

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

recognize the opportunity which is being offered to the Church to put the ideal into greatly increased practice, through the supply from its ranks of Christian teachers deeply imbued with a sense of their vocation.

To sum up, "Christian Education" is preferable as a term to "Religious Education," because it gives a more distinct and definite picture of what we mean and want as Christian people. By "Christian Education" we mean the process of imparting knowledge to the young against the background of the Christian interpretation of life, in such a way that all life and truth is seen to make sense and form a composite whole, through the unifying purpose of God's creative and redemptive activity in man and in his world of existence. To be able to educate the young in this sense, a teacher must of necessity himself possess the Christian outlook on life. Therefore in practice "Christian Education" can never be anything but a partially realised ideal, because there will always be some teachers who either in part or in whole do not subscribe to the Christian outlook. The Christian community must not on that account limit the embrace of its ideal; with a clear conception of what it means and wants by "Christian Education," the Church must strive to turn the ideal into an increasingly practised reality, by training and equipping members from among its ranks to enter the teaching profession with a full sense of engaging in a God-given vocation. In this way, the Church will not only be concentrating on the essential core of a problem which concerns her most intimately, but will also be answering the challenge of a remarkable opportunity which is being tacitly presented to her, to engage in the redemptive service which it is her essential function to give, in the name and power of her Master, Jesus Christ.

Public Worship.

FACT—CAUSE—REMEDY.

BY THE REV. RUSSELL B. WHITE, M.A.

WE are constantly reminded in these days that the Christian Church is a minority movement, and that this minority tends to grow less rather than more. It is easy enough for us to imagine that the problem of church attendance is peculiar to our own time, especially when comparing the numbers who present themselves for public worship to-day, with those vast crowds who went tidily to church every Lord's Day during the Victorian era. Yet in essence this problem is one which like the poor "is always with us," in greater or lesser degree. Men sneered at the Psalmist (Ps. xxii), saying "He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver him, seeing he delighted in Him." The times of the prophets were times of neglect of public worship. So too in our Lord's own day, and throughout the whole course of subsequent history, even in spite of the seemingly harsh legislation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there has never been a full worshipping community in the ideal sense.

Nevertheless, granted that this be true, we are passing through a period in which the habit of church-going continues to dwindle. As the Archbishop of Canterbury said in Convocation towards the close of last year—"There is yet no sign of a return on any considerable scale to habits of regular attendance at church services." It is perhaps correct to assume that on certain special occasions, Days of National Prayer, our Churches have been crowded to the doors, but this has been more in the nature of an emotional response to external circumstances of dire need and utter helplessness, rather than to any real desire to attend the House of God. Even these special occasions have shewn, by comparing the numbers who attended the first Day of National Prayer on May 26th 1940 with subsequent days of a similar character, that there is no deeply-seated urge to worship, within the professed Christian community of our country. Let me hasten to say that the blame cannot be laid wholly at the doors of the church. There has not been much encouragement upon the part of those in high places. Had a real lead been given say from the earliest days of the war by members of the government, we might perhaps have witnessed a return to institutional religion, which would have left its mark upon the people of this country for many years to come. As this has been lacking, we can but look for the ultimate solution to the problem in a revival of the spiritual life of our nation, and for this we must pray and work, and seize every opportunity to share in efforts towards this end. There then is the glaring fact, that although the situation is not entirely new, nevertheless the vast majority of our people to-day are outside the Christian Church.

Now worship in any form has always been the means of meeting some deeply rooted need or instinct of mankind. The study of anthropology makes this clear to us. In our western world, worship comes as a living tradition. Our noble cathedrals, our beautiful parish churches, the Houses of God built by men of all denominations, are evidence of this, Presbyterians, Methodists, Congregational, Baptist, Church of England, Roman Catholic, nor must we forget the Society of Friends, the Salvation Army and perhaps others; all these organised groups, recognise worship as, at the very least, one of their main activities. Yet, in spite of this, the numbers sharing in public worship to-day are lamentably small.

