, since Cosin had used every effort to reclaim the youth and had obliged him to read a public recantation and then expelled him from the University.

But in January, 1641, the Commons passed a sentence of the sequestration of all Cosin's many ecclesiastical benefices. Several years before Smart had pointed out that Cosin, besides his Mastership of Peterhouse and the deanery of Peterborough, held his prebendal stall at Durham and four other lucrative benefices.<sup>6</sup> The Commons at the same time impeached Cosin in 21 articles to the House of Lords, although his trial there came to nothing. Meanwhile in 1635 Cosin had been appointed Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, and also Vice-Chancellor in 1640. In the same year he was preferred to the deanery of Peterborough and made Chaplain to Charles I. His active help to the Royalist cause in 1642 cost him his Mastership of Peterhouse and Cosin felt it prudent at this critical stage in the civil struggle to retire to France. He went to Paris in 1643 and officiated as Chaplain to the English Protestants in the exiled Queen's household. He had lodgings given him in the Louvre and was allowed a small pension. But his privations during his seventeen years exile were very real. He lived with his servant on 6d a day and was grateful to accept "tips" from English travelling visitors. The iron must have entered into his royalist soul when in 1657 his eldest daughter was compelled to accept a pension of £1 a week from the "Usurper" Cromwell in order to maintain herself and her sisters.<sup>7</sup>

The hardships he endured and the real dangers which Cosin faced in his Exile were a severe test to the sincerity of his Protestant convictions and they totally disproved the accusations of Prynne and other Puritans of his popish leanings. In Paris the Jesuit controversialists made every effort, including tempting offers of preferment, to convert Cosin, but in spite of threats, even of assassination, he stood firm and stoutly defended the Anglican position. He vigorously attacked transubstantiation as a corrupt doctrine utterly unknown to primitive times and the ancient Church. In his tract on the subject he gives evidence to prove that transubstantiation, as defined at Trent, was quite unknown to the Fathers, to Bertram, the Abbot Aelfric, Peter Lombard and even to Paschasius Radbert.<sup>8</sup> This courageous attack kept many Englishmen abroad from turning Papists and Cosin later expanded this tract into his comprehensive "History of Transubstantiation." He makes it clear that the Reformed teaching of the Real Presence in the Eucharist is a *spiritual* one—"The bread is not the body of Christ any otherwise than as the cup is the new testament. We maintain our eating of Him to be true, but not carnal or natural." Christ, he affirms, is present only to the worthy Communicants and therefore "He ought not and cannot be kept and preserved to be carried about in the consecrated bread." Cosin's view would seem to be not far distant from the Lutheran theory of Consubstantiation when he says "the body and blood is neither sensibly present nor otherwise at all present, but only to them that are duly prepared to receive them and in the very act of receiving

them and the consecrated elements together, to which they are sacramentally in that act united."<sup>9</sup>

There is no doubt that Cosin did most signal service in defence of the Reformed position while in exile. His biographer truly says, "While he remained in France he was the Atlas of the Protestant religion, supporting the same with his piety and learning, confirming the wavering therein, yea daily adding proselytes (not of the meanest rank) thereto."<sup>10</sup> But we can imagine with what relief and joy Cosin returned to England in July, 1660, to resume his decanal duties at Peterborough. Less than six months later—on December 2nd—he was consecrated Bishop of Durham. He was soon diligently engaged in his diocese with Confirmations, and although he was active in suppressing Conventicles and in suspending clergy who refused to read the Prayers, he was most anxious to heal the past wounds of the Church without recourse to harsh recrimination. If only other Church leaders had pursued this moderating policy the course of our Church history would have been happier. He only silenced one preacher in his diocese because "he had neither episcopal nor presbyteral ordination."<sup>11</sup> It is therefore clear that, before the passing of the Act of Uniformity, 1662, Cosin was not prepared to eject a presbyterially ordained preacher in his reorganising of the work of his diocese, where he found the Church life in a very decadent state.<sup>11</sup>

