

Call to Worship.

By NEVILLE CLARK (S.C.M. Press, 7s. 6d.).

(In view of the interest aroused amongst Baptists by this book, we have asked three Baptist Ministers, all holding Pastoral Charge, to comment on it.—Editor.)

I

ALL that Neville Clark writes has an impact forceful and challenging, and this book in the "Studies in Ministry and Worship" Series is no exception. This book is not written as an objective study in worship—it is, as its title declares, a "Call to Worship" saying in effect: "This is what worship should be, and this is what ought to be done." He sets forth powerfully "the God we adore" and continues: "the worship of a God like that must ever be Trinitarian in tone, Christological in pattern, centred on Word and Sacrament, corporate, congregational, embodied, awesome, exultant, ordered and free."

In the last three chapters he expounds the liturgy in practical terms, finishing with his own experience in a typical Baptist Church at Rochester.

The history of worship is reviewed. Our people who so frequently press what they call the "simplicity of the New Testament," would be astonished to learn that in that "new age, the surprising thing is not the spontaneity and liberty of worship as the developed nature of its liturgical form." The historical development of worship down the centuries leads to the Puritan tradition which is praised for its profound and central emphasis on the Word of God and its consciousness of the immediacy of the work and witness of the Holy Spirit. But the Free Church Liturgy failed because it tended to religious exercises "in terms of didactic, educational and hortatory emphases" and lacked the provision of worship as a liberating vehicle of communion with God for all sorts and conditions of men. More fatal still was the separation of the service of the Word from the Sacrament—"rending of the seamless coat of liturgy."

Neville Clark insists that the weekly Service must be a Liturgy which, while stopping short of consecration and communion, relates clearly and unmistakably too, and finds its meaning and completion in, the monthly Communion. Consequently it is not surprising that he finds two services on a Sunday, "largely indistinguishable in purpose, form and content, confused and confusing." This means that there must be a weekly celebration or surely worship would suffer an element of unreality—you wait a whole month for the real meaning of your worship. But it must be contended, there is a Service of the Word, in which Christ is lifted up which can be and is complete in itself. Through the centuries people have resisted

the weekly celebration. Like the foci in an ellipse the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament approximate but they never coalesce. It may well be that we should return to the weekly celebration, although this will not be easy to obtain in many of our Churches, but this should not imply that the Service of the Word is lacking as a vital and complete act of worship.

The other point upon which Clark makes insistence is that worship must be congregational and corporate and herein he points to one of our greatest failures and he supplies helpful direction. There is no doubt that much of the poverty in the worship in many of our Churches stems from the failure to make worship an act of all the people, who never even utter an Amen. But if the congregation is to take part there must be either a printed service order or a service book. Our people have a distaste of "read prayers," but clear explanation and spiritual education, can, and is bringing about a change. Here a plea must be put in not necessarily for the Long Prayer, especially if the emphasis is on "Long," but for some inspirational prayer which possesses immediacy and reality which is irreplaceable. Bernard Manning said that our Fathers, with the conviction "where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I in the midst," felt that any attempt at heightening the effects in worship, "was not so much a gilding of the lily as a varnishing of sunlight."

Clark is not interested in heightening effects. Indeed he would condemn much in this direction in modern practice; nevertheless, he gives insufficient weight to the power and completeness of a Service of the Word, with the uplifted Christ, and in which a profound experience in prayer and preaching, in the Spirit is realized. Those of us who regularly conduct Free Church worship must be conscious of a power which has always seemed to me to have kinship with speaking with tongues.

Consideration of Worship cannot be taken in isolation from the doctrines of the Church, the Ministry and the Sacraments. Many of our brethren are ready and anxious to re-examine in fundamental terms our observance and practice in worship, but in this they are frustrated by the spirit of what might be called "Plymouth Brethrenism." Perhaps our greatest need is a clearer understanding of the Ministry.

It has seemed necessary to me to emphasise some great values in our Free Church worship to which I think insufficient weight is given; nevertheless, gratitude must be expressed for this splendid piece of work in which the way forward is indicated, for the fact remains that the Church we love will not grow, and the evangelism to which we are vitally called will not be as effective as it might, unless a far deeper understanding and experience of Worship comes about.

