

work out his own technique, and there is no such thing as a perfect pattern.

But a word must be added on one point of even greater importance. We cannot be content with our preaching so long as it is "in word only"—even though that word may be sound and biblical and scholarly. It must be our earnest desire that the Word of God should come to our people through us "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1: 5). How is this to come about? Not simply by adopting correct techniques according to the homiletical textbooks, or by delving into the right commentaries and preaching a thoroughly sound message. Something more is required, and that something more is spiritual unction, which in its turn is the result of prayer. But the prayer in question is not simply the preacher's own: it is also the prayer of the congregation. Indeed, the parson's greatest joy and comfort in his ministry is to know that he has around him a band of godly praying people, who, in a true sense, are workers together with him in the ministry of the Word.

I conclude this article with a further quotation from Von Allmen's *Preaching and Congregation*, to which I made reference earlier. Another thesis of his is this: *Without the work of the Holy Spirit the Word which God has spoken to the world in His Son cannot be effectively translated or made present.* He comments: "This requires from us, before, during, and after the sermon, intense supplication: there is no true preaching without epiclesis. But this fact is also reassuring: in carrying out our arduous work as preachers we are not alone" (p. 31).

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## An Examination of the Proposed Burial Service for Suicides

BY ROGER BECKWITH

**T**HE law of the Church of England, as contained in the rubric preceding the Prayer Book burial service, and repeated in part by Canon 68 of 1603, is that this service, designed for the burial of Christians, is not to be used in three specified cases. It "is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves". The reasons for these exclusions are plain. An unbaptized person is not recognizably a Christian. A person who has been excommunicated, whether as "an open and notorious evil liver", as having "done any wrong to his neighbour by word or deed, so that the congregation be thereby offended", or as harbouring "malice and hatred" (to use the Prayer Book language), has placed his Christian profession under such deserved suspicion that he has been excluded from the Christian fold. If he dies unrepentant, he cannot be buried as a Christian. A suicide is a person who has committed so

grievous and notorious an offence that, if he could have been, he ought to have been excommunicated for it. He is, therefore, as it were, excommunicated posthumously, being denied Christian burial.

These exclusions are not to be regarded as uncharitable. On the contrary, it would, in all normal cases, be hypocritical not to make such exclusions. The Prayer Book service is intended for Christians, and expresses the assurance of salvation, the "sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ", which is proper to a Christian. No clergyman could, with a good conscience, use such a service for those who made no Christian profession whatever, or had placed their Christian profession in such doubt as to warrant excommunication. On the other hand, these exclusions pose a certain pastoral problem. There are exceptional cases where a service suitable for Christians seems entirely warranted, though the Prayer Book service is not permitted. A child of Christian parents, or a converted adult, who dies before he can be baptized, is by this misfortune denied the Prayer Book service. But should he, therefore, be denied Christian burial? And even at the burial of a person who cannot be regarded as a Christian, is every sort of Christian service to be refused, when so obvious an evangelistic opportunity is presented?

By the Burial Laws Amendment Act of 1880 (section 13), a clergyman may, in any case where it is unlawful to use the Prayer Book burial service, use a form of service consisting of prayers taken from the Prayer Book and portions of Holy Scripture, approved by the Bishop.<sup>1</sup> But up to now no precise order of service for such cases has been authorized. The proposed service for suicides, introduced into Convocation in October and just published,<sup>2</sup> is an attempt in this direction. But it must be recognized that if these cases are all to be covered by liturgical services, quite a number of extra burial services must be produced, not just one. There will also be need of a burial service for non-Christians, a burial service for unbaptized persons (Christians, or infants of Christian parentage), and a burial service for excommunicate persons. The occasions for using these services would, of course, be comparatively few. Christian burial is not usually asked for those who regard themselves as non-Christians. The cases where baptism is desired but cannot be had before death are surely not many. And excommunication, though it has not entirely died out and ought not to, is uncommon. The occasions on which a special burial service for suicides is needed are also few. This point should be emphasized. The phrase "laid violent hands upon himself" in the prohibiting rubric has not received interpretation in a judicial decision, but the usual view among writers on ecclesiastical law is that it refers only to those against whom a verdict of *felo de se* has been returned at the coroner's inquest.<sup>3</sup> Suicide is, of course, no longer a crime, but normally the coroner still attempts to assess the state of mind of the deceased, so it is still the duty of the clergy, according to this interpretation, to use the Prayer Book burial service if the coroner finds that the balance of mind was disturbed. Only if he finds that the deceased wilfully took his life while in his right mind is the Prayer Book service to be refused.