As might be expected he took a prominent part in the Savoy Conference, and as Richard Baxter declared, "If all had been of his mind we had been reconciled."<sup>12</sup> In March, 1661, he was put on the Commission for the revision of the Prayer Book in which he took a large share. It is a tribute to the remarkable liturgical genius of Archbishop Cranmer that the prayers he adopted and composed and the doctrine enshrined in his Prayer Books were acceptable to the Evangelical Calvinist of the Elizabethan period and were also patient of an interpretation which in the main satisfied the Arminian theology of the Caroline divines. For even after over a century of use the 1662 revision did not effect any change in the *doctrine* of the 1552 Prayer Book. Cosin had been keenly interested in Prayer Book revision since his early years, although he was never a learned or specially accurate liturgical scholar. Some "First Series" of Notes on the Prayer Book, made in 1619 and published forty years after Cosin's death, were all inaccurately fathered on him. But as James Parker in his *History of Revisions* admits, "few of them seem to be original,"<sup>13</sup> and as he also conjectures, the Notes which Cosin made were probably collections of contemporary divines "rather than an original series compiled by himself." For they contain serious historical blunders, as in stating that the Act of Uniformity, 1559, restored the 1549 Prayer Book! They also contain long extracts from the Jesuit Maldonatus. The youthful Cosin may at first have been impressed with these Notes, but on further study he often corrects them, as when he declares that the title "sacrifice" cannot properly be applied to the Lord's Supper, since "there was never sacrifice nor never shall be any but Christ's alone."<sup>14</sup> But in an interleaved Prayer Book of 1638, there are genuine Notes made by Cosin, although they frequently only expose his ignorance of Prayer Book history, as when he attributes the authorship of the Black Rubric to Martin

Bucer. But in these Notes Cosin relies on the illegal Elizabethan "Ornaments Rubric."<sup>15</sup> and so declares that the "ornaments" of the 1549 Prayer Book, including the "vestment" for the Communion Service, should be used by the clergy, although in his "Considerations" in 1641 he admits that such "ornaments" were then practically unknown and were "neglected by most ministers."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he had previously admitted in 1619 that only the surplice and hood were then in use according to the 58th Canon of 1603.<sup>17</sup> We have evidence that Cosin continued his suggestions for Prayer Book revision from 1640 to 1661. His "corrected copy" was carefully considered by Convocation in November, 1661, and several of his additions accepted, such as the insertion of the first Ember Collect, the Collects for St. Stephen's day, the Collect, and Epistle and Gospel for the 6th Sunday after Epiphany, and the Thanksgiving for Restoring Peace at Home. But most of his proposed alterations, especially his re-casting of the Prayer of Consecration, on the lines of the 1549 Prayer Book with the inclusion of the *Agnus Dei*, were rejected. He wished to incorporate an Epiclesis and also a definite "memorial", the language of which has been followed in the Alternative Consecration Prayer in the 1928 Prayer Book. He wished the Prayer of Humble Access immediately to precede the actual administration. On the other hand Cosin made the rubric quite definite concerning the "North Side" by adding "North Side or End." But his addition of the words "Offer up" and place the Bread and Wine upon the Table, in the rubric before the Church Militant prayer was rejected, as was also his addition to the post-Communion rubric to allow the use of wafer bread. Probably most clergy to-day will regret that his proposal that half of the Communion Offertory money should be given to the priest "to provide him books of divinity" was not accepted!

Cosin composed a very long historical Preface to the Confirmation Service, explaining its objects and blessings and the reason for its separation from Baptism. Declaring that Confirmation is corrupted by the Church of Rome with "many errors and novelties" and "held to be a sacrament," he adds that "we who by the grace of God are numbered among the Reformed Churches, whereof this Church of England is both for doctrine and discipline the most eminent and the most pure, the most agreeable to Scripture and Antiquity, of all others we hold it to be a sacred and solemn act of religion, which being accompanied with fervent prayer will be a special means to convey the graces of God's Holy Spirit upon those persons that have duly prepared themselves to receive it."<sup>18</sup> The Revised Prayer Book has followed Cosin in the Marriage Service in altering "With my body I thee worship" to "With my body I thee honour."

His episcopate was specially notable for his great efforts in restoring Church buildings, especially the beautiful episcopal Chapel at Auckland Castle. He built a Public Library at Durham, and also two hospitals which he endowed, and he supported charitable and needy causes most liberally. He founded five scholarships at Peterhouse, Cambridge, and endowed its Library. It was estimated that before his death in January, 1672, his benefactions in these ways amounted to about £42,000. He made an allowance to Richard Hooker's grand-

daughter and also gave a pension to a Greek Archbishop who was too poor to return home. As Dr. Basire testified in his funeral oration, Cosin "was no dwarf, neither in stature, dignity nor bounty."<sup>19</sup>

