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Evangelicals and the Problem of Ritualism.

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THOSE who are able to watch the various types of theological students passing through our Universities and Colleges at the present time are familiar with one type whose career seems at first sight somewhat inexplicable. A lad comes up to college as an Evangelical by tradition, and, for some time at any rate, he does not come under the influence of any other school of thought. Yet from the very outset of his student-life it is manifest that he is drifting out of sympathy with Evangelicalism, and is being drawn, first towards what he describes as "Moderate Churchmanship," and, later on, to avowed High Churchmanship and Sacerdotalism. In the majority of such cases, it is evident that the motive which has determined this change of front is not primarily an intellectual one. It is not because he is convinced of the intellectual inadequacy of Evangelicalism that the lad transfers his allegiance to another school of thought. It is true that if his new position is challenged he will probably muster numerous arguments in its defence; but a keen observer will readily detect signs that these arguments are after-thoughts, the consequence, rather than the cause, of the newly professed sympathies. And however completely the student may be vanquished in controversy and appear for the moment to be silenced, the old tendencies soon reassert themselves with undiminished vigour. Clearly, then, there remains at the back of his mind some other motive which is the primary cause of his distaste for Evangelicalism and his craving for something else—something else which he thinks he will find in Anglo-Catholicism.

Now where are we to find the seat of this determining impulse? In many cases it may be traced with tolerable certainty to the æsthetic element in the lad's personality.

There are desires and emotions within him which seem to meet with but little response in current Evangelicalism. His love of beauty is not satisfied by "the barrenness of Protestant worship"; his musical and literary tastes are ruffled by the popular Evangelical hymn or the conventional Evangelical sermon. And as his "culture" is developed under the influence of college-life, these unsatisfied desires and emotions stimulate an initial "will to disbelieve" in Evangelicalism and an initial "will to believe" in some type of religion which appears to pay a greater attention to the æsthetic aspect of worship. When once an antipathy to Evangelicalism has been aroused in this way, it will normally grow more and more pronounced as time goes on, together with the corresponding passion for art and culture; till at last the breach with Evangelical traditions is complete, and another recruit is added to the ranks of the Anglo-Catholic party.

What is the right policy to adopt in dealing with students of the type we have been considering? It is obvious that arguments of a purely intellectual type will be of little use, for they do not touch the real point at issue. Even the highest type of spiritual appeal may fail to convince, because it does not appear directly to meet the need which is felt most keenly at the moment.

Two courses appear to be open. We may tell our æsthetic youth that Evangelical religion is so essentially and exclusively spiritual that art and culture do not properly fall within its pale, and, consequently, in the exercise of his religion he must forgo his æsthetic desires and emotions. In this case he will probably reply that he would prefer to forgo the exercise of a religion which imposes on him such conditions.

But there is an alternative course open to us—namely, to maintain that art and culture are not necessarily secular things, but are capable of being adapted to the service of even the most spiritual religion, provided that they are not regarded as ends in themselves, but simply as means to assist spiritual

worship. If we take this line, we shall recognize that in Evangelicalism there is room for a type of service enriched by art and culture, as well as for a service of plain and simple character. In other words, this means that the antithesis of Evangelicalism is not Ritualism, but only a Ritualism which is linked with High Church and sacerdotal doctrines.

This is the attitude which has been taken up (in practice if not in theory) by a number of Evangelicals in recent years. Stately music, surpliced choirs, embroidered hangings, are now used in many Evangelical churches, not because they are regarded as symbolical of any particular doctrine, but simply in order to gratify the æsthetic instinct. The incumbents of these churches would doubtless repudiate the title "Ritualist"; but, as a matter of fact, the practices thus adopted (if divested of doctrinal significance) differ from a more elaborate ritual in degree only and not in kind. There seems, therefore, no reason why we should not speak of such churches as representing a "Ritualistic Evangelicalism."