Hence, the secretary of the committee which produced the proposed service for suicides, if he be rightly reported in the press, was greatly

magnifying the issue, and making a double mistake, when he stated in the Canterbury Convocation that the Prayer Book service is altogether prohibited for the burial of suicides, and that they must presumably be buried without any service or ceremony. As can now be seen, the Prayer Book service is prohibited only in the case of those who take their life wilfully and with their balance of mind undisturbed. And even for those the Burial Laws Amendment Act of 1880 allows a Christian service. The committee, in its report, makes much of the fact that there have recently been five thousand known suicides each year. In how many of these instances, one wonders, did the coroner's court find it to be a case of *felo de se*? Legal opinion informs me that this is very uncommon.

But, whether or not the law forbids the use of the Prayer Book service at the burial of all suicides, the committee, in contrast with the earlier committee on suicide which reported in 1959,<sup>4</sup> has no doubt that it ought to. To depend upon a coroner's verdict, says the new report, is "a serious reflection on the ambivalence of the Church's attitude in the past" (whatever this may mean) and ignores the consideration that "whereas the condition of mind of a suicide and the question whether the death was accidental or not, are for the most part subjective matters of opinion, whether a man died by his own hand or not is an objective matter of fact" (p. 3). Against these arguments, one may observe, firstly, with Blunt, that the coroner, having considered the evidence, is in a much better position to judge the condition of mind of the deceased, and whether his act was accidental, than is the "Church";<sup>5</sup> secondly, that the coroner may well have to judge of the state of mind of the deceased, and the likelihood of accident, before deciding whether he took his own life or not; and, thirdly, that the committee's implied proposal with regard to accidental death involves problems which those who propose it can hardly have thought out. The evident implication of the words just quoted is that accidental death, if self-inflicted, ought to be treated by the Church as suicide. Presumably the committee intends that, if a man dies from an over dose of sleeping pills (a common way of taking one's own life), though the coroner may judge him to have taken them without suicidal intent (as through picking up the wrong box in the dark) and return a verdict of accidental death, the Church should, nevertheless, treat him as a suicide. But suppose he dies by some means less popular with suicides, for example, through cutting an artery with a knife. Here, also, he dies through his own act, it may be intentionally: but if the coroner judges it an accident, is his view to be ignored here also? And suppose the evidence of accident is really strong, as when a man cuts an artery not with a knife but with a tool he is using: is the Church to say, despite the verdict of the coroner and the feelings of the bereaved, that this may just be a case of cunningly concealed intention? If not, who is to draw the line between one case and another? The coroner will not draw it, and to ask the clergyman to draw it is unjust both to the clergyman and to the man who has died. Moreover, the report itself states, on the same page, that the clergyman should not have to make decisions of this kind.

In defending the committee's proposals with regard to the coroner, the bishop who presented the report in the York Convocation is stated

even to have gone to the length of saying there that very little notice should be taken of the coroner's rider regarding the condition of mind of the deceased. "I am reliably informed that very little notice should be taken of riders," the press reports him to have said. "Sometimes it is added after very careful thought and sometimes it is added without much thought." Considering how great a responsibility rests upon coroners to discover the truth, and how earnestly the sorrowing relatives look to them for any crumb of comfort which the evidence permits them to give, it is an injustice to them to say that they may give little thought to the matter. Of course, they may sometimes make an error of judgment, seeing that they are human, but are we to conclude that because they are not infallible their decisions are therefore unworthy of attention?

