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Revising Holy Communion

Two Points of View

I. H. E. W. TURNER

THIS competent book* really needs a review by an expert liturgiologist but this is precisely what cannot be offered here. I am competent neither to arbitrate between Mr. Beckwith and Canon Couratin nor between Dugmore and Francis Clark. Perhaps I may even make a third with 'the one or two innocent souls' who see no need for any major change in the 1662 Rite, strange company for one who during the last twenty years has for doctrinal reasons been driven back slowly and inexorably within the limits of the official Prayer Book. To have just about arrived at this point at a time when it could be seriously discussed whether the 1662 Liturgy should be withdrawn from circulation leaves me almost speechless.

In any fundamental liturgical revision three main problems arise, of which the first two are by far the most important, the doctrinal, the historical and the linguistic. The relation between the law of prayer and the law of belief, always close, is more complex than appears at first sight. The two questions which can be asked of a Rite 'Will it reflect or promote piety?' and 'What doctrine does it embody?' are not one but two. The current trend in liturgical revision falls short on both counts. It reflects the evacuated religion of the present age, and not only for Evangelicals but, I suspect, for many Anglo-Catholics as well, it marks a declension in the doctrinal content of the Rite. These are grave defects which seem likely to accelerate both regrettable tendencies in the present generation.

Among the doctrinal issues which have received a good deal of public attention was the Oblationary element in the Prayer of Consecration of Series II where a not very satisfactory compromise was reached. But the by-passing of the Cranmerian hammer blows in the

**Latimer Monograph 3. Holy Communion.* Edited by R. T. Beckwith and J. E. Tiller, *Marcham books*, £1.50.

opening sentence is an even graver loss. Granted that what is being said about Eucharistic Sacrifice today on all sides is very different from Reformation controversies, the recurrence of former errors is a familiar theme in the history of theology and the proclamation of a Reformation and Scriptural truth as a fixed point in liturgy is not readily dispensable. If this had been preserved, it might have been possible for Evangelicals to be easier about the introduction of some oblationary elements. As it is they are cumbered with a phrase which they do not want and have lost what they really need. Mr. Beckwith raises a proper question mark against the fashionable notion of anamnesis. How widely (if at all) the Hebrew concept of memory differed from that of modern man? Possibly the Passover Haggadah might count in support of this view, but how typical was the Passover for Hebrew ideas of sacrifice and how close was the link between the Passover and the Last Supper? Certainly Jeremias' discussion of anamnesis is among the more questionable features of his book. The loss of *perpetual memory* is a sore blow. Even more difficult are the Series II Words of Administration with the additional Amen which the communicant is expected to reply. The words are so completely uncontexted that the fear we are committing ourselves to something which we cannot accept is real indeed. The case would be different if the response was *In remembrance of Him. Amen.* I am surprised that the Evangelical members of the Liturgical Commission could accept this change at all. The phrase in the Prayer of Humble Access which might be quoted in its support is qualified by a *so . . . that* which seems to represent a restrictive *ita . . . ut* in Latin with the meaning 'in the sense that', adding a qualifier to the previous model.

The attempt made by the Commission to by-pass Reformation controversies by a return to Patristic liturgical patterns is tempting but fallacious. The problems associated with Hippolytus are among the most complex and disputed of the period. Not only must we ask which particular models should be followed, but we find the flight from history which this involves difficult indeed. We cannot behave liturgically as if we belonged to the third century, antedating both the classical formulations of doctrine and the Reformation insights. If it is argued that we do not belong to the sixteenth century either, then we reply that an Anglican pattern of liturgising has been developed which has been retained in most recent revisions and which serves us well. For its own intrinsic merits no less than for historical reasons it should not lightly be abandoned.

This shades off into the historical problems of revision. Here two questions arise, the consistency of Cranmer's theological opinions and the relation between the Caroline divines and the Tractarians. I agree with Mr. Beckwith that the 1549 Prayer Book may be described as an Interim Rite, but it has its importance in giving citizen rights to one main pattern of liturgising and its doctrinal implications. This

not even the most hard-bitten Evangelical ought to dispute. But in view of the changes between the Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552, even granted his wise policy of beginning where the people were, it is difficult not to believe that his own views had crystallised or matured. Is the evidence of his letter to Gardiner quite as conclusive evidence to the contrary as might be thought in view of the gap between the medieval doctrine and the presuppositions of both rites? Mr. Beckwith deals faithfully with the attempt to turn the Carolines into Tractarians in advance of their times, but there are curious features in the Cosin-Smart row at Durham which should be taken into account. While ritual is not doctrine, the reaction of Smart was doctrinal as well and the comments of some Roman Catholic recusants which he reports cannot be confined to ceremonial alone. The truth may lie rather between two extremes. The point that the 1662 Settlement did not go all the way with the authors of the Durham Book and the suggestion that Robert Sanderson, a moderate, had much to do with the new rite are well worth making.