This is not the time nor place to trace the History of the Idea of Worship. That has been ably done in such tomes as Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, and also in "Christ and the Gospels." It is generally agreed that the idea of 'Christian Worship' sprung from the worshipping community of the synagogue; that although at first, there was a Daily Meeting (Acts ii. 46), the emphasis gradually came to be laid upon the 'First Day of the Week.' Worship then consisted of five main characteristics—*Prayer*: followed by "Amen" by all present, *Praise*: i.e., a Hymn such as the Benedictus, the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis etc., still used in the services of the Church of England, *Scripture Readings*: as in the Synagogue worship, *Instruction*: or if you like to call it so—the Sermon and what very speedily fell into disuse, *Speaking with tongues*. Now it seems to me that if Worship to-day is to satisfy the deepest instincts of man, these characteristics in some form or other must be present; and

although I do not wish to speak from any denominational bias, it is true that the Church of England in her formularies adequately provides for them. The question before us is—"How can we make them so vital, so real, that they will awaken in men's hearts a desire to worship God with their fellow-men?"

The answer to this question is not so easy, for every branch of the professing Church of Christ to-day, in spite of, and in the case of some more than others, the rich heritage they enjoy, is hidebound by traditions and shibboleths. In the Beveridge Report recently issued, suggesting a Utopia in this present world, and lulling the minds of people into a false security, these pregnant words occur. "In a moment of world ferment, this is a time for revolutions and not patchings." It may be that in the organised church to-day, we shall have to realise that something similar is needed, if we are to win back the people to our churches, "Revolutions and not Patchings."

Let us go on to consider what we call ordinary church services. If they are to prove of any real value to worshippers, certain things are required. They must be interpretative of the facts unique to Christian experience; they must be vital, that is, they must be relevant to the needs of the ordinary man; they must shew creative imagination; they must be conducted in a sincere manner; and the Leader himself must be a truly converted and consecrated man, with some knowledge of 'Group' psychology. Let us take these points one by one.

1. *The services of the church must be interpretative of the facts of Christian experience*—the grace of God, forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, the surrendering of our lives to God's service through Jesus Christ, and newness of life through His resurrection power. Therein lies the core of worship, for in worship, man comes with all his human need and imperfections to meet with God. Worship can only be offered by the one who really seeks to come into contact with God. That is the peculiar content of Christian worship, the breaking through into God's Holy Presence, in prayer and in praise, that so there may be a greater response to the claims of God in all experiences of life. Divorce Christian worship from the basic facts of our Christian experience, and Christian worship is more or less denuded of its very right to exist. The so-called 'Popular' services of to-day, which have sprung up all around, not only in Churches of every denomination, but in Cathedrals as well, can prove of no lasting value, for they have no sheet anchor of doctrine, without which there can be little real satisfaction of man's natural instinct to worship.

2. *Public Worship must be vital.* It must be enshrined in such a frame-work that the average man understands religion to be something which has to do with his everyday life. Too often the public services of the church are looked upon, by those who are responsible for arranging them, as the requisite devotional exercise of the religious community. On the other hand, the average layman is seeking a mode of worship which will help him to apply his faith to his daily round and common task. There seems to be the crux of the whole problem. Creed (as expressed in public worship) and Conduct. Both of course are essentials, but whereas the average parson is looked upon as one who only cares about church worship, the layman fails just here, that he does not realise that the Christian life can never reach its

fulness, except through the acknowledgment of God in public worship. To relate the two,—public worship must express the sovereignty of God over every detail of life both in the realm of devotion and that of conduct. To listen to the services in some churches and likewise to the parson's peroration in his sermon, is sufficient to indicate what I mean. To use a trite saying—the parson himself must not be “too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use.” Whilst it is true that public worship must be based upon the fundamentals of our Christian experience, these fundamentals must be so applied, as that they will shew that there can be no redemption of international, national or social or individual life, except through the application of Christian standards and principles. Only so, can God's will be understood. Public Worship, if it is to realise its end, must be related to details of everyday living. We must seek to shew that Conversion is not purely a momentary experience, but a constant renewing of the mind in every attitude of thought and conduct.

