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## THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

BY ALBERT MITCHELL, Member of the House of Laymen,  
Canterbury Province.

THE second of the Committees appointed by the two Archbishops to "rehandle" the subjects in regard to which the "failures" of those who make up the Church and Nation had been revealed in the National Mission, or the preparation therefor, was directed to the subject of "The Public Worship of the Church." For some occult reason the adjective has been dropped out in the Report. The insertion of eighteen lines on the subjects of private and family prayer does not appear to afford sufficient explanation.

The Committee as nominated (for it possessed no representative character) consisted of twenty-two persons, of whom four were unable to give much attention to the work. Of the remaining eighteen "effectives," thirteen were ecclesiastics, three laymen, and two women. One, at least, of the absent ecclesiastics has exercised much influence on the Report. Only three, at most four, of the members had definite association with the Evangelical School, and all of those would be regarded as quite "moderate" in their views; but at least seven belonged to the more extreme High Church wing. There was not a single representative of lay Evan-

<sup>1</sup> We are publishing in the CHURCHMAN a series of articles reviewing the Reports of the five Committees of Inquiry, appointed by the Archbishops as an outcome of the National Mission. These will appear month by month not in the order in which the Reports were issued, but in the order in which the Committees were appointed. The Committee on "The Teaching Office of the Church," was the *first*, and their Report was reviewed in the CHURCHMAN for February. The Committee on "The Public Worship of the Church" was the *second* to be appointed, and their Report, reviewed in this article, is published by the S.P.C.K. (price 6d. net). The members of the Committee were as follows:—The Dean of Christ Church (Chairman), the Rev. W. C. Bishop, Dr. Walford Davies, the Head Deaconess St. Andrew's Community, the Rev. H. P. Dempsey, Canon F. Lewis Donaldson, the Rev. W. H. Draper, the Rev. W. H. Frere, Miss M. C. Gollock, Archdeacon Gresford Jones, the Rev. F. A. Iremonger, Mr. H. E. Kemp, Canon F. B. Macnutt, Archdeacon Southwell, Miss L. V. Southwell, the Bishop of Stepney, the Rev. N. S. Talbot, Miss Talbot, the Rev. F. Underhill, the Rev. F. S. Guy Warman, the Dean of Wells, and Viscount Wolmer. Note by the Chairman: The Head Deaconess of St. Andrew's Community and Miss L. V. Southwell were unfortunately obliged to withdraw from the Committee owing to ill-health. The Dean of Wells, for the same reason, attended none of the meetings. Archdeacon Southwell is at the Front, and I have been unable to obtain his final opinion on the report. The rest have approved it, and four members have appended reservations upon one or two points.

gical Churchmanship. Whether by accident or design the impression is given that the Archbishops regard the sphere of public worship as the exclusive preserve of the High Churchman. This is, of course, consonant with the general policy of the Episcopate. Evangelicals are (in moderation) welcome on Church platforms; their Evangelistic fervour must not, by any means, be lost to the Church; work of some kind (preferably spade work the more finished results of which can be utilized by others) must always be found for their energies; their financial assistance must be secured—it does not usually cost very much more than a few kind words, for Evangelicals are an easily placated folk); *BUT*—in all matters of public worship, the ritual and external observances and furniture must be in accordance with High Church ideals; if a corporate (diocesan or otherwise) service is held, the High Church forms are rigidly adhered to; it is assumed that the Evangelicals, for the privilege of admission, will sink their own distinctive practices and interpretations.

“We want,” says the Archbishop of Canterbury in his foreword, “critics as well as advocates.” That is a healthy note to strike.

### I.

The Report (which is a good bit overloaded with extraneous matter) leads off with some general considerations. “The instinct for worship has seriously diminished in the people as a whole. In some it exists, but is perverted . . . in others it can hardly be said to exist.” The Committee lean to the view that worship has been a matter of tradition, custom, and legal obligation; and they desire “a better sense of obligation . . . which may rest . . . on devotion and a sense of spiritual need.” But is there not a root-fallacy here? Is there such a thing as an instinct for worship, and can worship be produced either by a sense of obligation or by a sense of need? Is it not rather the fact that the true spirit of worship can be produced only by a realized satisfaction of a foregoing need? Man has an instinct for religion of some kind: something that will satisfy his need, whether it be of protection, of guidance, or (where it is sufficiently developed to include a sense of sin) of forgiveness. Satisfy that need, in however small a degree, and then the desire to worship may be created; but not before.