In view of the committee's attitude to the coroner, it is understandable that they should propose a single service, to be used in the case of every baptized person who has committed suicide. When one considers the character of this service, however, one realizes the seriousness of their proposal that it be used indiscriminately. "The Burial Service in the Book of Common Prayer," says their report, "is not suitable in the case of suicides, partly because the service would seem to presuppose that the person being buried had died in a state of grace, whereas, so far as we can judge, a suicide has died in a state of unremitted sin" (p. 3). Thus, the proposal is that a service should be used in the case of *every baptized suicide* which presupposes that he has *not* died in a state of grace. That this logical inference is the real mind of the committee is fully confirmed when one examines the draft service itself. The sentences, the repeated anthem, the alternative psalm, the committal, the petition from the Litany and the first optional prayer all say or imply, at least in this context, that the deceased, when he died, had unremitted sin upon his soul. And this service is to be used in *all* cases. However clearly the evidence may show that the deceased was not responsible for his action, or that he had no intention of killing himself, the comfort of the Prayer Book service is to be refused, and we are to address to the God of truth, and invite the sorrowing relatives to take part in, a service which assumes that his suicide was a sin, and such a sin as disqualifies him from being buried as a Christian. No one really believes that suicide while of unsound mind, or accidental "suicide", is, like deliberate suicide, an act equivalent to the sins which merit excommunication and which exclude one from normal Christian burial. But we are to use a service, the very use of which implies that there is no distinction between one case of suicide and another, but all cases are alike heinous, and the terms of which confirm this impression. Such is the committee's proposal, and how utterly contrary it is to the principle of charitable presumption pervading the Prayer Book is surely obvious.

In making this proposal, however, the report is not only in conflict with charity and with Anglican liturgical tradition, but is also glaringly in conflict with itself. On page two it states that suicide committed "through mental derangement" merits "no moral condemnation". Yet the report goes on to propose that in *all* cases a service should be used which repeatedly subjects the deceased to moral condemnation, the only occasion for which is the manner of his death. His earlier

life is not in question at all. It is because he is a suicide that this condemnatory service is to be used. The implication is that, however holy his life may have been, he merits this condemnation by the manner of his death. And yet, the committee admits, he may merit "no moral condemnation" whatever for the manner of his death!

Surely there is no need to labour the point any further. The committee's proposal that the Church should ignore the evidence presented at the coroner's court, abolish the distinction between one case of suicide and another, and work henceforth on a principle of uncharitable instead of charitable presumption, is utterly wrongheaded.

Incidentally, since the committee is so insistent that this service be used for all suicides, the rubric with which they open the service seems a curious one. It states that "This office is to be used, *with the approval of the Bishop of the Diocese*, in every case of a baptized person who has died by his or her own hand". It is interesting to speculate on what grounds the bishop could withhold his approval! Or does this refer to general permission for use in the diocese, and does the committee then envisage the service receiving episcopal rather than parliamentary authorization? The service would certainly need parliamentary authorization, as it is not covered by the terms of the Burial Laws Amendment Act, stated above. But the concluding words of the committee's introduction, in which they express the hope "that the Convocations will approve the same for immediate use by the Church", rather suggests that they do indeed envisage ignoring parliament, and thereby ignoring the law of public worship. Hence one may be thankful that the Archbishop of Canterbury, by the words with which he introduced the debate in Convocation, has given a check to such aspirations.

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Unfortunately, it is not enough to say that the draft service is unsuitable for many of the cases in which the committee proposes that it be used. On other grounds, it is unsuitable for use in any case whatever. It transgresses the practice of the Church of England not only in the matter of charitable presumption, but also in the matter of prayer for the dead. The secretary of the committee stated as much in the Canterbury Convocation, and added that he could not himself use the first of the optional prayers which conclude the service for this reason. But it is not enough to say that one could not use the first of the optional prayers as being a prayer for the dead, since the service has many other prayers for the dead, most of which are not optional. The prayer to which the secretary refers is certainly the most blatant, and reads as follows:

"Holy and loving Father, who graciously shewest mercy to thy children though they rebel against thee: Remember thy servant according to the favour that thou bearest unto thy people, and grant unto him forgiveness of all his sins and a place in the kingdom of thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen."

