

# The Prayer Book : Amendments and Additions that would Assist Effectiveness.

AN ESSAY BY THE LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

IN the final chapter of his book, "The Prayer Book of 1928 Reconsidered," Dr. Lowther Clarke analyses the causes of its failure. Few fair-minded and well-informed people will wish to quarrel with his analysis as a whole : but one statement that he makes is open to challenge. I do not agree that "the Evangelicals wanted no change." It is an undoubted fact that many Evangelicals voted in favour of the new book, and for various reasons. Some were prepared to make concessions for the sake of peace and order, recognising the comprehensiveness of the Church of England, and not wishing to fetter the expression of other traditions in worship by a too rigid insistence on the forms which satisfied their own needs. Still more wanted to have proper authority for the deviations from the Prayer Book of 1662, which had become customary and which they practised in common with the great majority of the clergy. They agreed with the finding of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline of 1906 that the existing "law of public worship is too narrow for the religious life of the present generation," so that strict conformity to the law can only be purchased by spiritual loss to the people. Even those Evangelicals who voted against the proposed Book were not united in their opposition by a common dislike of any change whatever in the familiar forms and words of the Prayer Book. Many of them remembered that Cranmer's original edition had undergone four revisions in little more than a hundred years, and that the Restoration had given the 1662 Book a sentimental value, but not a claim to final perfection. Indeed, considering the enormous changes in the size and distribution of the population and the tremendous advances made in education and especially in scientific knowledge since that date, most of them not only took the customary deviations from that book for granted, but were prepared to accept a large measure of the proposed reforms. What then drove them into opposition? Their determination to admit no change *in doctrine*; for they disbelieved the assurances that no doctrinal change was intended or implied. How could they believe otherwise in face of the persistent attempt being made within the Church of England to discredit the English Reformation and to put the clock back to Mediaevalism? How soon will the Church awake from the same kind of lazy complacency as blinded the country too long to the menace of Hitler? This is not an irrelevant aside. For there is too much in the Nazi subordination of the individual to the State that reminds the historian of the mediaeval subordination of the individual to the Church. The Gestapo has not much to teach the Inquisition. But it is not as the charter of private judgment mainly that the Evangelical values the Reformation, nor is he so wedded to the Tudor settlement as to be

blind to its mistakes and compromises. He thanks God above all that the Reformation, which reached these Islands simultaneously with the Renaissance, brought to our people the knowledge of the Bible, and especially of the Greek New Testament. That knowledge revived once more the preaching of the pure Word of God and the ministration of the sacraments according to Christ's ordinance.

It is to the New Testament, therefore, and especially to the teaching and example of our Lord, that the Evangelical looks for the fundamental principles of Christian worship. Though he often finds valuable corroboration and illustration in the Patristic writings, he does not base his appeal on "Catholic practice," which often means a narrow and arbitrarily defined circle of ecclesiastical precedent. All the great progressive movements in Church History have been inspired by the cry "Back to Christ," in the same way as the wise teacher makes the child start his copy-book at the bottom of the page and work upwards, keeping his eye on the model at the top and not on his own imperfect efforts.

From our Lord then we learn the two basic principles of true worship—spirituality and simplicity.

1. *Spirituality*. This is implicit in all His teaching on religious practices, whether it be the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, or the Sermon on the Mount, where He shows that the disciple's righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisee in this one qualification, that it is done in the conscious presence of the Father, Who "seeth in secret." But the *locus classicus* of Christ's teaching on worship is in His conversation with the Samaritan woman in St. John iv. 20-24. First, He declares the nature of God, for worship is conditioned by our conception of God. Because God is Spirit, alive and present, He is "free from the temporal and special limitations, which are characteristic of matter. Consequently there is no need to seek for Him in a local habitation." (Archbishop Temple). Our worship therefore is to be spiritual and sincere: it must be worship of the heart, where "spirit with Spirit can meet," and worship that is free from conscious hypocrisy and idolatry.

2. *Simplicity*. This also is traceable to our Lord's revelation of the character of God. As He is the heavenly Father, Who loves His children and knows their needs before they ask, we are not to "use vain repetitions," that is mechanical and long-winded prayers, but approach Him with the simple trust of children. And He gives us the terse, direct petitions of the Lord's Prayer as our model. The same quality of simplicity can be seen also in Christ's attitude to the elaborate ritual of the Temple services. An examination of the references in the Gospels to 'temple', 'altar' and 'sacrifice' shows that His emphasis is prophetic throughout, not priestly. It is true that as a loyal Jew He observed the customary religious practices: for so it behoved Him to "fulfil all righteousness." But when as a boy of twelve He went up to Jerusalem, His mother found Him in the Temple, not lost in wonder over the priestly ceremonial, but "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions." The temple for Jesus was His Father's house of prayer, and He consistently used it for prayer and for teaching. The later elaboration of hierarchic and ritual worship in the Christian

Church, as the counterpart of the ceremonial system of the Jewish priesthood, is distasteful, and even abhorrent, to the Evangelical Churchman, not only because it is quite foreign to the teaching and example of our Lord and of His Apostles, but also because it is destructive of the simplicity which is in Christ.

But the New Testament contains other principles of Christian worship which derived from the teaching of the Lord. As they influenced Cranmer and his collaborators, so they should have a direct bearing on all later revision. I mention them in turn, numbering them consecutively.