The remarks that follow as to the weakening of “personal

habits of devotion" and the need of recovery of "common prayer in the family circle" . . . "in some form or another—in new forms if the traditional and decaying ones are thought unsatisfactory," lead up to a long paragraph on the need for training the religious instinct. We are told that even the "atrophied" instinct ("common to all His children") is "capable of recovery . . . when the causes of atrophy are removed, when the will is turned to God and the heart is moved in response to His Love"; but when yet not "entirely atrophied" may be "trained by painstaking effort and quickened by Divine Grace" and "becomes the force that uplifts men to the heights of Communion with God" and "then demands more and more developed stages alike of liturgical worship and institutional religion and of mystical approach to God." A fine piece of confused thinking and unhappy expression. The Committee fail utterly to grasp the fact, so clearly perceived by those who framed our Morning and Evening Prayer, that until there is a revelation of God's law, a sense of sin, and a ministry of forgiveness, all attempts at worship must end in failure. In other words, "devotion" is not a matter of "forms," but of the response of the heart to a realized personal relationship; and worship is not so much a process or means as a result of definite experience. The Committee put the cart before the horse.

## II.

The Report runs off here into three successive digressions. The first deals with the lack of religious training in the education of the young, which is stated to be one of the most important causes of the failure of the Services of the Church. Now the fallacy that the school can ever be made an effective substitute for the home in the matter of the impulse to Divine Service is dear to the heart of the priest, but it is wholly mischievous. The Church, as it has gradually, under the evil influence of the Oxford Movement, alienated the first generation of fathers, has been continually engaged in the attempt to evolve a new generation of fathers, more docile to the "great improvements in the order and beauty of the services" which the Report complacently chronicles; but the attempt has been, and will be, futile. You may, perhaps, retain the allegiance of the older generation when you have lost the younger; but you will never retain the allegiance of the younger folk after you have

alienated the older. The boy who is proud to go to church with his father is quick to respond to the disapproval implied in his father's abstention from attendance at public worship. Of course, no general statement can escape qualification; but the problems of church attendance must be grappled with as they affect the grown man in the full vigour of his powers. No virile and successful religious movement has ever started from any other basis. The converted father brings his family to church with him if he feels at home there himself. His family is never likely to feel at home there without him.

The second digression is on "the unnatural and unsatisfactory position of the laity in the Church"; and it contains very much that is good and merits translation from theory into practice. But it rather fails to distinguish between the serious laity, equal to the clergy in spiritual capacity and religious rights, and "the persons who live in the parish" whose undisciplined opinions the Report regards with mingled respect and dread. The initial blunder on the part of the Clergy in the treatment of the laity, lies in the attempt to fit them on to the bed of Procrustes. It cannot be said that in this digression the Committee do anything more than look the difficulty in the face and pass on! Their reference to "the recovery of interest in the services of the Church if the powers and functions of the laity therein could be reorganized" does not carry us very far.

The third essay of the Committee is on the adverse effect of modern industrial conditions on the tradition of public worship. This is a sonorous phrase; and all that the Report says on it is good, so far as it goes; but it is not the subject. The Committee consider that a "radical change" in "our social and industrial system" is necessary to make the way "clear for the return of the people to the public worship of the Church."

But, did the Christians of the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic age, and of the following centuries—the Early Church—allow the conditions of their day to override their actions? Surely it is the duty of the Church to cope with the conditions of the day in the matter of provision of opportunity of public worship, not to be daunted by them! If it be true that those conditions "are greatly inimical to the offering to God on Sundays (particularly on Sunday mornings) of a freewill offering of a holy worship" (and the fact may be readily granted), then it is the duty of the Church to provide oppor-

