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THE CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine and Review

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CLERGYMEN AND LAYMEN OF THE
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Popular Services and Revision.

PUBLIC opinion is now ripe for the inclusion of prayers in the Church services for social conditions and for our empire, our colonists and the subject races. From that position it should be a simple matter to go one step further and add prayers of a definitely missionary character. But to stop there would fall far short of the changes needed to make the services popular and effective. Additions to the ordinary forms will not solve the problem. Revision of the latter is essential if they are to meet the needs of the modern mind.

The present epoch, when many conventionalities are presumably in the melting pot seems congenial for the introduction of changes. There is precedent for such opinion, a precedent which justifies the hope that the ambition may be realized. The Renaissance was heralded by the clash of arms. The Reformation was preceded by turmoil of mind and soul throughout Christian civilization.

A salient feature of the Reformation is that it was at once a representation of old truths and a new expression of ancient faith. The unreformed services no longer adequately expressed religious thought. In some respects they were found in conflict with the conviction of, at any rate, a considerable number of sincere and thinking worshippers. To a large extent they left the congregation inarticulate. In scope and in form they had failed to keep pace with the development of the educated mind and the progress of thought. It was a time when new ideas were quickly forming. Accepted theories were being put to the test. Dogma was subjected to inquisition. The right of individual judgment was asserting itself. The soul had outgrown its body. The modes of worship did not fit the age.

It is essential to remember that the sixteenth century revisions of the prayer-book were largely directed by the desire to provide the Church with a liturgy fit for the psychology of the day. That will prepare us to realize that a sixteenth century revision in its turn may fail to satisfy the thought of later ages. It is more than probable that the war will hasten development, and consequently emphasize the need of revision. It is the Church's misfortune that the discussion of revision has developed into controversy

between rival theological schools, mainly centring in the form and meaning of the office of Holy Communion. As far as the masses of the people are concerned it is plain that Morning or Evening Prayer appeals more to them than does the Holy Communion. It is to Evening Prayer, or to an adaptation of it, that we generally resort for services in Mission halls. But why these adaptations or mutilations of the ordinary form? And why should it be necessary to surround Evening Prayer in so many churches with meretricious attractions taking the form of an irrational concert? It is obvious that it is marred by imperfections. It seems equally certain that the simple mission service often possesses merits wanting in the more stately order; though it does not follow that the former is all perfection or that the amount of success attending it is to be attributed solely to an attraction intrinsically its own. If Evening Prayer is to be amended it would probably be a loss rather than a gain if the alteration simply consisted in an approximation to the so-called simplicity of the mission service.

What are the essential characteristics of forms of worship such as we have in view. Let us keep in mind that we are thinking of *worship*, not simply of occasions of receiving instruction or singing pious verse. Even the merely intellectual grasp of the proceedings cannot content us. If worship means anything it is the conscious approach to the presence of God. "‘Let us come before the Lord and enter His courts with praise,’ are words," says Professor Jevons, "which represent fairly the thought and feeling which on ordinary occasions, the man who goes to worship—really—experiences." If there is any external condition which can condition worship it is *atmosphere*. Witness the feeling of quiet repose and detachment from worldly interests which unconsciously steals over one on entering the stately pile, with its dim religious light, its perfect silence save for the whisper of the divine Presence, empty of all but the one or two kneeling figures and eloquent of the peace that is not of this world. True the devout can find God anywhere, and earnest prayer has ascended with the smoke of battle, has found harmony in the desert stillness and sweetened the air of a drunken alley. But the normal function of our senses is to make us alive to our environment. Through them we receive impressions and are prompted to expression. We are considering the *organization* of worship, that is, we are to create, aid and direct impression

and expression. As far as we can achieve it an air of reverence and solemnity must pervade the building. From the moment that the worshipper enters the House of God it is desirable that he should be surrounded by the atmosphere of worship. What meets the eye and strikes the ear should be carefully prepared. Music and scenery must be playing their part before the worshipper's never idle mind is driven to its own expedients to beguile the time of waiting. The note of reverence struck at the beginning must not lose its echo till the moment the last worshipper has left the church. The thought uppermost in the mind of each should be "It is good for us to be here." "I cannot worship in my own parish church," was the complaint of a thoughtful Evangelical layman. "The Vicar is a good preacher, but he is so irreverent during the service." And the remark concerned a firm evangelical who is not unknown as a writer. Atmosphere can be created by due attention to detail even with the present order of services.