3. *The Pre-eminence of the Word.* Throughout the Prayer Book the Christian Ministry is described as ministry of "the Word and Sacraments," in that order. For that is the New Testament order. For instance, in the earliest description of the Christian Church, immediately following the events of the day of Pentecost, we read "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." There is ample evidence that the two sacraments were administered in the Church from Pentecost onwards. But there can be no question that the Apostles gave pre-eminent place to the preaching of the Word. The reason which they gave for the appointment of the Seven was, "It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God and serve tables." And St. Paul in a different context declares that "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." For St. Paul, as for the rest of the Apostles, the preaching of the Word, and particularly the word of the Cross, was the God-chosen means of salvation, by which men received the Spirit (I Cor. i. 21; Gal. iii. 2; I Peter i. 23, 25). And the sacraments of the Gospel were ordained by our Lord to express the good tidings and thus to convey in dramatic symbolism the new life of forgiveness and fellowship in Christ.

4. *Intelligibility.* This principle follows closely on the preceding: for the word that is preached reaches the heart and conscience through the understanding. The operation of the Holy Spirit is needed indeed to open the eyes of the natural man, and often babes receive the revelation which the wise and prudent miss. But in giving direction for the conduct of worship to the Corinthian Church, St. Paul clearly states the principle of intelligibility. "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also . . . I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." So in church, we must worship intelligently ourselves, and we must also help others to worship intelligently. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind." This principle inspired Cranmer to give the people the Bible and the services of the Church in the language that they could understand, that they "might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of true religion."

5. *The Evangelistic Aim.* It is remarkable that in his prescription for the worship of a Christian congregation, St. Paul makes provision for the presence of the unconverted—"If there come in one unbelieving or unlearned" (I Cor. xiv. 24). Like the Good Shepherd, he cannot forget the "other sheep, which are not of this fold." Although that

church was suffering persecution, it did not worship within closed doors. And neither should we, literally or metaphorically.

6. *Decency and Order.* This is the last of the principles which St. Paul expressly states in his directions for public worship, though it clearly influences his ruling in regard to the veiling of the women worshippers, and his correction of disorder at the Lord's Supper, earlier in the same epistle (I Cor. xi). There he condemns the unworthy conduct as insensibility to the sacredness of the service, and an outrage on the fellowship of the church. The words "decently and in order" then seem to include both reverence towards God, and consideration for our fellow-worshippers.

Now that we have reviewed the principles which we find governing Christian worship in the New Testament, we are in a position to consider briefly such Amendments and Additions to the Book of Common Prayer as would be likely to promote these principles. And I here express my strong conviction that it would be the gravest error to produce another alternative Book, or a revision of the 1928 Book, in the near future. What is wanted is a properly authorised schedule of permissive uses, to be published separately from the Prayer Book. And that for two reasons: first, that the Book of Common Prayer is (together with the Thirty-nine Articles) the standard of the Church's doctrine, and secondly, that such permissive usage would be experimental and needs the test of time, before it becomes stereotyped.

For the sake of clarity and convenience, I shall arrange my Amendments and Additions under the six principles of worship, taken in the reverse order.

### 1. DECENCY AND ORDER.

The serious lack of discipline and the disloyalty to authority within the Church of England is a grave scandal. The great majority of Evangelicals are anxious to see a reasonable measure of uniformity restored, and to possess proper authority for such deviations as by common custom have become desirable or necessary, *e.g.*, the neglect of the rubrics concerning the exhortations in the Holy Communion office, or concerning the table of Vigils and Fasts.

### 2. THE EVANGELISTIC AIM.

We desire the express recognition of the long-established custom of the sermon in Morning and Evening Prayer, and of the use of suitable hymns. But in addition we seek authorisation for services of an informal kind, such as Mission, Lantern and Children's services. Also we desire occasional elasticity in the statutory services, especially Evening Prayer, *e.g.*, during Lent and Advent, so as to provide a more popular form of evangelistic service.

### 3. INTELLIGIBILITY.

Towards this objective, the following changes seem to be desirable—

The substitution of modern equivalents for such obsolete expressions as "conversation," "indifferently," "bowels of mercies," and "our vile body";

The excision of references to Old Testament characters in the Occasional Services, especially in Matrimony and Baptism;

The omission of the regular recitation of the *Quicumque Vult*; and the use of a short and carefully prepared introduction to the more difficult lessons and psalms.

#### 4. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE WORD.

Cranmer observed this principle by arranging for the continuous reading of the Bible in the Lessons and in the Psalter. But the break in continuity occasioned, on the one hand by irregular attendance at public worship, and on the other by the introduction of fresh lectionaries and of a new arrangement of the Psalter, lays an added responsibility upon the preacher for declaring "the whole counsel of God." If it is true that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ," then the minister of the Gospel cannot discharge his great and glorious responsibility by ten-minute sermonettes.

Lastly, SIMPLICITY and SPIRITUALITY, the fundamental principles, hardly admit of separate treatment. They will find expression supremely in him who ministers in the congregation, in his whole bearing, voice and manner: and also in his control of the choir, and particularly of the organist, that the whole conduct of the service may be subordinated to the one object of the glory of God.

But there are also certain amendments in the ordering of the service which may contribute considerably to this end. For instance, permissive variety in the opening of Morning and Evening Prayer would allow a fresh and appropriate approach to worship on special occasions, and similar freedom in the choice and use of prayers and thanksgivings after the third collect could increase the sense of unity or relevance in the Service. A like permission in regard to the opening and closing of the Holy Communion office may not be so widely desired: but where the sacrament follows closely upon Morning or Evening Prayer, the option of avoiding a repetition of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Collect for the day would certainly make for simplicity.

Many other suggestions come to mind, but these few must suffice for our present purpose, as illustrations of the way in which Evangelical Churchmen ought to test the various proposals which are being, and will be, made, by the touchstone of the abiding principles of the Gospel.

I claim no finality for my statement of those principles. I only hope that it will encourage a more worthy study and statement of them by others. For I am convinced that the only sure anchorage among the sands of shifting opinion lies in the Word of God.