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Revision of the Communion Service

BY THE REV. THOMAS HEWITT, B.D.

(The following article is inserted at the request of the Council of the Church Society and is written by a member of the Council of the Society. It has reference to an article on the same subject contributed by Canon D. R. Vicary to the March issue.—EDITOR).

THE March issue of THE CHURCHMAN contained an article on "The Revision of the Communion Service". The writer acknowledges that there are others better equipped for a subject of this nature and hopes that tolerance by them may be extended to him. In view of this and the vital importance of this subject which is so intricate and controversial one wonders why such an article was written. He also asks "the forgiveness of those whose cherished customs and convictions have been called in question". We maintain that the writer is fully entitled to his own point of view, and as he has touched upon all points lightly no one need be unduly disturbed. One unfortunate fact is his article has appeared in THE CHURCHMAN, of which the proprietors are the Church Society, and as the views expressed in the article are contrary to the views of this Society the following is written to correct any possible misunderstanding. A further point is to show that the points put forward are not a contribution to true revision but a step back to a period before 1549. We hope also to make clear that some of the points raised are contrary to Reformation, Apostolic and Biblical Doctrine.

A few brief comments on other points raised in the article itself are necessary before dealing with the suggested points for revision. We are informed that "the very existence of disorder implies the urgent need for revision". We would have thought that law and authority were needed to deal with disorders rather than revision. We are also told that the 1928 rubrics, although they have no authority, "form the only yard stick in the hands of the Bishops in their efforts to maintain some sort of Liturgical discipline". On the following page 25 the writer states the "1662 is the primary legal authority. . . . But the very existence of the present disorder shows how weak that authority is in practice". One can only say if that which has authority fails to maintain order that which has no authority will never do so. The difficulty seems to lie in the fact that there is little if any administration of the law and authority of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

The article also states, "It is the firm belief of the writer that we are being led by devious ways into a new unity through experiments in worship". The obvious answer to this is that which begins by causing divisions will never create a new unity. The few Evangelicals who have adopted the Eastward position and left the North Side have caused a division in the ranks of Evangelicals which is extremely unfortunate in these days when Evangelicals should be united.

I

Suggested changes in the Rubrics.

"The old 'North End' controversy is very cold pudding," so the writer says, but this is very far from the true facts. Because a very small number of Evangelicals have adopted the Eastward position it does not follow that all Evangelicals have abandoned the North Side. Let us examine for a few moments the true facts. The Church Pastoral-Aid Society gives grants to 493 parishes, most outside of its own patronage, and every one takes the North Side. Then the same Society has the administration of over 400 livings, and it is no exaggeration to say that in nearly every one the North Side is the position taken. The same can be said of the livings, about 200, in the patronage of the Church Society. The Simeon Board of Trustees now desires that the North Side where taken should be maintained in these livings in its patronage. It is also important to note that the Church of the Inner Temple, where large numbers of lawyers attend, still insists upon the North Side. Even at Oxford the North Side is still insisted upon at one or two of the Colleges. There are, of course, numbers of other Churches that have no other position but the North Side.

One would like to have a clearer definition of the following statement: "At a time when there is evidence that Evangelicals are awakening liturgically and even using a Western position the rubric must be freed". What really does Mr. Vicary mean by a Western position? Can he possibly mean that the whole Western Church from primitive times stood at the Eastward Position? I sincerely hope not, for numerous authorities can be brought forward to show quite clearly that the "Eastward Position", which is Mr. Vicary's 'Western position', was not practised in the Western Church in primitive times but was introduced by the Roman Church at a time when it was moving towards the doctrine of transubstantiation. There can be no reasonable doubt that whoever officiated in the Primitive Church at the Communion Service faced the people and never turned his back upon them. Lists of ancient authorities with quotations can be found in Harrison's Eastward Position, pages 45-48. Can he possibly mean that the North Side is not a Western position? If the Eastward Position, which is not a primitive position, is a Western position, then the North Side is also a Western position. In connection with this an interesting comment by Wheatley shows that the North Side is nearer the Primitive use than the Eastward Position. "Whereas if the Table be close to the East wall, the Minister stands on the North Side and looks southward, and consequently by looking Westward, turns himself to the people." It is hardly necessary to say that in the Communion Service in the Book of Common Prayer the officiating minister is frequently facing the people even when standing at the North Side. Wheatley goes on to say, "Wherever it be placed, the Priest is obliged to stand at the North Side, the design of which is, that the Priest may be better seen and heard; which, as our Altars are now placed, he cannot be but at the North or South side. . . . And Bishop Beveridge has shown that whenever, in the ancient Liturgies, the Minister is directed to stand before the Altar, the North Side of it is always meant". The Book of Common Prayer, Wheatley, page 303.

It is quite clear then that not only is the North Side the true Anglican position but it is nearer to the position adopted in all the primitive families of Liturgy of the Western Church. The writer may, of course, be using the word 'Western' for those who stand behind the Holy Table and face the people. If this is so, the above points would not be relevant. In any case the term is unfortunate and doubtful.

Does it really matter whether we stand at the North Side or at the Eastward position? In an excellent paper called "Foundations" the Rev. T. G. Mohan has shown not only that it really does matter but that it is vital. "We boldly and gladly affirm our conviction that the North Side is vital. Those who differ from us are not at all impressed by being told that English Reformers introduced it, that the Prayer Book directs it, and the Evangelical doctrine demands it, but they may be moved if it can be shown that the truth of the Gospel is endangered by the Eastward Position." In the same article Mr. Mohan shows how the Eastward Position being built upon human merit, destroys the Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith. To sum up we maintain that the North Side is very much alive, it is nearer to the position of the primitive Church, it in no way conflicts with the truth of the Gospel, and lastly, but by no means the least important, it does not hide the Saviour Himself like the Eastward position does.