Impression and *Expression* are two essential factors in public worship. It is when we seek to use these to the best advantage that we are faced by the need of revision. "No impression without expression" is the dictum of a well-known psychologist. We look for expression in worship as well as in the Christian life. We seek to make an impression on the worshipper for its own sake. We must try so to arrange the sequence of the service as to induce expression which will perpetuate the impression, and so to present impression as to prompt expression. The due proportioning of this sequence constitutes the fit *order* of service. Expression should be natural. The aid of music is appropriate for sentiment naturally voiced in song, the spoken utterance for direct and definite prayer and for confession, though the penitential attitude of mind may be stimulated by suitable rhythm and music in a minor key. Profession of faith may call for jubilant, subdued or strenuous enunciation. Appropriate gesture or position is by no means unnatural as an accompaniment of vocal utterance and serves to intensify both expression and impression.

Faulty arrangement of the items of this programme may stultify the plan and defeat the object in view. At the beginning of the service the mind should be weaned from foreign channels. Interest must be aroused. The intellect must be appealed to, and emotion enlisted to aid the scheme. The impression sought to be made

must be led up to by suitable gradations in an effectual sequence. Common prayer, instruction, exhortation, reading of scripture, praise, and recitation of creed must be introduced at such points as will enhance the psychological effect, by harmonizing with the particular attitude of mind that may be presumed to obtain at that stage of the proceedings. It is reasonable to look for opportunities of expression immediately after each effort to create a particular impression, that is, when the anticipated mood pervades the common consciousness of the congregation. It will not suffice for this expression to be the mere utterance of a pious sentiment. It must bear a clear and definite relation to the impression assumed to have just been made and its connexion with the preceding thoughts and words must at least be obvious. Psalms, hymns, prayers and responses will suggest themselves as vehicles of expression. The chanting of the psalms is an invaluable aid to public worship. The chant can claim a haunting charm that is all its own. The Psalms are unrivalled in imparting a staying power, a soothing influence and inspiration to religious endeavour. Contrary to a fairly widespread opinion they are popular with the less educated members of the flock. It would probably aid the expression of the worshippers if they repeated more prayers with the priest instead of merely endorsing them with "Amen"—or omitting to do so!

A criticism of the order for Evening Prayer will help to illustrate the force of these remarks. Its plan is not faultless. Its most quaintly charming portion is an aggregation of services of the Hours which revision could improve. Many prayers are too long. Indeed the whole order is too bulky. The opening is a compendium of theology. Throughout the beginning and much of what follows a logical sequence of ideas prevails, but it is a logic appealing to the expert, the converted and the devout rather than to the man whose enthusiasm has yet to be enlisted, and whose religious sense is not yet quickened. For the use to which it is, perforce, put the introductory portion is too long, too formal, and though excellent in itself, no doubt appealing forcibly to the psychology of a contemplative age, or perhaps we should say to the class whose exponents composed it, it does not really conform to the needs of to-day. It assumes too much. It is not sufficiently arresting. The reading of the exhortation does not sufficiently prepare for a genuine

confession of sin. The words of the confession prematurely put a formula of penitence in the mouths of the congregation and contain phrases which do not always win even their intellectual assent, much less that of their experimental religion. "I do not think that I am a miserable sinner," said the headmistress of a Church school, and she, good soul, was no candidate for the saintly halo. The lessons have no necessarily patent connexion with the portions of service preceding or following them. The position permitted the hymns removes them too far from prayers or lessons, the effect of which we may wish to enhance by their use. And what cannot be said in criticism of the manner in which we use the psalms?

These considerations show the need of grading the forms of worship to the requirements of different ages and different educational and spiritual attainments. They also point the desirability of variety of form so as to impress more effectually upon the same grade different truths or to develop in them progressive moods of emotional religion. Within reasonable limits variety in itself is desirable. The genius of revival in all religions is the desire to infuse a living reality into forms grown dead through long usage. And yet the value of the constant repetition of so much solid theology is not to be denied. As long as the sermon is customary we may assume that there will at any rate be some variety of topic; and the seasons of the Church's year, with their proper collects and, sometimes, psalms and lessons, keep before us change of subject. But a service arranged on true psychological lines would harmonize the prayer and praise and lesson with the topic of the instruction or exhortation. Many have experienced the power of the form of service where every part has a direct reference to its main object as, for instance, at missions or holiness conventions. Not that it is suggested that every service should be entirely of this character, and so employ distinct forms on every occasion of worship. That would be confusing and would not be over successful in begetting the religious *habit*, which, condemned as it may be as merely conventional, is nevertheless a "second best" of the greatest value and is the sheet anchor of respectable morality, ethical religion and steady churchgoing. The Book of Common Prayer points a way to the solution of the problem. It is a compromise; and for a usual form of service to suit most occasions and most people we must compromise. The Breviary, which though cumbersome,