tunity at other times. Here the Committee do touch on (but are scared away by) a real problem. North, south, east, and west, the same conventionalized hours of service prevail. "Take them or leave them" is the attitude of the powers that be; and the people, not of malice but of necessity, "leave them." If additional services are supplied at other hours, they are so manifestly "extra," of less importance, often dismal and uncongenial (although by an excess of irony often advertised as "bright and hearty," a phrase usually construed to mean as unlike a "proper Church service" as possible), and obviously suggestive of the belief that those who will come to them are of different flesh and blood from the decorous attendants at the "orthodox" hours. That a "proper Church service" at a less accustomed hour meets a real need is witnessed by the vast throngs that crowd into Westminster Abbey for full Evening Prayer at three o'clock, not to speak of other places. If such a service were provided in every residential district (not necessarily or desirably in every church), and no pains spared to make it of the best and most reverent type, the results might be not inconsiderable. But no hard and fast rule can be made: the principle to be asserted is that it is the duty of the Clergy to minister to the *needs* of the people in the matter; and not to expect the people to square their needs with the ministrations provided. The Committee sail wide of the mark in their painful concern for "the regular fulfilment of duties in regard to Church worship" by the people. The shoe is on the other foot!

### III.

The longest section of the Report is headed "Suggestions in Regard to the Book of Common Prayer." It is not surprising to read that "The Committee has received a very large number of valuable (!) suggestions for modifications of the Prayer Book." The more perfect a work of art the greater the number of amateurs who think they could better it. We are periodically deluged with solemn proposals for "improving" Westminster Abbey. But there is not so much wrong with our Prayer Book as with the men who use it.

The Committee begin with the Communion Service. The term is their own, but as they speak of it being "offered" in one place, and being "celebrated" in another, there is more than a suspicion

that its use represents a compromise, as neither verb is appropriate. They also fall into error in speaking of "the ancient principle of communicating fasting." Fasting communion is not a principle, but a practice. The Committee think that "it is almost universally felt that the Communion Service has fallen out of its proper place in the scheme of worship." It would be more accurate to say that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper has been pushed out of its proper place in the life of the Church. The Committee use the right title when they refer to the ordinance of our Lord and its claim upon Christians; but they immediately revert to their general phrase and say that "the Communion Service makes less demand for intellectual effort and satisfies more directly the spiritual impulses than such services as Morning and Evening Prayer." But that is a matter of experience; some would not agree; and, in any case, it is affected by the method of administration. Unhappily, the priest can mar the ministration of the sacrament by his idiosyncrasy in a way that he is powerless to spoil the other services. The tragedy of the English Church to-day is that it is practically left to the option of the individual minister either to give to the people the manward ministration of the "comfortable sacrament" ordained by Christ, and prescribed by the Prayer Book; or to summon the people to be (willing or unwilling) "assistants" at a Godward presentment of a totally different action evolved in the visible Church after it had fallen from its first love. This is the rock upon which the Church of England is being deliberately broken in two. It is idle to pretend that it is only the few specially informed laymen who feel deeply on this point. "How do you like your new Rector?" was asked of a taciturn farmer. "He'll *do*," was the curt reply, "He don't turn his back on ye." It is a true instinct that sees the dividing line here. On the one side is the Sacrament; on the other is, in essential, the Mass. Therefore it is that the hesitating suggestions of the Report read differently according to the side of the line on which they are to be experimented. The Committee are so conscious of this that they deprecatingly refer everything "to the wishes and temperaments of different congregations"; but they diffidently suggest an alternative between "a Communion Service somewhat elaborate in its features celebrated each Sunday at which comparatively few persons communicate" and "a special Communion Service held at regular

intervals which is definitely recognized as a corporate parish celebration and at which a large number of parishioners would communicate," when " a large number of the communicants would not be fasting." The Report goes on to assert that " the act of Communion is the true centre of all Christian worship and the bond of union between communicants." Now our Church puts the matter differently : " The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another ; but rather it is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death." There is no authority for the distasteful term " act of Communion." In plain fact, where the gospel of Christ's death is plainly proclaimed, and the sacramental form of the Lord's Supper jealously guarded, there is no great lack of the desire to join in that Holy Fellowship. But it must be admitted that the tendency of late years has been against the experience of the whole community of the Church taking the hallowed signs at the same time. Some " communicate " regularly in the early part of the day, and some at later hours. To those who have used themselves to the early morning service there is often a weird strangeness in the half-service (so to say) tacked on after the sermon ; and this is helped where the parson goes out to dismiss the choir and leave the alms-basin in the vestry, and hurriedly returns to take up the service with the abrupt " Ye that do truly." It is difficult to avoid the dulling impression that this is a quite subordinate " postscript " to something more important. When to this is added the fact that this " Second Service," as it is often called, is frequently driven very late by delays in the " Morning Service," it becomes clear that the present habits of service do discourage the proper use of the " most comfortable Sacrament."