But the committal is also a prayer for the dead:

"We commit the body of this our brother to the ground, earth to

earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust ; and we commend his soul to the just and merciful judgment of him who alone hath perfect understanding, even Christ our Lord. Amen."

Moreover, in the context of this service many other passages, adopted from Scripture or the Prayer Book but given a new setting, take on the character of prayers for the dead, and have clearly been carefully selected so that they will do so. Two of the four sentences that open the service are these :

"Remember not the sins and offences of my youth : but according to thy mercy think thou upon me, O Lord, for thy goodness" (Ps 25: 6).

"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord : for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps 143: 2).

The anthem from the Visitation of the Sick,

"O Saviour of the world, who by thy Cross and precious Blood hast redeemed us ; save us and help us, we humbly beseech thee, O Lord,"

is twice used. The alternative psalm chosen is Psalm 130, which ends:

"O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy and with him is plenteous redemption.

And he shall redeem Israel from all his sins."

And a significant petition is borrowed from the Litany :

"Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers ; neither take thou vengeance of our sins : spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever."

Now, the attitude of the Church of England to prayers for the dead has always been clear. They were deliberately removed from the liturgy at the Reformation, and the grounds on which the Reformers objected to them are stated in part three of the "Homily concerning Prayer", in the Second Book of Homilies. The authority of the Homilies rests upon the Thirty-Nine Articles (Articles 11 and 35), the Book of Common Prayer (rubric in the Communion service and question in the Ordering of Deacons), and the 1603 Canons (canons 46, 49, and 80). The points made in this homily are that there is no commandment in Scripture to pray for the dead ; that the opportunity for the forgiveness of sins ends with this life ; and that there are but two places of the departed, purgatory having no existence—in one of these places the dead do not need our prayers, in the other they are beyond any help that our prayers could give. The Homily adds references to Scripture and to the Fathers in support of these points. Prayers for the dead or requests for such prayers have more than once been permitted by the ecclesiastical courts to be used in funerary inscriptions, as a practice not explicitly condemned by the Church of England, and not necessarily implying belief in purgatory (repudiated by Article 22, etc.), though excluded from her liturgy.<sup>6</sup> The view that the practice is not expressly condemned by the Church of England apparently overlooks the Homily, and the admission that such prayers are excluded from her liturgy condemns the proposed service.

To pass from the law of public worship to the opinions of Anglican divines, no countenance is, of course, given to prayer for the dead in the writings of the English Reformers. But More and Cross have collected three passages from Caroline divines (Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, and Herbert Thorndike) indicating that these writers were not absolutely opposed to the practice.<sup>7</sup> They could have added passages from Archbishop Bramhall, Archbishop Ussher, Bishop Morton, and the eccentric liturgiologist, Edward Stephens, and (had they passed on to the eighteenth century) from Charles Wheatly, John Johnson, and Samuel Johnson, not to mention various writers who left the Church of England (and even strongly opposed it) such as the Usager party among the Non-jurors.<sup>8</sup> If one passed still further on to Anglican writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it would be easier to find supporters of the practice, and supporters not so discerning as the Caroline divines, with their qualified approval. But when this period is reached, the classical age of Anglicanism, which produced our formularies, is left far behind.

