

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

the Sacrament, its personal and its corporate character. To eat, to drink, are essentially individual acts; no one can perform them on our behalf: they are personal, appropriative, throughout. That is one great aspect of the Supper. But then this is carefully balanced by the other. *Λάβετε, φάγετε* imply a united social and composite action, and this is emphasized by the plural pronoun in the words that follow: "This is My body which is given for *you*," etc. This is that feature of "a communion" [*i.e.*, a joint participation] "of the body of Christ" on which St. Paul insists. Dear as our own familiar form is, with its words of personal appropriation, "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for *thee*," we venture to think that it loses something of the significance that He Himself put into the words when He first gave them to His Church and bade them "Do this"—*i.e.*, perform the actions and say the words that they had just seen and heard.

We would close this paper with a note of thankfulness to God for the Report taken as a whole, and with the prayer that it may tend to the restoration of the proper discipline of the Church. The National Church has a position unequalled by any other Church in the world; she has been, we firmly believe, a great blessing to the nation, in spite of manifold failure and shortcoming, and if this Report is loyally received and acted upon, she has yet before her a glorious future.



Organs and Choirs.

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE BISHOP OF BURNLEY.

I N a paper contributed to this Magazine some years ago, the writer endeavoured to point out how, according to his judgment, the competing claims of congregation and choir may be reconciled. He urged that a frank recognition of the existence of the other's claims should be accorded by each; that

intricacies and subtleties of musical composition should not be absent, but should be confined to those parts of the service in which trained voices may be introduced without prejudice to the general congregational character of the service; but that where the congregation are invited to join, and where they have the right to be assisted in joining, and to resent being discouraged from joining, the music should be of a much simpler character, and from these portions, chromatics, semitones, and semi-fugal passages should be rigidly banished. This writer now returns to the charge, and with strengthened insistence takes up his parable. The essential distinctions between public and private worship are too often, in discussion on the subject, entirely lost sight of. In private approaches to God, other than acts of adoration and intercession, our own personal needs are the theme. In public we sink ourselves, and lose sight to some extent of our individual needs in the realization of our membership in the Body. Hence our forms are clothed in general, rather than specific language; and to assist in accentuating this root-idea of associated worship the principle of delegation is called into action. The great bulk of the common prayers is the audible monopoly of the minister. The only exceptions to this are supplied by the General Confession, the Lord's Prayer (in Morning and Evening Prayer), and the suffrages. Setting aside these with the Canticles and Psalms, and the Apostle's Creed, the adjective 'congregational,' in the commonly received acceptance of the word, can hardly be correctly applied to the devotional provisions of the Book of Common Prayer.

It should, however, be borne in mind that the contention that this feature of the Book is a condemnatory one comes ill from members of other religious bodies. For comparatively inconsiderable as is the portion assigned to the people by this Book, it is much more than is contributed by the worshippers in any Nonconformist community. We are not aware that the smallest oral share is given to the people in any considerable Christian body among us outside our own Church. In some of the largest, not even the ratificatory 'amen,' escapes from the

listeners. And the circumstance that the choice of verbal expression is left, in most instances, to the ministers of these communities renders the delegation much more complete than with ourselves. The continued suspense of the mind must prevent that attitude of meditative sympathy which is favoured by the use of a form, of which the substance and the phrasing are alike familiar. Here the audible offering of the prayer is delegated. There the substance and the expression are the choice and the product of another's mind. This consideration may suffice to make good the allegation that however much the choir may invade the presumed rights of the congregation to an adequate oral share in the worship, nowhere is the share of the congregation so large as in the public worship of the Church of England. This being conceded, we proceed to give free play to the spirit of criticism—a spirit which is so fatal to all devotion, if evoked at the time of public worship. What follows we throw into the old-fashioned form of dialogue, with the editor's, if not the reader's, leave.

Walking home from church a Sunday or two ago, *Fraternus* was overtaken by *McJubal* the organist. Their homes lying in the same suburb, a mile away from their church, they often had a matter of twenty minutes in each other's company on the way. A slight accident during the service gave an immediate turn to the talk.

Fraternus.—Good-morning. What went wrong with your instrument at the service? It seemed to have a sneezing fit before it stopped altogether and left the choir to shift without its aid.

McJubal.—Detestable, wasn't it? Those fussy wardens took it into their heads that the church wanted cleaning, and never thought of protecting the organ from the grit and the dust. So these got into the pipes, with the result that intolerable ciphering was set up in half the stops; and, as the less of two evils, I had finally to give up playing.

Fraternus.—Well, well; worse things might have happened. Your leading treble might have eaten too much yesterday at

the school-treat, and been kept away in consequence this morning. That elaborate anthem would have been fatally maimed without him, as your second lad would never have had confidence enough to sing unsupported in the emergency.

McJubal.—Oh, without my leader we should never have attempted that particular anthem with all its accidentals and its cross-time passages.

Fraternus.—Worse things might have happened than even that. The heat of the day and the stuffiness of the church—church architects never study ventilation, though adepts at providing draughts—might have overcome Miss X again, just as the people were settling down to enjoy the popular hymn which might have replaced the discarded anthem; that would have been a distinct congregational loss to my thinking.

McJubal.—I know your constitutional disrespect to anthems. You would find no place in our Church services for the finest musical compositions of our own and past times.

Fraternus.—I confess to being prejudiced. But at the risk of offending I must lodge an indictment against organs.

