

## THE REFORMATION IN WORSHIP : THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD.

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### A. *Worship essentially supernatural.*

Last winter the choir of the Russian Orthodox Church in Paris was in Oxford, and in the preface to their Programme of Chants, Prof. Zander writes that the inner meaning of their service is in the words so often repeated : "As we stand in the house of Thy glory, it is as though we stood in heaven itself." "It is impossible," his note continues, "to regard these words as mere allegory or pious aspiration. They express the very essence of orthodoxy—the belief that heaven and earth are not separated by an unbridgeable gulf. Living here and belonging to the earth we may nevertheless belong to another world and dwell with the saints in eternity. This is the secret of the Church which unites the earthly and the heavenly, the eternal and the temporal, and makes us even now partakers in the bliss of Paradise and the life to come. The breath of life for the Church is her liturgical devotion : the fullest revelation of her true nature is her worship. Thus we can boldly affirm that the divine worship of the orthodox Church is 'heaven on earth' in the fullest and truest sense of the word. As a matter of history it was from this feeling of 'heaven on earth' that the spiritual existence of the Russian people began. When Prince Vladimir, the Baptizer of Russia, sent his envoys to visit different countries and to examine the different religions, the only thing which captivated their attention was the divine worship in the Orthodox Cathedral of St. Sophia in Constantinople. 'We knew not'—they said afterwards—'where we were : in heaven or on earth.'"

The average English Protestant Evangelical reaction to this is first complete bewilderment and incomprehension and then, secondly, severe criticism and condemnation, either, if the critic is a Liberal, with a finger of scorn at the Tsarist Church for its superstitious and unethical character, or, if he is a Conservative, with a gibe at the Pelagian tendency to "will-worship" (Col. ii. 23). Thus we easily succeed in concealing from ourselves the fact that the dynamic for the carrying out of the second of the two great New Testament commandments lies in obedience to the first. "Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength." Unfortunately, the position is made worse by the fact that where Orthodox worship has a more sympathetic reception in this country, so often emphasis is laid far more on outward ritual and

æsthetic appeal than on that proclamation of the living word of God which was intended by the Reformers to be the chief agent in the raising of Christian life and worship to that truly supernatural level which is fundamental to the New Testament Church even more than to the Orthodox.

To rediscover for ourselves and to reproclaim to others this living Word of the Living God is our greatest task as Evangelicals in England to-day. National characteristics count for a great deal and an Englishman will neither receive nor express his faith in the same way as a Russian. It is no mere coincidence that the greatness of our country is more evident after the Reformation than before it. Much of the strength of the national character at its best is shown by Ensor (England 1870—1914. O.U.P.) to lie in its essentially Evangelical and even Puritanical religious basis. Miss Underhill makes the point that "Anglican worship is Christian worship according to the 'English use,'" "produced under historical pressure" (*Worship*, pp. 322f.). There is no Evangelical bias in her acknowledgment that "perhaps the renewed sacramental devotion, which is so specially characteristic of the revival of worship, will never appeal in its fulness to more than a minority of English Christians" (op. cit., p. 337). The characteristic response of the English soul to the demand of God . . . leans more to the prophetic and biblical than to the liturgic and sacramental side of the Christian cultus" (op. cit., p. 318). If our country is decadent—and it is—the fault is ours. It is the decay of that truly supernatural conception of Christian living that is based essentially on the hearing and receiving of the word of God that is the trouble. And for that we Evangelicals of the Church of England and of the Free Churches are to blame. What we want and what we need is a Church that is not more than human in the sense that some high churchmen seek to make it, nor less than human, as a means to an end more important than itself, as some low churchmen would make it, but the truly human Church of the New Testament (Dr. A. B. Macdonald: *Christian Worship in the Primitive Church*, p. 20), where the measure of humanity is not bound by the materialistic limitations of our modern western world, but found in the living Christ of the New Testament, neither degraded to the liberal Jesus of an outworn Protestantism nor de-humanized by an over-dogmatic two-nature orthodoxy. Ten years ago the dogma of the classical "Mysterium Christi" that Chalcedon formulated was needed to arrest the disastrous Liberal humanism which was realized to be totally inadequate for the needs of the post-war world. There are many signs that this need has been largely met. To-day it is significant that Beverley Nichols' last book, *News About England*, has for its sub-title "A country without a hero." It is the liberation into the supernatural but truly human world (cf. Hogg, *Redemption from This World*, pp. 25-26) in which Jesus the Perfect Man lived that our spirits need if they are to be freed from the paralysis of despair and impotence. I do not appeal down to the Liberal Jesus but up to Him who manifested "the powers of the age to come" not only in His own Person before His death and Resurrection, but also through His Spirit in the Church after Pentecost.