What the Caroline divines say is worth examining. Sir Thomas Browne simply remarks that charity would incline him to pray for the dead, did not true religion forbid it. At the other extreme, Edward Stephens not only defended prayer for the dead but publicly practised it, praying, much in the manner of the proposed service, that the faithful might be forgiven sins carried to the grave.<sup>9</sup> But Stephens was in no sense a representative Anglican. He disagreed fundamentally with the Book of Common Prayer, refusing to conform to it. And he and Thorndike seem to have been alone in wishing to introduce prayers for the dead into public worship. Thorndike, Bramhall, Taylor, Ussher, and Morton point out that the early Church prayed for the dead, but add that it prayed for the blessed dead alone, that it did not conceive them as in purgatory, and that it asked for them such blessings only as are really future and as God can rightly be expected to grant. That is to say, it prayed that the blessed dead might continue in blessedness, that their resurrection might be hastened, and that they might obtain a merciful judgment in the Last Day. There is no serious conflict between this teaching and that of the Book of Homilies. It is fully recognized in both cases that the opportunity for forgiveness ends with this life, that there is no purgatory, and that we must not try to interfere with God's judgment, already settled at death, by praying that He will grant to the blessed or the lost that which they already possess or cannot possess.

Before leaving the subject of the early Church, raised by the Caroline divines, it is worth making one further remark. Though what they say of its practice is doubtless true in general, there is no question that prayers for the dead which they would have reckoned illegitimate were used in some circles from an early date. The view that the destiny of the lost can be changed by the prayers of Christians is found in the Acts of Paul (c. A.D. 150), the Martyrdom of St. Perpetua and St. Felicity (c. A.D. 200) and the Second Book of the Sibylline Oracles (second or third century A.D.). This is further confirmation of the awful liability to abuse that attends the practice of prayers for the dead. The later doctrine of purgatory is really a compromise between the view that

prayers for the dead can change the destiny of the lost and the view that they cannot. And these abuses are no less a danger today than they were in the second or the sixteenth century. Indeed, in the present chaos of belief about the world to come, they may be reckoned a greater danger. Of this danger, as will appear later, the prayers for the dead contained in the proposed service are themselves ample evidence.

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But we are running ahead of our argument in assuming that historic Anglicanism was right in its view of prayer for the dead. Anglicanism appeals to the authority of Scripture, and by Scripture its view of prayer for the dead must be judged. It makes three assertions on the subject. First, that Scripture nowhere, by precept or example, encourages prayer for the dead. This is virtually admitted by everybody. The prayers for the dead which some suppose they have found in Scripture (the favourite instance is 2 Tim. 1: 16) are made such only by completely arbitrary interpretation. The advocates of prayer for the dead appeal not so much to statements in Scripture which favour it, as to the absence of statements there which condemn it.

The second element in Anglican teaching is the assertion that opportunity for the forgiveness of sins ends with the present life. This rests on such sayings as that of Hebrews 9: 27: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment". Another relevant passage is John 3: 36: "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him". This seems clearly to imply that the wrath of God, provoked by sin, rests upon everyone: when a man hears the gospel, there is an opportunity for the wrath of God to be removed through faith; but if the man does not believe, the wrath of God remains on him as before, and is never removed. This interpretation is confirmed by our Lord's words in John 8: 21, 24: "I go away, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sin. . . . I said therefore unto you that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins". The obvious implication of the phrase "die in your sins" is that when they die, the opportunity for the forgiveness of their sins will be past. If they believe on Christ, they will be forgiven and will not die in their sins; if they do not believe on Christ, they will die in their sins and will never be forgiven. One could add to these verses all those in which forgiveness, justification, and eternal life are made dependent on faith in Christ, but the fullest statement is found in the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, where we learn that it is necessary to preach the Gospel to all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, since faith in Christ is their only hope of forgiveness and salvation.

The third element in Anglican teaching is the assertion that there is no purgatory. The one passage constantly urged in support of the doctrine of purgatory (1 Cor. 3: 10-15) is clearly misunderstood when so interpreted—it refers to loss of reward at the Last Day, not to sufferings before the Last Day. Many passages of the New Testament show that Christians are to expect peace and blessedness, not the torments of purgatory, when they die (for example, 2 Cor. 5: 6-8; Phil. 1: 23;

Rev. 14: 13). Regarded as discharging part of the penalty due to a man's sins, the supposed sufferings of purgatory derogate from Christ's atonement. And the witness of Scripture is constant that there are, in the world to come, two places (heaven and hell) and two destinies (life and death, blessedness and punishment) not three : and this not only after the final judgment, but also before it, as is made especially clear in Luke 16: 19-31. It should be noted in this passage that the rich man's brothers are still alive, and that there is " a great gulf fixed " between him and Lazarus, which no one can cross to alleviate his sufferings. Thus, when men die their future is settled. A division at once occurs, and they go to one of two places, according to whether they repented and believed in Christ, or whether the wrath of God still abides upon them. No one, by prayer or any other means, can modify their lot, still less transfer them from one place to the other.