Perhaps a practical suggestion may be made. On one fixed regular Sunday in the month, let the early morning Communion be omitted. Have the Morning Prayer, quite in full as far as the third Collect, with organ and at least half choir, at ten o'clock. Then let the eleven o'clock service commence with the Litany, and proceed with the full order of Holy Communion ; omitting a sermon but perhaps in place of it having a short ten minutes' devotional word to the communicants, pausing after the Church Militant prayer while the boys of the choir (it is assumed there will be no non-communicant men) and any other non-communicants retire ; but the minister remaining standing at the Holy Table, and taking up the thread



with the "Dearly beloved in the Lord, ye that mind," the whole body of the communicants standing according to old custom. At such a service the touching and inspiring experience of whole families taking the hallowed signs together might be renewed; and the whole would close at a reasonable time without haste or tedium; while the careful reading of the noble exposition (so shamefully neglected) of the Church's teaching on the subject of this wonderful sacrament would do more good than many sermons. But any permission of non-communicating presence, or dalliance with the back-to-people position, would be fatal. It would be well for the whole congregation to stand for the Gloria in Excelsis, and sing it to a measured simple setting, to be carefully practised, and maintained unvaried. Nothing would be more calculated to set the ministration of the sacrament "in its proper place" in the minds of the people. In some churches, and on some occasions, a different time of day might be chosen according to local circumstances. Indeed, we want a good bit more of adaptation in our hours of service generally; and it would be common sense to make some considerable difference between winter and summer.

#### IV.

The Committee next refer to the attack upon Morning and Evening Prayer (which they assert to "make too heavy a demand upon the intelligence and knowledge of the congregation"), the Psalter and the Lessons. It is necessary to protest against the attempt to drive out of our Churches our best people by tinkering with the services that are the best-beloved. It would not be possible to frame services more calculated for edification and reverent worship than the existing Orders of Morning and Evening Prayer. They need no variation, unless it be in some additional rubrics to meet special emergencies. It may be granted that they are not exactly adapted for unconverted people, or worldlings; but it is not seemly that the public worship of the Church (i.e. the faithful laity) should be regulated by that principle. We do very greatly need an authorized form of service of a directly Evangelistic aim, as the Committee recognize, but this should be an addition or supplement. It is a fatal error to attempt a compromise between two totally different conceptions of a religious service on the same occasion. But, please, leave to the true Church Remnant the security of "the Prayer

Book, the whole Prayer Book, and nothing but the Prayer Book" —what old-fashioned folk call "a proper Church service." As a matter of fact this attack upon Morning and Evening Prayer is a purely artificial movement on the part of the more volatile clergy who kick at being bound down to a fixed form; but in this particular the liberty of the clergy is the bondage of the laity. The Liturgy is the layman's only protection; and a question of Church principle is involved. We do not want our services approximated to those of the Nonconformists. Nearly everything that the Report says on the subject of the Psalter and the Lectionary is controversial and betrays an aloofness of position from that of the ordinary devout Churchman. More people have been driven, and will be driven, away from church by failure to adhere closely to the Prayer Book, than have been attracted or will be attracted by these experiments. Give the old book a fair chance, and see if it does not come by its own again. In particular much more use might be made of the Litany. Very much turns on an atmosphere of restful homeliness.

The Committee are on safer ground in their pleas for better elocution and reverence of demeanour on the part of the clergy; in their adverse criticism of the monotone; and their insistence upon training and discipline in these matters. The suggestions that sermons should be preached separately from the regular services, and with greater freedom of place, and with a greater liberty of "bidding prayer" are quite worthy of attention. This, of course, is not strictly worship; but the advice that sermons in the regular services should be shorter is a little more germane to the subject. A very wise suggestion is that graded forms of children's services should be framed. A satisfactory form of service for children has yet to be evolved.

The Committee express a desire to foster the spirit of prayer; but they do not seem to have in mind either the spontaneous conversation of the redeemed child with his Father and Lord or the penitential heart-cry of the convicted sinner to the personal Saviour (indeed they appear to approve of the amazing complaint that there is too much emphasis in Morning and Evening Prayer upon the penitential idea!). They seem rather to be thinking of something formal and soothing, and call attention to the Chaplet of Prayer, a sort of rosary-arrangement—"prayer repeated at intervals."