**B. Christianity essentially charismatic.**

At the end of his last book, the *Kingdom of God and the Son of Man*, Rudolph Otto sums up his conclusions as to the essential character of the true Church. Powers that to the modern man are incomprehensible are not only possible but indeed are the *sine quibus non* of a spirit-controlled community such as the Early Church (cf. A. B. Macdonald, op. cit.). "For the historian of religion," he writes, "the charisma is a significant phenomenon, a psychic factum which he must include among his historical causes and explanatory factors, if he wants to avoid a false reconstruction." So far he has with him an increasing number of New Testament scholars. But he goes far beyond them in fearlessly drawing the only possible Christian conclusion that "The charisma together with the paeana as an anticipation of the eschatological order is an essential element of a community which is intended to be a Church of the Nazarene. That the church has lost its charisma, that men look back to it as to a thing of past times, that men make it trivial by allegories, does not show that this Church is on a higher level, but is a sign of its decay" (pp. 375 f.).

That is a brave appeal and a very searching challenge. But every religious revival in the history of the Church has arisen through some man taking it seriously. E. F. Scott is right in saying "that belief in the Spirit has always arisen out of actual experience and that the Primitive Church did not arrive at it by brooding over ancient texts and precedents. The belief was an expression of a fact" (*The Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 61). Streeter's words may shock us, but we can hardly deny their truth as we read the New Testament: "The reception of the Spirit was something as definite and observable as, for example, an attack of influenza" (*Primitive Church*, p. 69). The trouble with the history of Evangelicalism has been this. At the great periods of religious revival strong emotional feeling has coloured the lives of individuals, groups and whole Churches; the evangelical revival, the Moody missions and the authentic days of Keswick are all evidence of this. But as the revival has waned, the emotional experiences have often outlived their originally rigorously ethical accompaniments. The result has been a general mistrust of all emotional feelings and reliance on the naked word of God alone, generally as found in some definite biblical text. So the final step is sure: reliance on the word of God alone leads to "coddling" (or is it "kidding"?) ourselves into believing that something has happened to us although all the evidence available is to the contrary. This is what Oswald Chambers hit so hard, for it is something akin to the Jesuit doctrine of *excaecatio*, which makes a virtue of calling black white in obedience to a preconceived dogma.

No: H. R. Mackintosh has well said that if our gospel has not an antinomian look it is not a gospel at all (*Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, p. 119). To this we must dare to add that if there is not a dangerously subjective look about our Christianity it will not be the New Testament brand. For the twin bases of the New Testament Church were (1) the Resurrection of Her Crucified Lord and (2) the experience of the Spirit. And it will always be possible for the outsider

to criticize this latter fundamental of our faith as dangerously subjective. Tests of all kinds have been applied during and since New Testament days. They are valuable, but they are at best supporting or critical criteria. None can dispense us from the difficulty, which goes far back into the Old Testament, of distinguishing between the true and the false prophet. Ministry, creed and canon arose and were hardened into an ecclesiastical system to meet gnostic dangers. But when they alone were made the *sine quibus non* of the Christian community regardless of evidence of the Spirit's presence, it was forgotten that other sins besides irregularity of orders and heresy "grieve . . . the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. iv. 30), and with the passing of the gnostic peril there passed also the greatest creative age of the Church.

Again and again this issue has faced the Church and never more acutely than to-day. Everywhere except in the spiritual world the frontiers of knowledge are being pushed back. New and undreamt of horizons are being discovered or rediscovered. Yet in religion such advances are being made outside the organized Church, which is in grave danger of being found with no God adequate for our modern age (cf. G. A. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. I). Conservatism has abandoned progressive seeking for truth in order to safeguard its own inadequate and outgrown dogmas. Liberalism has saved its intellectual "face," but only at the cost of the far more disastrous loss of all supernatural and converting power. It is clear that we must rediscover an Evangelicalism of the Spirit and risk gnosticism if we would save Christianity in this country. Streeter saw this and joined the Oxford Group—a courageous and costly step—and out of his experience he wrote: "Wherever there is life there is danger: but the danger of rejecting the call of God and so lacking the guidance of His Spirit is far graver than that of being occasionally self-deceived. Life is action; and we have to choose whether or no we will habitually act with or without that Spirit. And it is in action that we find it; only when the ship is in motion does the helm guide" (*The God Who Speaks*, p. 174). From another angle Berdyaev, expelled from Russia before the revolution for heresy and after it for his Christianity, sums it up thus: "No one who has left a Christianity based on authority can return to anything but a Christianity which is free" (*Freedom and the Spirit*, p. x.). This great evangelical issue St. Paul for his generation, and Luther for his, fought and won. For the true Church and the true Christian no less a standard than this may be accepted: "All things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas; or the world or life or death or things present or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 21-23).