It is now possible to test the prayers for the dead in the proposed service by Scriptural and Anglican teaching. The fact that they *are* prayers for the dead makes them dangerous, and contrary to the use of the Church of England. But, as has been shown, it is possible to frame prayers for the dead which are less pernicious, though inexpedient and foreign to the worship of the Book of Common Prayer. Do the prayers in the proposed service fall into this less pernicious category? Do they ask simply that the saints may continue in blessedness, receive a speedy resurrection, and be mercifully judged at the Last Day? Is this the character of the prayers now proposed? One can tell at a glance that it is not. These prayers repeatedly ask that the dead man's sins may be forgiven. It is implied, of course, that they have not been forgiven already. And this is what the committee really believes. In a passage from their preface, already quoted, they say that the Prayer Book Burial service " would seem to presuppose that the person being buried has died in a state of grace, whereas, so far as we can judge, a suicide has died in a state of unremitted sin " (p. 3). The suicide has not died in a state of grace : the committee, by its service, hopes to transfer him to one. Therefore the destiny of the dead is not settled ; the question whether they have believed on Christ is not determinative ; even if they are believers they are not already at peace ; there is no great gulf fixed ; the dead stand in some middle state like the state of purgatory, and can be saved by our intervention—or so the committee would have us believe.

It is now clear that Canon T. L. Livermore was not overstating the matter when he said in the Canterbury Convocation (to quote once more from the press reports) that the new service savours of " heresy ". It compromises the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith. Yet it is not difficult to see how the committee has come to make this fatal mistake. Sin is a reality, in Christians as in others—indeed, in Christians it is worse than in others. And the judgment of God against sin is a reality, whether the sinner be a Christian or not. When a man sins, it is necessary for him to confess and ask God's forgiveness, and if he is a Christian he will do so. But suppose he dies without doing so—whether through unexpected death or through suicide? Is it impossible for his sin to be forgiven? Surely not, if he is a Christian. Then it will have to be forgiven after death. Let us, therefore, aid

him by praying that his unconfessed sin may be forgiven. This seems to be the committee's train of thought.

They have got themselves into this false position by ignoring the complementary doctrine of justification by faith. That they have little appreciation of the doctrine is suggested by the passage they have chosen for the lesson (John 5: 25-29, though there is an alternative). By separating these verses from their context, the committee has produced a perfectly terrifying lection for the occasion, which seems to imply that, despite all their prayers for the dead man, God's judgment is exclusively according to works, and it is impossible for any sinner to be saved. They say in their preface that they do not wish to give the impression of condemning the dead man to eternal punishment: if this had been their wish, they could not have selected a better lesson for the purpose. Had they included only the preceding verse, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my words, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life," what a difference it would have made! But the lesson is not our present concern. It is on the prayers for the dead that we wish to bring the doctrine of justification to bear.