In some ways this affords ground for satisfaction. It is a good thing to demonstrate that Evangelicals are not tied to a rigid uniformity in the externals of worship. It clears the ground from secondary controversies and helps to concentrate attention on the doctrinal foundations which are of the essence of our position. A "Ritualistic Evangelicalism" is also to be welcomed, if it serves to convince the æsthetic type of Churchman that he need not necessarily join the Anglo-Catholic party in order to obtain full scope for his artistic sympathies.

But, at the same time, there are elements in this movement which give cause for some anxiety. There is, in the first place, the danger—almost too familiar to need detailed discussion—that a highly artistic and cultured type of religion should tend to foster an exaggerated idea of the importance of the externals of worship. An elaborate system of rites and ceremonies, however excellent, is always liable to attract to itself an interest so all-absorbing that its devotees are inclined to pay but little heed to that which alone is absolutely essential—namely, that worship

should be "in spirit and in truth." It would be hard to find in history any instance of a "Ritualistic" worship—Christian or non-Christian—which has not thus become corrupted with formalism and unreality ; and it is not unreasonable to feel some misgiving lest a "Ritualistic Evangelicalism," however pure in doctrine, should suffer from the same cause.

But there is another feature in modern "Ritualistic Evangelicalism" which calls for fuller comment. Some of our brethren, in their desire to provide "nice services" without compromising their doctrinal position, treat the ritual they adopt as a mere ornamental appendage to worship, without any doctrinal significance at all. But the true function of ritual (whether it be of the simplest or most ornate kind) is surely to instruct the mind as well as to please the eye. The outward forms of public worship should be designed to suggest ideas in accordance with the doctrines taught by word of mouth. To this end, it is desirable that the ritual of our churches should be chosen, not merely because it is "the usual thing" in other churches, nor solely because it is artistic (though this will naturally be taken into account), but even more with a view to providing, so far as possible, an intelligible outward expression of the spiritual truths of our faith. Too often, new customs are adopted by modern Evangelicals simply because they are "nice," without regard to the fact that these customs normally and naturally suggest, to an impartial and thoughtful spectator, ideas which are really foreign to our doctrinal position. It is good to shake off the old blind horror of ritual *quâ* ritual ; but unless our toleration be tempered with discrimination, the last error will be worse than the first.

A concrete illustration—not strictly drawn from the sphere of ritual, but closely associated with ritual—may serve to make this point clearer. At the present time, when an Evangelical church is restored, the architect employed is almost always one whose ideals of architecture are framed on those of the medieval church. In other words, his aim (in so far as he is allowed a free hand) is to design the general artistic scheme of the church

so that a magnificent "altar," enriched by the costliest ornaments, is placed in such a setting that it at once attracts the attention of the observer. This was the ideal of a church in medieval times ; and rightly so ; for it provided a clear outward expression of the ideal of medieval worship, focussed as that was upon the sacrifice of the Mass. Now it is of course true that the chancel of even the most "up to date" Evangelical church differs widely in its appointments from the medieval type of chancel ; nevertheless, everyone who has watched the general trend of the changes made in the chancels of our Evangelical churches during recent years will admit that these changes have almost invariably been in the direction of the medieval ideal. Again and again the Holy Table has been raised upon steps, vested in rich embroidery, and adorned with handsome ornaments, till its general appearance is far more suggestive of a medieval altar than of a communion table such as used to characterize "the Churches of the Reformation." Undoubtedly we all welcome the change in so far as it increases the beauty of the sanctuary ; but it is worth noticing that this exaltation of the Holy Table is generally far in excess of any attention devoted to other features of the church, which are often thrown into relative insignificance as a result. Now consider the effect of this upon an impartial observer who may happen to enter such a church. His eye is at once drawn to the "altar," the general appearance of which is such as to imply that around it the worship of the Church is gathered, as it were around a shrine. Will not this further suggest to his mind (if he is of a thoughtful disposition) the idea of a Divine Presence localized at the altar, and of a sacrifice offered there by a priest ? These were the ideas which the medieval architect intended his chancel to suggest ; and he designed it accordingly. Our Anglo-Catholic brethren, also, who aim at medievalism in doctrine, rightly imitate medieval designs in their churches ; for they know the didactic value of external effects.