### c. *Evangelical Emphasis on the Word.*

What is the distinctively Evangelical contribution to the realization of such a Church as this? There can be no doubt as to the answer. Our heritage and tradition are bound up pre-eminently with the Word of God. Catholics have their sacraments, Mystics their inner light, but Evangelicals have always lived by the Word of God. All the liturgies of the Reformation bear this out with differing emphasis.

Lutheran worship centres round the word in human experience—at every point Luther's own experience of the living word of forgiveness colours the worship of the Church. His "interest was not essentially in the form of worship, but in the spiritual experience that was to be expressed. . . . This experience gathered itself around the idea of God's Word as opposed to tradition, dwelt on God's touch upon the soul in opposition to the acceptance of ecclesiastical authority." For Luther and so for Lutheran worship, "the forgiveness of sins bulks as the one supremely significant thing in all spiritual life" (Hislop: *Our Heritage in Public Worship*, pp. 166-7). "And normally the Spirit works in and through the Word; such is God's will." "This Word is the bridge and the path by which the Holy Spirit comes to us" (*Christian Worship*: Ed. Micklem, p. 130) are Luther's words in a sermon on 1 Tim. i. 8-11, in 1525. "Through the word, thus alive with the Spirit, the Lord is directly revealed to the heart of worshippers in the church: it is not ideas about Him, nor memories of His life, but He Himself, not even as the mere object of faith but living and working in us not by way of speculation but in reality, most directly and powerfully (*realiter, praesentissime et efficacissime*) (op. cit., pp. 130-1). This conception of the Word has held the element of mystery and objectivity within the Lutheran Church and for Luther himself it was such a living and vital reality that we can understand and justify in its historical context the emphasis that he laid upon instruction; though for his successors who lacked his living experience, the danger of intellectualism proved too much. For, as Moffatt says, "A directly didactic arm dries up real devotion"; and when we read that "He sought to make praise a lesson book, by versifying the Nicene Creed, the Sanctus and even the Te Deum" (op. cit., p. 124), we cannot but admit that this over-reaction from medievalism was in part responsible for the arid desert of intellectual Protestantism that blighted the German Church for so long. His sympathy with Catholic ritual helped to warm the worship of the Swedish Church but his fear of, and antagonism towards, the Mystics drove many of the deeper and more spiritually minded of his successors out of the State Church.

Calvin did not share Luther's original deep personal experience and consequently in the worship of the Reformed Church the word is central, not so much in its human relations as in its revelation of the will of God (Hislop: op. cit., p. 180). There is no doubt as to the strength of Calvin's position. "That Hilaire Belloc's "Ballade of the Heresiarchs" should begin with his name is a compliment intelligible enough" (*Christian Worship*, p. 154). "Calvin has been Rome's one really dangerous opponent." Hence her attention to Karl Barth and his neo-Calvinism. It is true that *fas est et ab hoste doceri*, but do we want to fight Rome on this ground, to set up a rival theology to Aquinas? John Colet's words are strong, but to the point, and they apply to others besides the "Angelic Doctor." He says: "Why do you extol to me such a man as Aquinas? If he had not been so very arrogant, indeed, he would not surely so rashly and proudly have taken upon himself to define all things. And unless his spirit had been somewhat worldly, he would not surely have corrupted the whole

teaching of Christ by mixing it with his profane philosophy ” (Lindsay, *History of the Reformation* : I, p. 167). We do well to remember that there is a Protestant as well as a Catholic scholasticism. Reaction to Calvin will not see us through, even though it be via Barth to the 39 Articles, any more than will a return to Aquinas save our High Church brethren in this critical hour of Church history. But, the Calvinistic doctrine of grace through the Word of God and its experience in worship in all its solemnity and comfort put iron into the blood of Huguenots in France, Beggars in Holland, Puritans in England and Covenanters in Scotland (*Christian Worship*, p. 158), and we could do with more of their spirit to-day. In a fine vindication of the power of the “autopistic” word for Calvin, Streeter says : “Personally I should much regret a revival of the belief in predestination in anything like the form in which it was taught by Augustine or by Calvin. But religion will not again be potent in the life of Europe until the belief is revitalized that God has a purpose and a plan—not only for the world, but for every individual in it and for the minutest details in the life of every individual ” (*The God Who Speaks*, p. 10).