To say that when a Christian sins, he comes under God's displeasure and has to repent and ask forgiveness, is to state only one side of the matter. The other, and, indeed, more important, side is that as soon as a Christian believes, God's displeasure is turned away from him; he is reckoned righteous, not for his own but for Christ's sake; he receives eternal life, and is delivered from the prospect of condemnation. These two doctrines of the New Testament are in tension. When God justifies a man, His displeasure is turned away for ever; yet when that man sins, he becomes, for a time, the object of God's displeasure. God's temporary displeasure with the objects of His grace is not, however, directed to their condemnation but to their salvation. His purpose in chastening them is that they should repent and be forgiven. Nor does He suspend their salvation upon their conscious repentance of every sin they have committed: how, then, could they be saved? What He requires is that they should repent and ask His forgiveness in every case where they are able to. Forgotten and unwitting sins cannot be repented; nor can sins immediately followed by death, whether it is merely sudden or brought about by suicide. But sins of which the believer cannot repent do not, therefore, remain unforgiven, even for a moment, since they are covered by his pre-existing justification. Suicide may be immediately followed by death and give no opportunity for repentance and confession: on the other hand, death may follow more slowly, and in this case there will be the opportunity. But in neither case is it necessary to pray that the perpetrator be forgiven after he is dead. If he is a believer, he dies justified from all his sins—those of which he was in a position to repent and those of which he was not—and enters immediately into the peace and blessedness of paradise. Of course, suicide is a grave sin and scandal in a Christian, such as even throws doubt on the sincerity of his Christian profession. But there is no reason to think that the old man, still dwelling in the flesh of the regenerate, is quite incapable of such an act. And if this be conceded, it must also be conceded that believers who commit suicide,

like believers who commit other sins, enter, as soon as they die, into the joy of the Church triumphant.

Had the committee grasped the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith, they would have seen no need of praying for the dead man to be forgiven. What the doctrine of justification means, as the Homily mentioned earlier points out, is that either the dead man's sins have already been forgiven or they cannot be forgiven. The man who is justified by faith does not die in his sins: the man who dies in his sins cannot be pardoned, however much we subsequently pray for him. To die in one's sins, according to our Lord, is to die without having "believed that I am he" (Jn. 8: 24). But according to the committee, to die in one's sins is to commit suicide. There could be no greater contrast. To quote their words once more, the Prayer Book service "would seem to presuppose that the person being buried has died in a state of grace, whereas, as far as we can judge, a suicide has died in a state of unremitted sin" (p. 3). To say this is, in effect, either to affirm that all who commit suicide are lost, or to deny the doctrine of justification by faith.

In a full examination of the proposed service one could not ignore its literary qualities and its historical antecedents. This article is confined to the more important matters of its theology and pastoral usefulness, and we have found, without proceeding beyond these, plenty that requires revision. The Archbishop of Canterbury is reported as having promised, when introducing the debate on the service, that there would be ample opportunity for such revision: one is thankful for this, but is concerned lest little advantage should be taken of the opportunity. The York Convocation and the Upper House of Canterbury have already approved the service, and only the Lower House of Canterbury has asked that it be referred to the Liturgical Commission. Yet a drastically altered service is needed, whether prepared by the Liturgical Commission or submitted to it by others. Such a service, to be used only in cases where the coroner discounts the possibility of accident or unsoundness of mind, should set out, firstly, the sinfulness of suicide, and secondly, the good news of salvation for sinners, applying this both as grounds of hope regarding the deceased, if a believer, and as an evangelistic challenge to his surviving relatives and friends.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See W. L. Dale, *The Law of the Parish Church*, 2nd edn., p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> S.P.C.K., 9d.

<sup>3</sup> See W. L. Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 52, following Burn. Phillimore takes the same view, so does Blunt, and I have not found any writer who does not.

<sup>4</sup> Its report, not to be confused with the new one, was published by the S.P.C.K. at 2/6 under the title *Ought Suicide to be a Crime?* and forms the basis of the report of the present committee.

<sup>5</sup> See J. H. Blunt, *The Book of Church Law*, 7th edn., pp. 183-184.

<sup>6</sup> See R. Phillimore, *Ecclesiastical Law*, 2nd edn., p. 696, for one case, and recently another has been reported in the press.

<sup>7</sup> *Anglicanism*, pp. 631-633.

<sup>8</sup> For the opinions of some of these writers see W. Goode, *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, vol. 2, p. 418; W. J. Grisbrooke, *Anglican Liturgies of the 17th and 18th Centuries, passim*; and J. Bramhall, *Works* (Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology), vol. 2, pp. 494, 633-634.

<sup>9</sup> See W. J. Grisbrooke, *op. cit.*, p. 242.