

The Duty and Difficulty of Close Adherence to the Prayer Book.

BY THE REV. R. J. COBB, M.A.

“IN Public Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments I will use the form in the said Book Prescribed and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority.” These words, binding upon each of us who has entered upon a cure of souls, form the obvious starting point for this day’s Conference; for they not only give the subject matter of this initial paper, but with their hint of review and adaptation of the Prayer Book Services through regular channels they also afford the introduction to the other papers as well. Our purpose is to face as fully as may be, the present situation of the Evangelical in his ministry—at least in his conduct of public worship. The writers of the later papers have the more enviable task of making constructive suggestions, while our present concern is that of attempting to review the position of one who is conscientiously seeking to implement the promise he has made when entering his sphere of ministry.

That is no easy task, and not the least difficult part is the decision as to the approach which must be taken. The most tempting is to set forward in all its rigour the actual course of worship as it stands prescribed in the 1662 Book; immediately we do so, we find ourselves forced to agree with Stanley Morison in his statement ‘The Act of Uniformity is dead’, though I feel we would, many of us, be far from agreeing with him as he continues, ‘There never was much chance of survival of the Act, if only because the directions in the rubrics of the *Annexed Book* are insufficient in number and ambiguous in meaning.’ We would rather acknowledge that the Act of Uniformity is dead in the letter, but very much alive in the spirit: there are, I fear, none of us who have exactly fulfilled the conditions of the ‘said form prescribed’ even, shall we say, during the past seven days—and that bearing in mind the somewhat slender reliefs which the Shortened Services Act permit.

It is, however, an easy matter to say ‘No one observes the Prayer Book nowadays,’ and far too easy to come to the conclusion that very few really care about loyalty to the Book on that account. Indeed, those who are anxious for drastic reform find in such a cry the starting-point for an attitude of mind that sets up the Book as a ‘liturgical Aunt Sally’ in order to prepare the mind for those violent handlings of its services which render them quite unrecognisable. We must meet such an attitude by declaring that, while we agree that the full terms of the Book are such as are not really applicable in these days, there is a mean of loyalty to the Book which is consistent with departing from some of its provisions.

The definite formulation of such a position is no easy task; but the attempt seems to be the only rational course for this paper. It will

involve a reference to the principles which the compilers of the Book sought to express in their work, some consideration of practical parochial questions, and the chief concern will be with the relation between Faith and the Worship which is conducted in accordance with the Prayer Book. Maybe in so doing we go a little beyond the strict scope of this paper as defined in its heading, yet it is only so that we can provide something by way of background for the later discussions.

We are concerned, then, first with the *duty* of adherence to the Prayer Book. This, as we have already noted, is a matter of obligation for all in the Ministry of our Church : we were ordained on our avowal that we were 'truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the due order of this Realm, to the Ministry of the Church', it is a Ministry which involves a discipline in Public Ministration, for one of the principles in Worship which we are commissioned to maintain is that of Uniformity—'all the whole Realm shall have but one use.' How loosely the Church has, in practice, sat to this provision is a matter of History ; every age has had its 'non-conformists' in this respect. Wickham Legg in his *English Church Life* instances a letter of 1683, written by a gentleman of the Inns of Court, who complains that, in London, there are as many ways of worship as there are ministers. He speaks of : leaving out the opening Sentences, Exhortation, Confession, and Absolution at Mattins and Evensong ; substituting a metrical psalm for the Benedictus or Jubilate ; interpolating into Altar Prayers ; the use of extempore prayer in place of the Prayer for the Church Militant ; omission of the opening Lord's Prayer and the Creed from the Communion, and so on. This of course is exceedingly 'modern' in its tone, but I wonder if we realise quite how far things might go were suggestions of the Deposited Book to be accepted : in this connection, Dr. Brightman calculated that there would be 384 possible varieties of Mattins, 2080 if the Litany followed. Such astronomical figures seem to justify the assertion that, if the Book had been accepted, the principle of Uniformity would have given place to one of '*quot ecclesiae, tot liturgiae.*' If we have a conception of the Church which regards her ordered worship as related to her Unity, the principle of Uniformity is one that has great bearing on our conception of the duty of adherence to forms. It is a great witness and constant reminder of the fact that the Church is One Body, divided in time and space, we are none the less one in worship. As we depart from the Prayer Book provisions we weaken the witness to that aspect of Truth.