They also "discussed the extra-liturgical use of the Reserved Sacrament." They advocate "experiments" . . . "to find out, if possible, what are the actual desires which need to be satisfied," which strikes the present writer as a pitiful confession of incompetency and failure. They make some quite old and obvious remarks about free and open Churches, without any indication of knowledge of the other side of the question—the love of people for seats of their own in church; and they hope for the revival of "votive offerings" and approve of a wider use of the churches for conventions and missionary meetings.

## V.

A dry summary of points of "Prayer Book Revision" which receive the approval of a majority of the Committee, is not much more than a catalogue, but is enlivened by a solemn warning that a more drastic reform of the Prayer Book than the Convocations contemplate "will be soon necessary." The reason is "that many persons have entirely outgrown the Book of Common Prayer" (this after telling us earlier that Morning and Evening Prayer "make too heavy a demand upon the intelligence and knowledge of the congregation" !); and "the book does not satisfy a number of requirements which have come into existence in recent years." Probably the allusions are to the pseudo-catholic demands. Here the Committee appear to have got tired, but find room for a hasty request for Prayers for the Dead.

A very valuable essay on Church Music is evidently an independent addition, the main authorship of which can easily be guessed; but this merits a separate treatment. It is admirable, but perhaps not wholly uncontroversial.

The Appendices include a truly wonderful production from three Military Chaplains "come to judgment"! Much of it is incorporated in slightly modified form in the Report; the rest had apparently been a little more than the Committee could assimilate. We are told that "the lay mind is a very elusive thing," and "seldom articulate on any religious topic." So we should imagine—in such company! The "lay mind" finds no difficulty in becoming "articulate" when the clergy are absent. Even when it is not openly reactionary, it is enough to say that the spirit of this memorandum is not that of our English Church.

A careful perusal of the Report, of the worst that it can say against our present Prayer Book, and of the suggestions as to the way to better things as it appears to the Committee, does but confirm the writer in the belief that it is the men who use the Prayer Book and dominate the public worship of the Church who need reforming far more than the old book and the hallowed forms of prayer and praise and teaching that our fathers loved. It is not on the lines of this Report that enlargement and deliverance will arise. If we could once more have an old-fashioned Prayer Book service lovingly ministered in every parish, would it now be too late to repossess the hearts of the people again? Perhaps not, if there were also a fearless proclamation of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins and life in Christ.

ALBERT MITCHELL.



#### A GUARDIAN OF ORTHODOXY.

“The first thing, then, I want to emphasise is this, that in our Liturgy we have a useful guardian of Orthodoxy. This is no small advantage, as history teaches us. Those who have studied the development of the Church tell us that even Calvin’s scriptural doctrine gradually and silently gave way to a bare Socinianism, not only in Geneva, but in many of the Presbyterian congregations in England, Ireland, and the United States. So long as our Prayer Book remains, it cannot be so with ourselves. We cannot utterly fall away. In our churches, the pulpit here and there may be worse than useless, for dead preachers may speak to dead sinners; it may be infected with the down-grade theology, the ‘modernism,’ of the time—the children may cry for bread and get a stone; it may be semi-popish, and inculcate the Real Presence, and adoration of the elements; but always the error of the pulpit’s teaching will to some extent be corrected by that of the Prayer Book, for our Liturgy, as its preface indicates, has this dominant feature—its adherence to Holy Scripture. Take away the Bible out of the Prayer Book, and how little you have left! I believe that no other Service book in the world is equal to our own in this. Not merely is Scripture publicly read, and congregationally sung, in every part of our public worship, but the responses, collects, ascriptions and special Offices are steeped in Bible thought and Bible language. No man, it is not too much to say, can enter our churches and use intelligently ‘our incomparable Liturgy’ without learning his need as a sinner, the way of salvation, and the outline of Christian life. The very warp and woof of our Prayer Book is God’s word, and herein lies the open secret of its spiritual power.”—CANON BARNES-LAWRENCE in *A Churchman and his Church* (Church Book Room, 82 Victoria Street, S.W.1, price 1s. net).