HUBERT JANISCH

II

The view has got around that worship is purely an optional element in Christianity. From being the test of the true condition of the soul, conduct and charity have become Christianity entire and complete. The result is that the minister finds that he is officiating at a service the value of which has been called into question. So often the acid test is the size of his congregation, so that he begins to order his service to increase their numbers. Without knowing it, he ceases to try and make the worship acceptable to God and to order it in accordance with the mind of the congregation. All sorts of special services are arranged. Perhaps encouraged by the immediate increase in numbers and faced with the ignorance of the nature of worship, he begins to regard the service as an opportunity for instructions. Hymns, readings, prayers are chosen and manipulated to drive home one point of Christian teaching. As time goes on he finds it harder to ring the changes. He begins to fall back on the sermon and some of the hymns and the service is regarded as a kind of softening-up process. So he is back where he started. Indeed the situation is worse for he has made it more difficult for his people to realize what worship is. He has taught them that the service is instruction and that the liturgy ought to come down to our level. He has failed to justify public worship and has merely succeeded in employing the time formerly occupied by public worship with something else.

If only this could have been avoided! My one regret about Mr. Clark's book is that it did not come into my hands over six years ago. It is easy for a guilty person to look round and find someone else on whose shoulders to lay the blame. But College Authorities can no longer afford to neglect what the author has said. "The failure of our theological colleges at this crucial point has worked more mischief than can be calculated."

In his first chapter Mr. Clark makes a plea for a thorough understanding of the liturgy. To many Baptists to whom he is writing (preface) the word "liturgy" is almost a dirty word. But every Church has its liturgy: "It will be good . . . it will be bad," but it is still liturgy. "The business of the liturgy is to be the means by which the member of Christ's Body may offer to God the best worship of which they are capable."

"What men are seeking," wrote Dr. Forsyth, "is a satisfying worship," and the author points out that the churches of the Reformation throughout the world have an opportunity in this matter which is denied to the so-called Catholic Churches. They are free to discover the essential principles of Christian worship and when they are discovered to apply them. It is to search for these principles that the author turns in his second chapter to "The Biblical Pattern." All worship is a response to an objective situation;

it is "grounded on the Saving Act of God in Jesus Christ." It is in response that "the people of God is remade." Having shown us that the Old Testament gives us a clue to the Biblical understanding of the liturgy and worship and glimpsing at how in the New Testament "it is an indivisible whole moving forward from the setting forth of the Word to its Eucharistic completion at the Lord's Table," he then examines in Chapter 3, "The Historical Development."

One of the reasons why people have found Church services unhelpful is that it has never been made plain to them that worship is active and not passive. People have got it into their heads that Church-going is largely a matter of being edified, moved emotionally or stimulated for the coming week. They have not been told that they have come to work and to contribute their understanding in a positive active way. Mr. Clark points to this corruption in that "the idea of an action to be performed by clergy and laity alike has given place to that of a spectacle to be observed by the people." In both the Lutheran and the Zwinglian liturgies a wedge is being driven between the Word and the Sacrament and the door is open for the situation described in the first paragraph.

In spite of the return to "Scripture as the norm and source book for liturgy" in Puritan worship (Chapter 4, "The Free Church Tradition"), "The rich unity of Word and Sacrament" has passed; "congregational participation faltered and faded"; the Supper became an occasional observance and the "sorry tale of the Free Churches in 18th and 19th centuries" is written.

In Chapter 5 under the heading, "The Way of Renewal," the author begins to draw out the implications of the foregoing. This is a very fine chapter. One hesitates to comment lest it should in any way detract from the interest of the reader. Here is the working out of the activity of minister and laity together.

In Chapters 6 and 7 we are given "The Structure of Worship" for three acts of worship. 1. The liturgy where the Sacrament is not celebrated. 2. The liturgy of the Eucharist. 3. The liturgy of Baptism/Eucharist. "The two sacraments belong together. Baptism, laying on of hands and first communion is the pattern of Christian initiation." The catechetical instruction that is given to the candidates is grounded in the liturgy.

Chapter 8 when the author shifts from the third person to the first person enables us to see how the proposed liturgical reforms were made in a local Baptist Church.

I hope that the reading of this book, by minister and layman alike, and subsequent action will be able to remove the charge that "of all the major denominations it is probably the Baptist that has been least affected" by the Liturgical Movement.

D. D. BLACK

III

"This essay is offered in the conviction that the recovery of the Liturgy is the most urgent need of the Free Churches at this time." In this way Neville Clark introduces his book, *Call to Worship*, and I have been invited to make some comments about its significance for Baptist Churches.

For many years Free Churchmen have felt and been made to feel that their worship is a poor thing, thin and meagre. Throughout my own ministry I have frequently attended groups where different ministers have, in turn, outlined the 'form' of Sunday worship. Usually these groups have started with a Roman priest, or an Anglican, and then moving through various Free Church ministries ended with a member of the Society of Friends, or better still someone from the Salvation Army, especially invited for the occasion! Sometimes Free Church ministers would produce elaborate orders of service as though determined not to be outdone. I remember well a Presbyterian who presented with no little satisfaction an Order which makes Neville Clark's structure seem shaky—he had everything including an Epiclesis.