For many the most valuable part of the Monograph will be the proposed revision of the 1662 Rite in modern linguistic dress. Mr. Beckwith's point that in the present climate of opinion an unrevised 1662 Rite will never be able to compete on an equality with the Series II method is fair comment, even for those who deny the need for revision on linguistic grounds. That liturgy should have to some extent a special language, that it should have a numinous quality, that it should take unhurried time to deploy itself properly are opinions which are as unfashionable as they are tenaciously held by more than might be thought. The *Thou . . . You* debate has not yet been finally concluded in favour of *You*. Is the whole thrust here a small indication of the flight from Divine Transcendence and otherness which (if vital to a proper theology) is unduly neglected today? The idea of a common Ante-Communion Service followed by two alternative sequels is well worth exploring, particularly if it permits the second alternative to be more unequivocally Anglo-Catholic. The revision is workmanlike. The following criticisms suggest themselves. I am not sure that the Old Testament lection should find a place in a sacrament of the New Covenant. It gives the impression of a reading and a 'thing' thrice over and might well seem to acquiesce in the current undervaluation of Morning Prayer. I am not convinced that *Lord in thy mercy hear our prayer* is any improvement on the more customary *Lord hear our prayer and let our cry come unto thee*. In the Preparation it is questionable whether the Absolution is any improvement on the full 1662 form. The Prayer of Humble Access in my opinion misses the restrictive sense of the *so . . . that*. If this is not retained, it could be improved by running straight on from *Feed us therefore on Christ that we may be cleansed in body and soul*, unless a disputable distinction is introduced between feeding on Christ and eating His body and

drinking His blood. If *perpetual memory* is not to be retained, then *instituted to commemorate* is on the right lines, though the following phrase is unnecessarily prosy in comparison with *until His coming again*. The rubric (No. 29) ends abruptly. *Leave Church* is odd English. It might allow the clergy to return for the consumption of the elements after going into the vestry or even disrobing. *Leave the sanctuary* would be more seemly and in greater accord with general usage. Does the rubric by intention or oversight leave open the practice known as 'tarping' which many find deplorable?

I note with pleasure that following the suggestion of F. C. Burkitt, both the Prayers of Thanksgiving and Oblation are prescribed, though the order should surely be reversed. The Prayer of Oblation should be brought as close to the reception as possible if the doctrine of the Respond Offering is to be fully expressed liturgically. The Prayer of Thanksgiving would not detract from the Gloria, since both Oblation and Thanksgiving in the context of the eucharist logically precede the final diapason of praise to God as God. At least the service should go out with a bang and not a whimper. It is good that the Blessing is retained. The thrust back into the world is implied in the whole service as well as explicit in the Prayer of Oblation. The fashionable objection 'What good does the Blessing do anyway?' is fallacious. The action of Christ as the principal minister of the sacrament is not incompatible with the ministerial blessing at the end of the service any more than Christ's gift of forgiveness with the Absolution earlier in the service. We are sent forth certainly, but that we are sent forth blest is equally important.

2. B. J. WIGAN

IT IS DIFFICULT to review such a book as this with fewer words than are contained in the book itself: for it performs four tasks in an extremely concise fashion. In the space of 125 pages it (a) discusses the early history of the liturgy; (b) expounds that of the Prayer Book; (c) criticises [in some detail] the work of the Liturgical Commission; (d) supplies a revised liturgy. All these tasks are performed carefully and elegantly, in a patently sincere attempt to be faithful to Holy Scripture and the Church of England, as well as to be sympathetic to the rich variety of Christians who have been 'doing this' for nearly two thousand years. It is nevertheless so Cranmerian in its approach that, in spite of their efforts, the authors do not seem to have achieved a very deep appreciation of those who (whatever their shortcomings) spread and established the Gospel between the first century and the sixteenth.

The authors, like Cranmer and the Liturgical Commission before them, have to face the problem which arises when some usage (such as

the liturgy), which has grown up in and with the Church, comes under attack. The only hope of a solution lies in seeking guidance from the New Testament. That is what Cranmer, Calvin, and Luther did: and, in spite of their impeccable protestantism, they produced very different answers. That, believe it or not, is also what the Liturgical Commission did. Its answer is different from those of the sixteenth century: but in some disputed points it is remarkably similar to that adopted in this century by the Church of Scotland. And it found a ready acceptance in Free Church circles, before it had been 'toned down' by the Church Assembly. Such diversity arises partly from the paucity of instructions to be drawn from the New Testament; but also from the natural tendency to assume that one's own prejudices are not repugnant to Holy Scripture. This tendency has left its mark upon the present attempt as well as upon its predecessors.