antiquated and conservative to more than a fault, yet is a monumental record of the needs of ages of worshippers and of successive and by no means entirely ill-judged methods of meeting them, makes a contribution towards solving the problem. It divides the component parts of the services into "Common" and "Proper." The insertion of the multitude of the responds and verses deplored by the reformers as breaking up the reading of the scripture was originally promoted by a sound enough idea, though the method of practising it was disastrous. These items bore a relation to the topic and were meant to serve as illustration or expression in harmony with the passage read.

The "Common" suggests itself as the first part of the service. Here will appear such items as are of a preparatory nature and of general import, and such other concomitants as may be in conformity with them, provided of course that they will really be a genuine reflection of the spiritual mood that may be expected to prevail on ordinary occasions at the beginning of worship. First would come the voluntary, which might well be a "song without words" if its theme were sufficiently clear and the burden of the song were appropriate. Or it might be the air of a song of which the words were well known. Then would follow the hymn, say one of thanksgiving or that had a reference to the opening of the day (if it be morning) or to the circumstance of assembling in God's house; then prayer, preceded by an invitation to pray or by a sentence of scripture. The Lord's prayer will probably furnish the most suitable beginning. This might be followed by thanksgiving and by intercessory, missionary or state prayers. Here there might be introduced a psalm of praise or thanksgiving or a hymn voicing the thoughts of some of the prayers already used. Then might come a confession of sin, a prayer for forgiveness and an absolution, preferably in shorter terms than the prayer-book forms, and a penitential psalm or a hymn of faith.

Now we are ready for the portion that we may term "Proper," or the principal topic of the service. First would come the sermon (which should convey at any rate one dominant idea), following this a lesson from the Bible, the passage to bear upon the theme expounded. The lesson will then be listened to with more intelligence and interest. Then might follow a canticle or psalm illustrating the lesson: certainly not one requiring a feat of mental gymnastics

to discover its relevance. Where the original of any part of a lesson is in verse such portion would come best as a canticle after the prose. When the topic is one of the verities enumerated in the creed that particular part of the creed might be impressively chanted to an appropriate setting. Then would follow prayers connected with the special topic, then a hymn which might be an offertory hymn or one in keeping with the subject if the sermon were a plea for some special cause. A prayer of offering might be made with advantage to the worshipper, or, at any rate, devout ceremonial should accompany the "reverent" bringing of the "decent bason to the priest" and the latter's "humbly presenting and placing it upon the holy table." Certainly it is desirable to encourage the idea that the collection is an offering from the worshipper to his Creator and is not given as a coin thrown to a street singer or paid as a fine for attendance at Church. Our thoughts have been centred on communal worship, but surely it would be a distinct help to the spiritual life sometimes to introduce the mystical element into the order for Common Prayer. This might be accomplished by affording opportunity for silent prayer after the confession or the sermon or after extempore prayer or a hymn following the sermon. There remains the conclusion of the service. The main feature of this will, of course, be the benediction. This is the consummation of the form of worship. It is the audible pronouncement of what every worshipper should be loath to depart without, the grace and the ineffable peace of heart which is the consequence of real communion with God. But what too often happens? It would seem as if the Blessing, like the National Anthem, were the signal for buttoning coats or furtively adjusting headgear. Perhaps a suitable sentence of scripture might be recited or chanted while the people were on their knees, and after the Blessing a verse of a hymn, of which the theme was of the gift of peace, might be sung while the worshippers were still kneeling. A recessional hymn concerning the close of the day (if it be evening) will appropriately follow and the ensuing voluntary should be suggestive of a solemn peaceful hour and suitably embody some chords reminiscent of the closing hymn.

E. F. F. DESPARD.