But what of ourselves ? Is our Evangelical worship, in truth, focussed so predominantly on the ministry of the Sacra-

ment at the Holy Table, that the ministry of the Word at lectern or pulpit is of quite secondary importance? For this is the natural impression suggested by internal appointments of some modern Evangelical churches. Or again, is it really the case that our doctrinal principles have been drifting during the last few decades away from those of the Reformation, so that our present position is nearer to that of the High Churchman and the Sacerdotalist than to the position of the Reformed Churches? For this is the conclusion which is often drawn—and not without apparent reason—by those who have marked the general trend of recent church restoration and alteration under the Evangelical school.

As with the designs of our chancels, so with other aspects of the Ritualistic movement. Every new custom or ceremony adopted by the Anglo-Catholic party has been denounced by Evangelicals; but in many cases, after the lapse of a few years, these denunciations have given place to imitation—which is the sincerest flattery. Surpliced choirs, coloured frontals, turnings to the East—these and many others are cases in point.

Many a thoughtful layman, as he takes note of these things, asks, “Quousque?” He will tell us that we have met the advance of Sacerdotalist Ritualism with a mere show of conservatism, which has not availed to conceal the tacit surrender of one after another of the old strategic points; and he inquires, When and where is this policy of retreat going to end?

Surely it is time that we Evangelicals took up a more constructive line of action in face of the problem of Ritualism. If (as we believe) Evangelical Churchmanship is a living, growing, creative power at this time, why should it not exercise a definitely formative influence upon the externals of its worship? Instead of borrowing indiscriminately from an age whose ideals are foreign to our own, let us recognize the need for a more independent (and, in the long run, a wiser) policy. Such a policy would be guided by a determination to retain—or if necessary create—only such outward forms of worship as are best suited to express what we believe to be the New Testament conception of worship and religion.

But how could this constructive policy be carried out in practice? A full answer to that question is one which it would be rash for anyone to attempt who (like the present writer) has no claim to possess the artistic temperament. But much may be gained if we can only bring ourselves to realize that here is a real problem confronting Evangelicalism at the present time. And I would submit that one of our great needs is a rising school of church architects and artists who are at heart Evangelicals, and keen to express Evangelical ideals through their art. It is only with the help of such men that our school of thought can truly meet the needs of the æsthetic type of student, such as we have described above.

Perhaps it may be well (even at the risk of provoking hostile criticism) to mention, by way of illustrating the general principles advocated above, one direction in which a constructive policy might prove to be of advantage to Evangelicalism. It concerns a problem which (to the knowledge of the present writer) has been exercising the minds of a number of our younger clergy for some time past—namely, the position of the officiating minister at Holy Communion. In itself, this is, no doubt, a small matter; but viewed in the light of history and of modern controversies, it can hardly be dismissed as of no account.

Now, most of us, I imagine, are desirous that the outward form of our Communion service should express as clearly and simply as possible the Reformed doctrine of the Sacrament, which we believe to be in accordance with the mind of our Lord. We should wish the emphasis to fall upon the idea of spiritual communion and thanksgiving by the whole congregation, rather than upon the person of a sacrificing priest, or any actions performed by him as a mediator between the people and their God. With this aim in view, let us ask ourselves what is the most seemly position for the officiating minister to adopt? It is natural enough that our first instinct should be to select for our answer one or other of the two positions with which we are familiar in the present day; but if we can divest our minds from the influence of traditional custom, we shall, I think, come to

the conclusion that the most natural and the most reverent position—from the Evangelical point of view—is to stand on the farther side of the Holy Table, facing the congregation. If we were not so accustomed to the sight of the North-side and Eastward positions, I doubt if either of them would strike us as particularly artistic or reasonable. It is true that the Eastward position is well adapted to express the sacerdotal idea of the Eucharist and the mediatorial office of the priest, but otherwise it seems a strange perversion of true reverence that the minister should turn his back upon the congregation in whose midst the Divine Presence is promised. As for the North-side position, it was intelligible enough when adopted at a movable table placed (as the more advanced reformers desired) “in the body of the church,” but when the Holy Table is placed altar-wise it is generally admitted that the North-end position is somewhat lacking in dignity. So long as the table is of moderate size, this is not so noticeable; but where it is large and magnificent, after the pattern of an altar, the North-end position, viewed from the nave, cannot fail to strike the thoughtful observer with a sense of incongruity. Indeed, the growing tendency to adopt the Eastward position may probably be traced in some measure to this cause.