It is right here, in view of the terms of this paper, to insert a reminder of a fact frequently forgotten, and that is that the 1559 Act of Uniformity is part of the Book. In the Annexed Book of 1662 the Act of 1559 is written in full, and is numbered 1 in the Table of Contents. This has a bearing on the question of the introduction of ceremonies, for the Act clearly prohibits the use of any ceremony not ordered by the Book ; it is not within the immediate province of this paper to discuss the bearing of this on, for example, the Ornaments Rubric, but the allusion is to the point as a reminder that the Prayer Book is intended to be sufficient in itself, and not to need reference to outside authority.

But the great principle which governed the compilation of the Prayer Book was that of Edification. Here again, much criticism is levied at the Book; Addleshaw, in *The High Church Tradition*, summarises this feeling very aptly. "The celebrated principle of edification, 'whereunto', as the Prayer Book says, 'all things done in the Church (as the Apostle teacheth) ought to be referred', was one which our forefathers regarded as of vital importance in liturgical worship. Modern writers on liturgy dislike the phrase, and the emphasis laid on it in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been the subject of considerable criticism. It is said that the principle makes the liturgy more concerned with man's moral and mental uplift, the improvement of the congregation, than with the worship of God. One modern writer, in an article in *Laudate* on the relationship between the Prayer Book and the Liturgical Movement, speaks of the Prayer Book as displaying 'a manward movement intent, first of all, on the edification of the worshipping individual, and even so over-emphasizing words at the expense of the whole make-up of man.' If this is true, Anglican liturgical thought becomes fundamentally anthropocentric and our claim to possess a liturgy in the technical sense of the words is made very questionable." The 'modern' type of thought misses the whole point, and that a most important one, for our emphasis is inclined to be on 'uplift,' while our Reformers will insist that a man cannot really worship unless and until he is responding to the Truth as revealed in the Word of God. It is with this end in view that the services are framed.

This, too, gives the key to the 'order' of the services, each being designed to provide an act of worship meeting every need of the soul as a man comes before God, and affording the opportunity for uniting with fellow-believers in such an act. You will scarcely require me, on such an occasion as this, to elaborate the point, by analysis of the different services. It is sufficient to state it.

We have thus covered, very rapidly, the matter which we need to hold in mind as we come to our subject: Adherence to the Prayer Book is a matter of Duty for those who have accepted the conditions of ministry in our National Church. The Book itself was compiled to provide a uniform worship for the whole nation, one calculated to promote true Christianity among the people, and by the order of the Services to provide means of spiritual worship.

The crucial question which we understand to be involved in the second part of our subject is just how far this ideal is being realised, and we feel justified in asking what modifications seem to be justified within the fabric of our 1662 Book. Again, let us frankly acknowledge that the full Order of Morning Prayer to the third Collect, Litany, and Ante-Communion with the appropriate Exhortation giving Notice of the Communion (or on Communion Days the regular reading of the Exhortation) is a thing of the past. Each of us has his pet modification of this scheme, and in fact quite irregularly puts into operation the permission given by the Shortened Services Act to use for example the Order for Morning Prayer as a separate service, (a proceeding which can, strictly, only be followed on a weekday, or in addition to the full service on a Sunday). In short, it is acknowledged on all hands that the full implementation of the 1662 Book

is quite out of the question for the practical conduct of the regular worship of our Parishes.

Yet, when we have said that, it is important to realise just how much we have lost : the scheme of Worship as it is presented in the Book, longsome as it may be, is nevertheless magnificent in its comprehensive nature. There is no need of the soul that is left unprovided for, and few, if any, needs of national life that are not included in our petitions. It is easy enough to gibe and say that a Prayer for the King, a Prayer for the Royal Family, a Prayer for the Church, a Prayer of St. Chrysostom, and the Grace, do not make a very comprehensive or adequate scheme of Prayer. To do so is to lose sight of the fact that the use of the Occasional Prayers is not optional but prescribed : the ' . . . to be used before the two final Prayers . . . ' is not permissive, it is jussive, and hence these prayers are for regular use as and when they are applicable. The Prayer ' In the time of War and Tumults ' is as much a part of the Litany to-day, as the prayer of St. Chrysostom itself, and when we remember the Collect or Prayer for all conditions of men, to be used at such times when the Litany is not appointed to be said, our Scheme of Prayer in Morning and Evening Prayer is seen to be indeed representative of every need, and a very strong case can be made for considering the Prayer Book as sufficiently providing in its actual terms for every need, even in the twentieth century.