The writer says: "A further permissive rubric is needed to cover variations in the words of administration, now almost universal, after the example set in 1928". One would like to know what "now almost universal" really means? The words of Administration found in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer are truly excellent and built upon Holy Scripture. The fact that additions were made in 1552 is a great gain. The Church of Christ added to primitive creeds to save Christians from error. For the same reason the Reformers added the words, "Take and eat this, etc.". The 1928 alternative words of administration are by no means clear and give the impression of Christ being in the consecrated bread and wine.

II

Suggested changes in and additions to the text.

We desire to make comments upon three suggested additions, prayers for the dead, the Benedictus, and the Agnus Dei.

(a) Prayers for the dead. We maintain that the liturgy of our Prayer Book has a Commemoration of the Saints, but omits prayers for the dead. This omission is a wise one, and built upon the Word of God. Then we ought not to forget that the Roman Church argues that prayers for the dead are an absolute proof that the Church had always held the doctrine of purgatory. This, of course, is by no means true, but many have been deceived by this argument. There were two reasons why the Reformers made this omission. (1) To remove from the minds of the people the error of purgatory and the superstitions associated with it and (2) to show that the true Christian after death is translated into heaven itself, and has the fulness of God's peace and joy. He obtains this through faith in the full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross and not through the prayers of Christians on earth.

(b) The Benedictus. We are told that there are difficulties associated with the Benedictus, and with this we heartily agree, for in the Roman Mass it is sung after the Prayer of Humble Access, because it is believed that our Lord is about to come through the consecration.

(c) Agnus Dei. Unfortunately the writer does not recognize the same difficulty with regard to the 'Agnus Dei'. The Reformers condemned the position of the Agnus Dei because it was definitely associated with idolatry. In 1927 Evangelicals also opposed its introduction into a similar position for the same reasons. At that time the Rt. Hon. Sir William Joynson-Hicks said, "The deposited Book does not condemn the use of the words 'Behold the Lamb of God', accompanied by the exhibition of a consecrated wafer or bread. Far from it, for it introduces immediately before the Prayer of Consecration the words, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord'". He said these words to show why this book should be rejected because of its association with idolatrous practices.

III

Suggested changes in the structure of the rite itself.

With regard to the Gloria in Excelsis it does seem that the end is the most fitting place for it. It is an ancient hymn, and as our Lord and the disciples sang a hymn at the close of the Communion Service what could be more fitting than the Gloria in Excelsis? It is quite possible that Dr. Swete was wrong when he said that the placing of the Gloria in Excelsis at the end of the rite in 1552 has started a new family of liturgies. In a very ancient liturgy of the Western Church, about the 7th century A.D., and which belonged to the Irish works of Luxovium in Gaul, this hymn is found exactly in the position which the English Liturgy assigns to it, namely, amongst the thanksgivings after Communion.

We would like to deal with the anamnesis and the epiclesis but time and space forbid.

In closing we maintain that there has been no true attempt at Revision of the Holy Communion Service. Both the 1928 deposited Book, and the main points put forward by the writer are movements towards the Roman doctrine of the Mass, which existed before the Reformation. But the doctrine of the Mass hides Christ, and the work of Evangelicals is to reveal Christ, therefore true Evangelicals could not possibly accept this movement towards the Mass. It would be dishonourable to the cause of Christ and contrary to the teaching of God's word.

Herein lies the cause of our divisions. The writer and the comparatively few Evangelicals like-minded have departed from the teaching of the Reformers, the Book of Common Prayer and the Word of God, and they regret that other Evangelicals are not willing to do the same. Divisions are always bad, and the present writer, being one of the younger Evangelicals, sincerely regrets them, and earnestly appeals to those who have moved away from other Evangelicals to seriously reconsider the whole position. One thanks God that there are not lacking signs of a forward movement amongst Evangelicals, and we appeal to all to put away those things which hide Christ that

the Saviour Himself may be seen by all. We also maintain that there is room for revision, and one would like to suggest certain points that could be revised without in any way conflicting with the teaching of the Word of God ; but this would go beyond the purpose of this article.

Canon Vicary makes the following observations on the preceding article.

I am grateful for the opportunity of seeing Mr. Hewitt's paper. Since I wrote to provoke discussion, his contribution is a welcome one. But in order to avoid misunderstanding, it must be made plain that his terms of reference are very different from mine. It would appear that he has been briefed to defend a party line and to pounce on all deviationist tendencies ! My commission on the other hand was to consider possible revision of the Communion Office in the light of the new revision in Canada and the new liturgy of the Church of South India. Since this latter rite would be counted out on almost all scores by Mr. Hewitt, it is not surprising that there is considerable ground of difference between us.

Early in this century a Royal Commission pronounced that the 1662 book provided a form of worship " too narrow for this generation ". Fifty years later, it can hardly be a practical remedy to go back on this. There is therefore no confusion in my statements about the authority of 1662 and 1928. The 1662 book is a primary legal authority because it is *de jure* ; but the authority of 1928 is *de facto* as recent litigation has borne out. My remarks about the North End position were in the nature of a plea for liberty instead of lawlessness, and when I wrote, I had in mind a much wider range of parishes than those which, as is made clear in this paper, are subsidized or otherwise compelled to adopt the North End position.

What I view with a certain dismay is the twofold refusal of the writer to consider the Anglican Communion as a whole and to recognize something creative in new liturgical experiment and craftsmanship. Fortunately there are Evangelicals who have wider perspectives, as witness the statesmanlike character of the report "*The Fulness of Christ*" and the recent discussion in the pages of *Theology* between the Principal of St. Aidan's and the Principal of Ely. D. R. VICARY.