When we turn to the Church of England, there is no doubt that the clear aim of the Reformers is to restore the primitive balance of Word and Sacraments. The Word of God service is brought out of the monastery and in intention, if not in realized fact, is coupled with the service of the Lord’s Supper (cf. Macdonald, *op. cit.*). Biblical and Sacramental worship are both emphasized. There was no one outstanding experience to mould our worship and theology and this is both gain and loss. We lose in depth, but we gain in width, for no one man’s experience however deep—not even St. Paul’s—is adequate basis for a complete theology or a fully-orbed worship arising out of it. The Word of God is dynamic in a wider area than Luther realized, and fundamental as is the great doctrine of justification by faith, slavish adherence to its isolated pre-eminence by those who have really little authentic experience of its inner meaning of release and forgiveness does not help a world like ours to-day where very few are in the religious bondage out of which St. Paul and Luther were brought. Anglicanism offers a wider possibility of hearing the Word of God than either Lutheranism or Calvinism. The Christian Year was not abolished and Cranmer’s Preface shows the aim of the Prayer Book to do away with corrupt interpolations into the lectionary, to use the vernacular instead of an unknown tongue, to restore the whole Psalter, to simplify the services and by providing the Calendar to increase and regularize Bible reading. These changes and the enforcement of preaching (even if this was only a homiletical second best !) were designed to restore the principles of “the ancient Fathers ” of whom the Preface says that “They so ordered the matter that all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once every year ; intending thereby that the Clergy and especially such as were Ministers in the congregation ”—note the phrase—“should (by often reading and meditation in God’s Word) be stirred up to godliness themselves and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine and to confute them that were adversaries to the truth ; and further, that the people (by daily hearing of

Holy Scripture read in the Church) might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion." The principle underlying the Prayer Book changes is well put in the strong language of the first Homily (on Holy Scripture) where the exhortation is to search diligently "for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament (*sic*) and not run to the stinking puddles of men's traditions, devised by man's imagination for our justification and salvation." Even more impressive are the words of the Ordinal. "Seeing that you cannot by any other means compass the doing of so weighty a work, pertaining to the salvation of man but with doctrine and exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and with a life agreeable to the same : consider how studious ye ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures and in framing the manners both of yourselves and of them that specially pertain unto you, according to the rule of the same Scriptures : and for this self-same cause, how ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies." The intention is "that by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, ye may wax riper and stronger in your ministry." When this is followed by the giving of the Bible, not of the sacramental vessels, to the priest immediately after the laying on of hands, it is not too strong to say of the difference from pre-Reformation practice that "The Church of Rome in making her priests says nothing about preaching ; the Church of England in making her priests says nothing about sacrificing" (quoted by Neil and Willoughby : *Tutorial Prayer Book*, p. 527). Admittedly the Reformers were not working in a vacuum and the pendulum is always apt to swing too far. But there can be no question that the Ministry of the Church of England is first of the Word and secondly of the Sacraments. Our Church "proclaims not a gospel of sacraments, but sacraments of the Gospel" (*Christian Worship*, p. 245).

#### D. Our Task.

There can be no question that the post-Reformation as well as the pre-Reformation Church stands under that "judgment" which "must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. iv. 17). So, as Forsyth says : "There are only two ways of treating the Reformation : one is to complete it and one is to escape from it" (*Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 161). Escape may be back to Catholicism or away into the Liberalism of the Enlightenment. Completion can only be in the spiritual direction indicated at the outset. Obviously a tremendous weight is thrown upon the manner and matter of God's approach to man if man's response in worship, the one "disinfectant from egoism" (cf. K. E. Kirk, *Vision of God*) is to lift him to the heavenly heights of the New Testament experience of life in the Spirit. "It belongs to our tradition and to the truth of the Gospel to lay all the stress upon the action of the living God" says the Principal of Mansfield (*Christian Worship*, p. 243). And Miss Underhill in speaking of the Tractarians as "convinced, even impassioned, transcendentalists" (*Worship*, p. 330) is giving expression to what must be fundamental to any recovery

of the New Testament level of life and worship. "According to your faith be it unto you." We must believe in the Spirit and the powers of the age to come and life in the heavenlies and we must as "a colony of heaven" (Phil. iii. 20) experience them now as facts in our own life and worship. But the trouble is—we cannot, unless we are drawn to do so. Faith is the gift of God. It was not fundamental to Christ's preaching to challenge to a decision. Forsyth puts it in a startling exclamation, "Suppose he had measured his success by his supporters! Suppose his first and great object had been conversions!" (op. cit., p. 172). No: the point has been finely put by Otto, where he says of the Kingdom of God as preached by Christ that it is "a transcendental domain of salvation, which does not harass the will by threatening but draws it by attraction" (op. cit. p. 57). Here is the *mysterium, tremendum* indeed, but also and wonderfully *fascinans*. Only this can lift our world which is hungry for the Word of God and tired of crises and decisions into the New Testament life of the Spirit. Only Christ thus "offered"—the word is Wesley's—can meet man's need.