The Tambaram Report (1938) seems to sum up the whole position so clearly, stressing as it does the relation of the individual to the community. It says—“Though the Christian's worship must be first of all, his personal and individual response to his Heavenly Father's love, he soon learns that in his Heavenly Father's presence, there can be no isolation, and his “I” “Thou” must always pass into “Our Father.” Corporate worship is the natural expression of our incorporation into the family of Christ.” We need to bear that in mind, especially in these days, when because we are so actively engaged in different forms of national service, we are inclined to forget our responsibility towards the family. But the report goes on—“The Christian is saved by an Incarnate Lord; therefore the tide of the daily common task of man must flow through his worship. That worship will not be fully Christian unless the needs and questions of his own day, the realities of social, economic and national life, are submitted to the light of God's Holy Spirit for conviction, for intercession, for guidance and inspiration.” It goes on—“The Christian is saved by a Crucified Lord; therefore his worship can be no mere escape from the harshness of life, but a dedication and empowering for witness and service.” Again, “The Christian is saved by a Risen and Ascended Lord, in Whose Name he prays with a sense of victory and triumph, in unison with the whole family in heaven and earth.” But we pass on.

3. *Public Worship must show Creative Imagination.* It is true that every nation and every denomination has something to contribute to the enrichment of Divine Worship. We have such a rich heritage, and we must never undervalue the traditional forms which have been handed down to us, for they have helped to mould the very best in our national life. But too frequently the services in our churches are lifeless and mechanical. It seems so tragic that anything done in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, should appear to the worshipper to be dull and uninteresting. I am writing after a meeting on Wednesday last of our Prayer Watchers Groups in my parish, of which I cannot say much now, but where as the result of the report of one of the Conveners, this very point cropped up. Worship, it is true, should be a giving, and not merely a getting. Yet how frequently those who come to church find the services boring and stuffy. Is it any wonder

that some go away asking "Is it worth while?" There is a lack of imagination on the part of those who are responsible for Divine Worship. Surely, even in those denominations where traditional forms are used, it is possible to allow our imagination to have such play, as will truly vitalise the very prayers we read and the praise we offer. Often the homely touch is all that is needed, for example a word or two before the Scripture Readings, an explanation of the reason why certain special prayers are to be offered, and so on.

4. *Public Worship must be evident of a truly sincere Christian spirit.* Here perhaps the clergy are to blame, although not entirely, for public worship should aim to be as congregational as possible. The Church of England is at an advantage on this point, for approximately two-thirds of its form of service is shared by those present. Nevertheless so much depends upon the personal element. The Leader of Public Worship must remember that he is there not to make the service a means of self-expression, for we can sometimes make hideous caricatures of our real selves by the tones and gestures we adopt, but to lead his people in worship into the presence of God. Of Archbishop Benson it is said by one who knew him intimately, "I never did and I believe I never shall see anything that spoke so loudly for the Church of England as never to be put away, as did the morning service in Eversley Church, whether he read or whether he preached." While the Master prayed, we are told that the fashion of His countenance was altered. So may ours be. And whether the congregation understand it or notice it, or not, this they ought to be able to say—"It is good for us to be here." This is something deeper than ritual or ceremony or even liturgical form, it is really the outcome of the Minister's life of devotion. I am convinced that the sincerity of the parson, who is intent himself upon the service he is rendering, is something of major importance in the conduct of Divine Worship.

I have been dealing with these points rather in the abstract. Let us now turn to the more practical issues. How can we so re-vitalise our Church services, so as to make it possible for the men and women of to-day to use them as a means of grace for everyday life?