Poverty in worship is not restricted to meagre 'form.' Elaborate structures may also fail to give glory to God, or to bind the worshippers together, simply because the form has no sure theological basis. Neville Clark recognizes this. It is interesting to note that both the Mass and Free Church worship have had periods when they were weakened by individualistic devotion. Bishop Gottschalk (1481) gave this rebuke: "You come when you hear the bell rung, then you run to see the elevation; when it is finished you go running away in flight as if you had seen the devil." There is not much sense here of Christian worshippers united within the forms of the Church's liturgy, and this is an abiding ill which the Liturgical Movement in the Roman Church seeks to remedy. The condition of modern Protestantism has been described by William Robinson—"Protestantism came to be reduced almost to having no beliefs at all, no foundation in the eternal gospel, to a kind of 'anythingarianism'; and the church to be little more than a social club."

The response of Free Church ministers to this problem has been marked by variety. Some orders of service have looked like variety bills with the items calculated to draw, hold and interest the congregation. Others with some sense of dignity have pushed in anthems, introits, vespers, solos in a desperate effort to respond to the cultivated demands of a wilting congregation. Yet others have assumed the mantle of the prophets and condemned worship because it has no relationship to life, hoping secretly that the congregation would not take too seriously the demand to give up their sacrifices.

The strength of Neville Clark's book is that he will not be tempted to deal with spots and pimples. He calls it cancer—and that is a

dread disease indeed. He seeks to show "the close and inalienable association between theology and worship." The one thing that must determine Christian worship is the nature and purpose of God, and this is found in the fullness of the Gospel. He traces a biblical pattern leading on to the liturgy which emerges on the other side of Golgotha. All this is built into a structure which Mr. Clark considers proper for worship in a Baptist Church and which he claims to have demonstrated in the Church at Rochester. For all this we are grateful.

The book, however, is disappointing. It is too thin for its purpose and the author in order to make his points swiftly, is more dogmatic than I imagine him to be by nature. Footnotes and documents can frequently be an unnecessary burden, but here they are essential. The argument for the threefold cord in worship—proclamation of the Word, prayers and praises, Eucharistic supper—is a strong one, but the evidence is so controversial that one would like to see the early chapters lengthened. Claims are made which encourage doubts. The Eucharistic supper is not seen clearly as a family meal, and the sacrifice it pictures not bound firmly enough with the world of men and things. Many ministers would be glad to control the great eucharistic prayer, but to limit it to the minister, as a presiding Bishop, may well involve the loss of something valuable in our tradition. I think that Mr. Clark's pictorial use of *Revelation* iv. 6 is also open to question.

I find Mr. Clark's order excessively precise and his use of lection, fraction and oblation traditionally sound but, practically, encouraging unnecessary difficulties. It is so easy to make the form sound more like a pageant than a family meal. It may be observed how successfully W. Robinson avoided this so that many of our ministers use the book without feeling disloyal to their tradition. I do not like the way the Order was introduced at Rochester, and similar control of a church meeting could well lead to greater confusion in the hands of other ministers equally confident but less gifted and sure.

My main criticism must be on the question of our most urgent need. It is true that liturgy is defined in such a way that it must be either good or bad. It cannot be avoided, for there can be no true worship without a liturgy. The word 'liturgy,' however, like the word 'form,' is open to grievous misunderstanding. I cannot believe that the structure of Mr. Clark's service will bring either revival or a better understanding of worship for the people. It may well lead to even more pietistic withdrawal. As the central act for the Church it gives hope, but as an order for evening worship I should judge it retrograde. The need of our time is worship, as William Temple long ago claimed, but "all conditions of men" will need something very different from this. It may well be that the act of worship

will be considered as an activity of the separate and "elect" with other ways, for the majority of people, regarded as a temporary concession. I fear that greater emphasis on proper form and procedure may help people to offer worship to God without hearing the demand for right relations between man and man—"Go and tell men," said Bishop Gore, "that they cannot have communion with Christ unless they have communion with one another." We must not forget that some "irregular" in their worship are more sensitive on this than many of our regular communicants.

Much of the difficulty lies in our 'form' of celebration—and then people seem to have shown a shy resistance throughout history to Communion . . . once a month—well, say once a year . . . but there is so much more to be said, and we value Mr. Clark's guidance. The Spirit may choose different channels, but the heart of the matter is in this book. Whatever the 'form,' we do well to remember that there is no virtue in shapelessness.

HOWARD WILLIAMS