Whatever may be said in favour of the Prayer Book, and to the detriment of Series II, in three respects at least the latter is undoubtedly the more scriptural. (1) The attempt to 'do this' by incorporating manual acts into the institution narrative can only be taken seriously as being scriptural if the thanksgiving and the distribution are also incorporated. This book appears to be unsuccessful in meeting one part of this criticism, and to ignore the other. In fact, of course (as Luther found) such a course is not practicable. (2) Cranmer followed the Roman rite as he knew it by including only a perfunctory thanksgiving, followed by longish petitions and the institution narrative. This book is very critical of the theory of 'consecration by thanksgiving'. But it does not allow for the fact that such a theory is put forward because thanksgiving is the only kind of prayer which our Lord is said to have used, and to have told us to use. The difficulty arises from the (in this context) unscriptural word 'consecration' to describe the prayer: an error from which Cranmer and Series II are free, but which is committed both by 1662 and by the draft rite included in the present book. Surely it is right to admit that (whatever else we may add) the essence of the eucharistic prayer is thanksgiving, and then to explore its meaning. (3) In this country, since the Reformation, the Communion has been thought of almost entirely as a means of securing spiritual food for the individual Christian, and very little as the corporate worship of the Church. That has been true until recently of all schools of thought in the Church of England: and it is due to Cranmer's liturgy. One may well sympathise with his situation in his own time: but we ought to be trying to put matters right now.

In all these points the authors of this book appear to be opposed to Scripture as well as to the Liturgical Commission. The only improvements that I can trace are the placing of the heading 'The Consecration' before the Preface, and the prayer that we *may* ALL SHARE *his holy body* and blood.

The question then arises: 'What may/must we include in the eucharis-

tic prayer in addition to thanksgiving?" On the strictly scriptural principles of this book, the answer might be expected to be: 'Nothing.' Yet its rite includes two petitions (a version of 'Humble Access' and 'Hear us, O merciful Father'), together with the institution narrative. Surely on scriptural principles the right use of the institution narrative is as a preliminary reading to explain the authority for what we are doing—as in the Calvinist tradition (e.g. the *Directory* of 1664)? The petitions are strictly speaking otiose in view of the covenant implied at the Last Supper. And, if 'scriptural' criticism is to be applied to Series II, surely the most difficult to answer would be an objection to the retention of 'Hear us' *after* the giving of thanks? On the other hand, the new draft agrees with the Prayer Book in rejecting anything else between the institution and the distribution: that is to say it rejects an 'anamnesis'. Admittedly, this is an unfortunate title. If 'consecration' is unscriptural, then 'anamnesis' here is an abuse of a scriptural word. The anamnesis of our Lord must be taken to be the whole rite from 'taking' to 'giving'. But that does not mean that the use of an 'anamnesis' is of itself wrong. If one has any regard for earlier Christians at all, one is bound to be influenced by the fact that the use of such a text is more certainly *ubique, semper, et ab omnibus* than either the *Sanctus* or the institution narrative. What is needed is to ask what is its real purpose. We have perhaps been misled by the traditional translations. The present tense in Greek and Latin may be rendered into English either as 'we do' or as 'we are doing'. Until Series III (which has gone some way to circumvent this difficulty), the former version has been the rule. This may suggest that, *having done x, we now do y*. If, on the other hand, we say 'Wherefore we *are* doing', the text will be made to refer to the whole Eucharist, which we do in obedience to the command which has just been recited. [I use the neutral verb 'do' for example, because the content of the 'anamnesis' is a separate matter of debate from the question whether or not we have one at all]. This formula is not put forward simply as a dodge to escape difficulty: it must surely be the true meaning of a passage whose origin lies in a time when Eucharistic theology was less sophisticated as well as less contentious than in the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries.

Having had to write so critically of the central points of this book and its liturgy, it is a pleasure to express gratitude for very much. The tone of the book is eirenical, and much less likely to arouse anger than many earlier works of controversy on both sides. The section on the limits of uniformity deserves to be pondered, especially by those bishops who seem to have resigned themselves to anarchy. The pages on sacrifice are a useful contribution to this difficult subject. And there is good pastoral thought on the question whether we should continue to try to persuade people to go to church two or three times on a Sunday, and on the situation produced by the spread of literacy.

Like another student quoted in this book, I am convinced that 1552 was a masterpiece: but it was a masterpiece of accommodation to continental criticism while poking the Henricians in the eye. What we need today is a different kind of masterpiece, which arises from the loving study of the New Testament, together with an attempt to understand (and not simply to reject or to copy) the ways of earlier generations. This book is a contribution to that end: but it also warns us that we have a long way to go.