But what of all this in practice ? How far is the Book as we have it really a Book of Common Prayer ? What of the archaisms in which it is said by some to abound ? Each of us will place a differing value on these questions, as we differ in regarding our Services as in themselves a means of educating the worshipper, specially from the point of view of spiritual development. But it is also important to bear in mind the fact that, as Duncan points out in his commentary on Galatians, Christianity is a Way of Life, not a higher education, and so we must most seriously review our services as they really provide for the needs of men and women as they come to worship. Perhaps that point may be best brought home by quotation from the Article on Christian Worship by Mr. Nowell Rostron which appeared in a recent number of the Churchman : " In the matter of archaisms Prayer Book revision is overdue. But there is that about the structure of its main services, its insistence on sincerity and personal religious experience, its use of a tongue ' understood of the people,' its emphasis on the part that each worshipper is called upon to fulfil, and its fidelity to and quotation of the Bible, that is a constant recall to the immediacy of our religion. Its stately and impressive language sets a standard rarely, if ever, reached since it was drawn up, though it does not forbid or quench, outside its liturgical offices, the spirit of freedom in prayer too little exercised to-day ; whilst for use in the Prayer meeting there is no book of prayers to compare with it. The ministry of the Word to which it points, and on which it is based, preserves the prophetic note as an essential part of worship, and is joined with that of the Sacraments in its devotional scheme. The Prayer Book still speaks to the deepest needs, and opens up the highest lights of the soul. Penitence, forgiveness, adoration, praise, listening to God's voice, waiting on Him in prayer and, in the Holy Communion,

the memorial of Christ's death 'till He come,' the reception of the 'dear tokens of His passion,' the self-oblation of the communicant, the sense of the living presence of Christ by His Spirit, and our fellowship with the whole Family of God, cleanse, satisfy, strengthen and nourish the Christian life in all its aspects. But no liturgy can do more than bring us to the fountain of living waters. That the Anglican Liturgy has done for countless Christian people, and is doing to-day." Those of us who are sincerely seeking to use the 1662 Book in accordance with its provisions, feel we can most sincerely add our testimony to that fact.

The plain fact is, that to us as Evangelicals, the 1662 Prayer Book is a completely satisfying Form of Worship: this is specially so in regard to the Administration of the Lord's Supper. Most of us would stand by the leaders of the Opposition to the proposals for Revision who were willing to concede the need for Revision, and to co-operate in such a task, so long as the Communion Service remained untouched. How far such amendment of the Prayer Book would go, may be seen from the practices of many of us who in our own ways, specially where the Evening Service is concerned, seek to adapt our forms to the mood of those who come to Worship. This is probably chiefly seen in the intercessions; there are no elements that we feel able to vary in the Scheme of Worship before we come to the final prayers, but there we, maybe by biddings, maybe by using extempore prayer, certainly from time to time by silence in which the congregation is invited to join in a united act of individual prayer, feel we must seek to meet the need for helping our people to bring their personal burdens before the Throne of Grace. What this amounts to, really, is the giving of some degree of flexibility to the prayers of our congregation, so meeting a need of which we are very conscious.

It was said, at the time of the Revision Discussions in 1927-8, that the strength of the Evangelical case lay in the fact that we had no suggestions to make. This is true! But that is not a result of weakness, it is rather the expression of the conviction which most of us have that the Prayer Book itself is so excellent and really does meet the needs of our people. We feel that the Forms of Worship should be, and are, normative to a very large degree of the spiritual life of the worshippers. That our forms do meet a real need of the present day is witnessed by the fact that there is an increasing tendency in Non-conformist circles to use them, virtually in their entirety, and that the major need in this respect of our day is that the liturgy should be more fully exploited, so that the people may learn to enter into the Services in which they join. There is no doubt that our people do, to a very large degree, appreciate the chance to take the full share in the actual 'progress' of the Service which our forms give to them. We would re-echo the words of Charles Simeon, "The finest sight short of heaven would be a whole congregation using the prayers of the liturgy in the true spirit of them."