How the Word has been brought down from that high pinnacle where preaching is, in Forsyth's phrase, "the organized Hallelujah of an ordered community!" "Religion is sacramental. Where it is not it becomes bald. And the only question is, where the sacrament lies. We place it in the Word of the Gospel. *Accedit verbum et fit sacramentum*. Nothing but the Word made Sacrament can make a Sacrament out of elements and keep it in its proper place. But what a task for our preachers to fulfil!" (op. cit., p. 85). Yes, indeed, and we cannot hope to fulfil at all as long as we conceive of preaching as merely evangelistic or homiletic. What we need is the prophetic note. In the earliest New Testament lists (1 Cor. xii. 28; Rom. xii. 6-8; Eph. iv. 11) it is the prophets who come second only to the apostles. May God raise us up prophets in our age who will proclaim the Word as a living Person with their whole personality in utter dependence on the Holy Spirit who alone can make Him our contemporary!

That is our first task. Now for the second! "God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John iv. 24). After centuries of the Bible and the liturgy in an unknown tongue the Reformation emphasis on "truth" and consequently on teaching (*διδάχνη*) was necessary and right and it is still needed to-day. Many have abandoned the lectionary and substituted a much more precarious and irregular system of Bible-reading. Yet the ordinal says, "for this self-same cause . . . ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies." It is *διδάχνη* in the spirit that we need: not teaching about the Bible, but teaching of it; not the re-editing of old commentaries, but the rediscovery of the living message of the whole book; not the rejection of St. James as "an epistle of straw" or of Ecclesiastes as "dumb" (so Luther), but the rediscovery of *πασα γραφή θεόπνευστος και ὠφέλιμος* (2 Tim iii. 16). The breakdown of the old Biblical view has seemed to many of the most spiritually minded of our people a disaster and an apostasy. And no wonder, when the pulpit has so often degenerated into a school of ethics or an information bureau and a bad one at that! I appeal for

a διδάχη in the Spirit of the whole Bible in this, its fourth centenary year.

So much for διδάχη: now for κήρυγμα—the preaching. And this must be my final word. If worship “in truth” is difficult to secure, worship “in spirit” is still more difficult. This need not surprise us to-day, for even Our Lord found the Jerusalem attitude more difficult to deal with than the Samaritan. If there is to be worship “in spirit and in truth” there must be κήρυγμα. Theology has recently come to our aid here and has re-emphasized the old evangelical distinction between the preaching of Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen, and the teaching of, e.g. the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Prof. Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*). Here is a crucial issue for our day. If the Reformation is to be completed, then the immediate task of the Minister of the Word is to *preach* the Gospel. Though theology has rediscovered the subject matter of the κήρυγμα, yet it has not so far dealt with the secret of κηρύσσειν. Yet it is not accidental that in the New Testament while there are less than ten references to the noun there are over fifty to the verb. It was the way the Word was proclaimed that mattered far more than the exact form of its expression. It—or rather He—was proclaimed as “Wonderful” and as “Gospel” not by the intellect alone but by intellect and emotion too. How otherwise could you speak of One you loved and who was living with you and in you? Such a preaching in utter dependence on the Spirit can make Jesus our contemporary and can lift us in His Real Presence into that resurrection life, to which Easter recalls us. It is κήρυγμα truly *preached* that is needed even more than διδάχη. The latter will never unite us unless we are prepared to go back to Aquinas or Calvin. But the former, as Campaign experiences prove, can unite not only Evangelicals but all Christians in the Body of Christ exercising that rich variety of gifts of the Spirit which must be “an essential element of a community which is intended to be the Church of the Nazarene” (Otto: *loc. cit.*) where “all things are yours . . . but ye are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.”

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*Daily Sunshine from the Bible* is a small volume of readings for every day in the year, by the Rev. Richard Wood-Samuel (The Lutterworth Press, 3s. 6d. net). The author’s long connection with the Church Bible Study Union, and its magazine, *The Daily Messages*, gives him a special claim to authority as an exponent of the comfort and help of Bible study. Each of the short readings in this volume contains a forceful interpretation of a text of Scripture, and provides a thoughtful guide which many will appreciate and value.