1. *Candidates for the ministry in every denomination should receive more thorough instruction in the conduct of public worship.* A knowledge of theology and an understanding of Christian Doctrine are most important, but there is the practical side of our pastoral ministry as well. Every Ordination candidate should receive a special course of instruction in the method of conducting Divine Worship. This will not merely mean Voice Production, which is essential, but he should have some appreciation of English literature, so that in the reading of the prayers and particularly the Scriptures, the Word of God should be conveyed as a Living Power to the heart of every worshipper. Likewise as required in the Free Churches; he should be trained either in the art of framing prayers, which should always be in simple straightforward language, or to read set prayers in such a manner as that they will be a real spiritual uplift to all who are present. In this connection, the choice of a suitable post, that is whether after Ordination he should be appointed to a large or small church, ought to be decided, not only upon a man's academic and spiritual qualifications, but upon such concerns as to whether his voice will or will not carry.

This may seem a trivial point, but it is one of vital importance to those who worship in any particular church Sunday after Sunday.

2. *Creative Imagination.* Here it is imperative that Leaders of Public Worship should have at least an elementary knowledge of Group Psychology. It is quite obvious that a form of service suitable for a village congregation cannot possibly satisfy the spiritual needs of a worshipper in a town church. There are some who are especially gifted for the conduct of the one who are entirely unsuited to render Divine Service in the other. Further there are some whose qualifications are more academic than pastoral and vice-versa. Here again those responsible for appointments need to exercise greater care in their selection of men to fill vacancies. But even so, sometimes suitable men, who are quite capable of ministering to a congregation of average size, are a complete failure, when for a Parade Service, or say a Day of National Prayer, their churches are thronged with worshippers. It is here that Group Psychology comes in, and an understanding of the needs of the varying types of worshippers, who crowd to church on such a day. Creative imagination is required, and the service must be so arranged as to awaken a response in the heart of every worshipper.

Yet in the ordinary services the same creative talent is essential. Call it what you please, "Liturgical experimentation" if you like, but to meet the needs of a new age, every denomination, every school of thought, must be prepared to adjust its services accordingly. In the Established Church, we must use our Evangelical genius to produce new forms of worship, albeit entirely consistent with our heritage. It may mean the creation of special services. Youth, for example, is growing more and more impatient with set forms and traditional practice. There is nothing in the Church of England Prayer Book which caters for youth, and its special needs. Here then is a glorious opportunity to shew creative imagination. Youth must be allowed, under proper guidance of course, to take a considerable share in services which are arranged especially for them. Leaders of the Youth Groups in our parishes should be specially trained for this purpose. Of course, in the Free Churches, there is already opportunity for considerable experiment. But in all cases we must beware lest we yield too much to the sentiment of a generation which is inclined to scatter everything that speaks of tradition to the four corners of the earth. The same thought applies to special services for men, and perhaps even for women. Not that these services must be the end, but rather, having won the outsider to such a type of service, he may be led on to the more usual form of congregational worship. The trouble is that we are so bound by conventions and rules, that the unimaginative parson, I will not say the lazy parson, is perfectly content to carry on, living upon the heritage of a past age. Let the 'old men have their dreams, and hope for the best, but let the young men see visions of the glorious possibilities which are theirs,' and let them translate these visions into reality.

3. *Further, in regard to Public Worship, there should be some unifying element, some single thought, pervading the whole service.* Too often our hymns, our prayers and the sermon are completely divorced from one another. Let me give you an example of what I mean. I am speaking