As a Churchman Cosin must be classed with other prominent Caroline divines like Andrewes, Laud and his great friend Bishop Montague, as definitely "High." Unlike the great Elizabethan Churchmen, Parker, Whitgift and Hooker, who held that Scripture required no one obligatory form of ecclesiastical polity, Cosin followed Andrewes and his "lord and master" Bishop Overall in asserting the *jus divinum* of episcopacy "where it is established and may be had free from superstition," although he admitted that "we must not cry down and destroy all the Reformed Churches where it cannot be had."<sup>20</sup> But Cosin regarded it as a "great presumption and fault for any particular Church to recede" from episcopacy—"the apostolical practice and perpetual order of God's Church"—"without any invincible necessity to do so." Yet he admits that learned men, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, such as Bishop Jewel, Dean Field and Richard Hooker, admit that "presbyters possess an intrinsic power of ordination *in actu primo*,"<sup>21</sup> and although he does not quite subscribe to this view, he would not like "to condemn their judgment openly." In fact he declares that "if Bishops become enemies to God and religion, in case of such necessity, the duty of ordaining such as are to succeed them in the work of the Ministry pertains to the presbyters remaining Catholics,"<sup>22</sup> since he affirms: "I conceive that the power of ordination was restrained to bishops rather by apostolical practice and the perpetual custom and canons of the Church than by any absolute precept that either Christ or His apostles gave about it, nor can I yet meet with any convincing argument to set it upon a more high and divine institution."<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, during his long exile in France, Cosin stressed the solidarity of the Reformed Churches and maintained most friendly relations with the Huguenot ministers at Charenton and fully recognised the validity of their presbyterian orders.<sup>24</sup> He attended their services and sermons and strongly urged all English churchmen, when abroad, to do the same and "make no schism between their Church and ours." He also enjoins them, in order to declare their "unity in professing the same religion," "to communicate reverently with them of the French Church," since "there is no prohibition against communicating with them as there is against communicating with the Papists."<sup>25</sup> But like other Caroline divines, he strongly condemns the English presbyterians for rejecting episcopacy where it was established in a Scriptural form and he makes a clear distinction between them and the foreign Reformed Churches. It was especially with these "Protestant and well reformed Churches" that Cosin declared in his Will, that "he always joined in Spirit, mind and affection."<sup>26</sup>

He was particularly distressed by the defection of his son, in spite of all his efforts, to the Romish faith and his eventual ordination to the Roman priesthood. At first he determined to disown him altogether, but in his Will he leaves "to my *lost* son one hundred pounds, having already settled on him a life annuity of £50. I give him no more because he hath dealt very undutifully with his indulgent

father and twice forsaken his Mother the Church of England and the Protestant, being the true Catholic religion therein professed."<sup>27</sup> We get here a valuable incidental confirmation of the High Church Caroline view of the "Protestant" Catholicity of the Anglican Church held by leaders like Laud, Sanderson and Bramhall.

From his "Correspondence" and from the records of his career, we can form a fairly clear picture of this great XVII century divine. Surtees tells us that Cosin was tall and of a "commanding presence, in which frankness and dignity were mingled."<sup>28</sup> He was from the first an active and prominent member of the Arminian or "High" Church School of divines led by Archbishop Laud, Bishops Montague, Wren and Morley. In his ardent youthful and almost "Tractarian" zeal, he was keenly anxious to revive as much of ancient ritual and ceremony as might be in any way compatible with the Protestant and reformed character of the Church, and the Court favour and patronage of the new Arminian party greatly assisted this design and the accompanying campaign to overthrow Puritanism. His later experiences and the lessons of adversity, although not changing his convictions, somewhat modified his earlier partisan outlook; while his courage, unbending rectitude, and sincere piety won him the respect and esteem of all parties. Although he certainly showed no love for the Puritans, Neal, their great historian, praises his charity and moderation and describes him as "a learned man, of an open, frank and generous temper, and well versed in the Canons, Councils and Fathers."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cosin, Correspondence, 1. 287 (1869).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. 133.

<sup>3</sup> Parker, History of Revisions, cccxxix.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, cccxci.

<sup>5</sup> Cosin, Correspondence, 1. 184.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. 185.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. v.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. 270.

<sup>9</sup> Cosin, Works, v. 345. (A.C.L.)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. xxx (1874).

<sup>11</sup> Cosin, Correspondence, 2. viii.

<sup>12</sup> Kennet's Register, 507.

<sup>13</sup> Parker, Hist. of Revisions, p. cccxv.

<sup>14</sup> Tomlinson, Prayer Book, Articles, &c., p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, Hist. of Revisions, ccclxv.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, cxxxvi.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, cxxx.

<sup>18</sup> Cosin, Correspondence, 2. 69.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. xlviii.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. xxxvii.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Mr. Cordel, Works, IV. 401.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted Fletcher, Some Troubles of Archbishop Sancroft.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Mr. Cordel.

<sup>24</sup> Cosin, Correspondence, 2. xliii.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Mr. Cordel.

<sup>26</sup> Works, 1. xxxii.

<sup>27</sup> Cosin, Correspondence, 2. xxxi.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. xlvii.

<sup>29</sup> History of Puritans, iii. 99.