Under these circumstances, I would suggest that it is worth while for Evangelical Churchmen to consider whether a “Westward” position for the celebrant might not be the most suitable and seemly for the purpose of expressing our ideal of the Lord’s Supper. Such a custom need not involve any meanness or barrenness in the appearance of the chancel. It is true that the Holy Table would be placed at a little distance from the East wall, and that the conventional ornaments might require some modification. But this arrangement, if designed by a competent architect, need not detract anything from the dignity of the sanctuary, while at the same time it would ensure an “openness” in the actions of the celebrant which is often endangered by the Eastward position.

It will perhaps be said that the present rubric, directing

the "North side" position, is incompatible with the suggestion made above. But we know that as a matter of fact that rubric has been decreed by high authorities to be consistent with the Eastward position. Under these circumstances, is it not permissible to suggest that if the phrase "North side" can thus be made to mean "West side," there is no reason why it should not equally well be made to mean "East side," so that the position advocated above should be at least on the same footing as the Eastward position?

Nothing is further from the writer's wish than to suggest that the Evangelical school should adopt this or any other new custom hastily or without due consideration of its disadvantages as well as its advantages. To disregard either the wishes of our congregations or the injunctions of those set in authority over us would be a course unworthy alike of Christians and Churchmen. The suggestions made above are intended simply to indicate the possibility of meeting the Ritualistic movement in the future with a more intelligent and more constructive policy than that which has characterized the past.

Nor is it the purpose of this article to encourage a general growth of "Ritualism" (in the sense of an elaborate system of ritual) within the Evangelical school. A ritual of some sort is indeed necessary for any form of public worship (unless that of the Quakers be an exception); but a complex display of rites and ceremonies is foreign to the English taste—at least of the male sex. If Evangelicalism is to win the allegiance of the best type of English Christianity, its public worship should normally be grave and simple in form. At the same time, there is (as we have endeavoured to point out) no necessary antagonism between Evangelicalism and Ritualism; and a "Ritualistic Evangelicalism" seems to be really needed at the present time, in order to meet the wishes of those whose æsthetic nature craves for greater luxury in sight and sound than is offered by the average Evangelical service. There appears to be no adequate reason for refusing to grant them their desire within the pale of Evangelicalism; but, in view of past

history, it may not be superfluous to express the hope that our "Ritualistic Evangelicals" will not in their turn become exclusive, and look down with contempt upon their brethren whose tastes are simpler or more puritanical.

It is, after all, largely a matter of temperament whether we appreciate or dislike elaborate ritual; but there is one point on which all Evangelicals may surely agree, and that is, that the outward forms of our worship, whether ornate or simple, should not be prompted merely by the motive of imitation, but by the desire to express with the utmost clearness the Evangelical ideal of the Christian religion.



1912.

Provision by the Way.

BY THE REV. A. J. SANTER, M.A.

UPON the threshold of the dawning year
 Two messengers stand ready to attend
 And me, by God's appointment, to befriend
 And bid strong confidence take place of fear.
 In them His own sweet Presence doth appear,—
 Fulfilment of Love's promise, "to the end."—
 O'er hill or dale, where'er my path may trend,
 Their aid and comfort are for ever near.
 Fallen, the hand of Mercy doth restore,
 Fainting, the arms of Goodness me embrace;
 I lie in peace on "restful waters'" shore,
 And feast in joy spite of my foe's grim face.
 And Death's dark vale is but the opening door
 To my dear Lord's eternal dwelling-place.