from the angle of the Church of England Service. I have chosen for my Church's motto this year, "Be strong . . . for God hath power to help" (II Chron. xxv. 8) On the first Sunday of the New Year, at the morning service, I preached upon that text, but I tried to make its message the keynote of the whole service. The service opened with the hymn "Soldiers of Christ arise" with the verse "Strong in the Lord of Hosts. . . ." Then followed the sentence from Isaiah "They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall renew their strength." So we went to prayer, and then to the Psalm emphasising "God is our Refuge and Strength . . ." The first lesson was the chapter in which the motto text occurs, the second that incomparable passage from Ephesians, in which the verse comes "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord. . . ." The Anthem which came later constantly repeated the words, sung in unison by a strong choir of voices with real conviction, "Be strong." Then followed prayers with the same theme, after which came the sermon upon the motto text "Be strong, for God hath power to help." At the close of the sermon, there was no hurried Ascription "And now to God the Father . . .," but a prayer that God would grant to us all a consciousness of His power to help during all the days of this coming year, whatever the future might bring. The service ended with a fine hymn written by Frances Ridley Havergal, which again stressed the same thought, and as the worshippers left the church, the organist extemporised upon the hymn with which we commenced the service, "Strong in the Lord of Hosts. . . ." I have reason to believe that no one present could fail to remember the underlying message "Be strong . . . for God hath power to help." Of course I know that it is not always possible to do this, especially if a visiting preacher is coming. It may be an ideal, but it is an ideal at which every service should aim, and for which we ought to strive. A single organic idea.

4. *Public Worship should allow for opportunities of Quiet before God.* Periods of silence might come either at the end of extempore prayer, or at the close of the said prayers, just before the prayer of St. Chrysostom. Sometimes at the close of the sermon a time of silent prayer will prove most helpful and effective. We need more waiting upon God. Extempore prayer demands a magnitude of concentration if the worshipper is to follow throughout, and often such prayer depends too much upon the mood of the minister who offers it. Set forms of prayer, in spite of constant repetition, and perhaps because of it, do allow the true worshipper who may follow the prayers in his Prayer Book, to enter the more easily into the spirit of each petition. On the other hand, it is vital that such set forms of prayer be said reverently and with meaning, and not rushed through as is the case in some churches. But granted all this, periods of silence enable the soul to recuperate, and prevent spiritual indigestion, which may be just as harmful to the soul as physical indigestion is to the body. Times of silence can sometimes seal the dedication of a life to God, who knows?

5. *Public Worship must be conducted upon dignified lines.* There must be no trace of slovenliness in the service. Too often clergy imagine that in order to make their service appeal, or as they say to have a more homely effect, dignity must be cast to the winds. But the contrary is the case. A single jarring note may spoil the whole

effect for one of the worshippers. I refer here to the outward setting, as well as to the conduct of the service. A Church, however poor architecturally the building may be, should be kept spotlessly clean, even to the hassocks in the back pew. There is nothing uplifting in a church which is full of dust and cobwebs, too often associated in the mind of the man in the street with church worship. Cleanliness is next to godliness, but too often the reverse is noticeable in our churches to-day. And in the conduct of the service. Is there any reason whatsoever why reverence and orderliness should be looked upon as the prerogative of the High Church Party. Surely as Evangelicals, we can present our worship to God, in however humble a building, in a manner worthy of Him to Whom we come to pay our homage. Again, there is nothing more distracting than that a Minister, who has left the List of Notices or his Sermon Notes upon the Vestry table, should leave his seat suddenly in the middle of a hymn, in order to recover them. Everything in vestment, in gesture and in posture should be so ordered as to bring no disturbing element into the mind of the worshipper. The Leader should be so engrossed in Divine Worship that all who see him will want to copy his example. That of course applies also to the surreptitious glances, which we sometimes cast over our congregations to see who is there and who is not there. I know that some people would be mortally offended if their Minister did not notice that they were present or absent, but let such a survey of the congregation be taken at a point in the service, where it will be least distracting to the greater number present. Remember in this respect the injunction of the Apostle, "Let everything be done in decency and in order." So likewise with special services, parade services for example. It is a very poor advertisement, apart from the confusion caused, and particularly to the Colonels of Units who are in charge, if there has been no careful preparation beforehand. It takes me weeks to arrange for the seating of 1,100 people in my church, but it makes all the difference to the smooth running of the service throughout. Remember, too, Punctuality, which Cecil Rhodes says is "the method of business." These are points which all affect the mind of the worshipper who would share in the worship of any church Sunday by Sunday.

Perhaps I have said enough. You may think that all this has centred upon the ideal rather than upon the practical. It may be so, so far as many of you are concerned. I have but related to you my own personal experiences in my parish church, which holds 940 people. Further, I have in mind that some of us are dealing with young people, who will be the backbone of our Church life in the days to come. For them we need to present Church Life and Worship at its very best. Let them see that our generation is taking this matter seriously, and they will want to follow in our tread. I plead for a new attitude towards public worship. "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be," might have been adequate for a Victorian age, but if we are to capture the interest and enthusiasm of a rising generation, we shall have to revolutionise our ways. The whole Church of Christ in this country will have to give heed to this urgent question. It is for that reason that I welcome criticisms of my Church Services. Not that I always agree, nor do I put into practise all the suggestions

that are offered. But I take a mental note of them all, endeavouring to weave any which may be helpful into the general structure of the service, and thus church worship becomes more and more the vital energetic channel of the grace of God, and worshippers learn the truth of the old dictum—"Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."

Book Reviews

PRAISE OF GLORY.

By E. I. Watkin. iv and 280 pp. Sheed and Ward, 1943, 10/6.

This commentary of thirteen chapters on Lauds and Vespers is by a Roman Catholic layman, who was received into the Roman Church at Downside at the age of twenty years. Mr. Watkin is known for his philosophical and theological writings and for his translation of Halevy's "History of the English People" and Maritain's "Introduction to Philosophy."

The Catholic News-Letter has pointed out that "lay scholars have exerted a very powerful influence upon the development of the Breviary," and it is therefore fitting that a layman should write a commentary showing such a keen understanding and appreciation of the Hours of the Roman Breviary. The Roman Church is fortunate in having a layman so well-informed and so well-versed in liturgiology that he is able to supply a running commentary on the Psalms and other parts of the two Offices, skilfully explaining the intricacies of the Common and Proper of Saints, proposing thoughts which will be helpful in interpreting the chief themes and in following the leitmotif of the days, and at the same time injecting little personal notes which considerably add to the interest of the book. It is essentially an endeavour to interpret to the layman the potential spiritual value in the Offices when they are prayerfully and thoughtfully followed, either privately or publicly.

Mr. Watkin is thorough-going in his acceptance of Roman dogma and superstition. The idea of the Mass, Mariolatry, and the sacerdotal system has thoroughly taken hold of him. The term "saint" is used in the non-Scriptural limited sense. "St. John Fisher" is quoted as such. On page 29 we read that "the Mother of Christ's physical body is also the Mother of His mystical body." The words of the Magnificat, "My Spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" are skilfully interpreted, "For her complete freedom from sin was the choicest fruit of the salvation wrought by her Son. Not less, but more than sinners-pardoned was she saved." It is, however, good to see (p. 42) that the title "the Sword of the Spirit" is correctly applied to "the Word of God." An interesting interpretation of the *Benedicite* includes this statement, "I suggest that we should take the spirits and souls of the righteous to mean the holy souls in purgatory; the saints and the humble of heart to mean the saints in heaven." Imagination knows no bounds! In quoting the R.C. version of Genesis 3. 15, "She shall crush thy head," a footnote is added, "the literal meaning of the human writer of Genesis is not in question here, but the inner meaning, the meaning intended by the Holy Ghost."

The author confesses that there is no attempt to correct the numerous mis-translations of the Vulgate Psalter by reference to more accurate versions. Instead the line is taken that the Psalter actually in use has been hallowed by the centuries, and that therefore spiritual truths should be sought from the text as it stands. Mystical interpretations abound. However, reference is made to the new translations and Dr. W. O. E. Oesterley's books are mentioned. The author dislikes the word "sweetness" and suggests that the word "should have no place in an English religious vocabulary."

Cranmer's literary genius is praised on page 27 for its replacing the Latin rhythms of the Collects by the longer rhythms of English prose, instead of an attempted literal translation. It is added, "Lord Bute in his translation of the Breviary had the wisdom to make use of Cranmer's Collects whenever an Anglican Collect translates a Catholic." The author, who was educated at St. Paul's