McJubal.—What! against the prince of instruments, which embraces in its wonderful complex mechanisms all that is best and greatest in most other instruments.

Fraternus.—My strictures are not levelled so much against the instrument as against the abuses of it. I am fully persuaded in my own mind that nine out of ten organists can as little be trusted with their own instrument as Phaeton with his father's chariot.

McJubal.—I am pretty thick-skinned, and am curious to hear whether you are going to do me the honour of tithing me or will include me in the nine.

Fraternus.—As a sensible man I believe you won't resent straight talking; I won't mince matters. As a brilliant executant you have few equals in your profession. Your organ-recitals at the Town Hall are a treat. But as an accompanist, you are (forgive me) right down among the nine.

McJubal.—Thank you for the sugared wrappings of your pill. Fire away, candid friend.

Fraternus.—Many thanks for liberty of speech. I accept the full grant, and mean to tax your patient forbearance to the utmost. You know I am a bit of an instrumentalist. My mother taught me the piano when I was six, and however good the vocalists I always enter with more musical sympathy into the instrumental items in a concert programme than into the vocal. So what I now urge cannot be set down to any personal bias in favour of the voices as against the instrument. Now the first requisite, I take it, for a true accompanist is that he should accompany. To accompany means to be on friendly terms with the voices, to lift them on, to encourage them. The impression you, in common with the large majority of your brethren give me, is that you are bent on the most dire voice destruction. With excellently true trebles you pull out your most strident reeds, against whose competing blatancy the boys shriek, where to sing with ease and pleasure would render them inaudible. I have never yet heard any good reason why *the melody* of a familiar tune or chant should be played at all, except as a little variety. It is often my task to accompany a lady's song in a drawing-room, and if I now and then touch a note or two of the melody, I feel I owe her an apology for invading her domain.

McJubal.—Excuse me, the cases are not in the least parallel. Boys would get flat at once if left to themselves, or sharp, if they hail from Lancashire or the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Fraternus.—I have repeatedly been told so; but I simply meet the contention with a flat denial. The lower lines of the clef will keep them in tune, when properly trained, and if the melody is ever really needed—which I question—the softest stops should be used. Why, what organist would dream of shrieking at the clergyman, who occasionally needs the note in the prayers where the monotone is used? A few weeks back one of the Church papers¹ criticised the "insistent ubiquity" of

¹ The *Church Times*, May 18, 1906.

the great organ on the occasion of a vast meeting recently held at the Albert Hall. The writer exactly touched the point I have long urged. I cut the slip out containing the words, and have it in my pocket-book. "The solemn diapason, so beautiful when subordinated to the human voice, has given place to shrill mixtures and blatant reeds." My own experience in the same place years ago was equally disappointing. Ten thousand Church people met to protest against the disestablishment of the Church in Wales. "If nothing else is worth listening to," I thought on my way, "I shall hear some grand singing." I came away in a state of indignant irritation, impressed with the deep folly of the belief that the English have the slightest claim to be considered a musical people. A unique opportunity had been lost. Lest the monster organ should find the task of drowning half a score thousand voices at the top of musical enthusiasm too formidable, three murderous cornets were requisitioned to reinforce it. The voices died hard; but they did die! I have never been able to explain one piece of obtuseness on the part of your profession. You go to our cathedrals for the pattern of your services, regardless of what may be suitable for a parish church, and often enough go considerably beyond the cathedral type in what you provide. But you do not go to our cathedral organists for a lesson in accompanying. I have visited at least half the cathedrals of our land, and I do not know one where cultured and sympathetic self-restraint does not mark the playing. Oftener than not the organ during the singing is rather felt than heard.

McJubal.—There again I maintain that the cases are no true parallels. Cathedral choristers are very highly trained, and through the daily services become familiarized with the most perfect and elaborate compositions. The materials at our disposal are such as to need much greater instrumental support.

Fraternus.—Yes, I know that is the opinion of your fraternity. It is not mine.

Then, to descend to a few out of many particulars, which I heartily wish I could avoid noticing with annoyance.

1. Here is a string of them. No attention to tonal gradations—a burst of forte, followed or preceded by a pianissimo; no crescendo or diminuendo—these last ministering to mystery and emotion, as the extremes never do.

2. Next to no attention to the *mood* and sentiment of the psalter, with two stock exceptions—the lions never fail to “roar after their prey,” nor the trumpets and shawms to blare.

3. Whatever the odd verse closing a psalm contains, it is always (with a double chant) taken extra loud, suggesting a strenuous preservative against a lapse of watchfulness, and a hapless slip into the first strain of the chant.

4. The miserable adaptations (after the most impudent liberties taken with the originals) of Mendelssohn’s and Beethoven’s composition for the *Kyrie* between the commandments. These deeply penitential utterances of a conscience-awakened soul, at the recital of the Moral Law, are never less fittingly interpreted than when wedded to a pretty sentimental melody.

5. A similar remark applies to the closing prayer of the *Te Deum*; generally the full force of instrumentation thunders in competition with voices exerted to the breaking pitch when the worshippers reach the beseeching approach to the God of mercy: “Let me never be confounded.”

6. The spoiling of *all* the greater Festivals of the Church by the ridiculous idea that on these occasions all the worshippers are proof against headaches, and therefore prepared for crushing fortissimos from the opening processional to the final Amen. All the psalms specially clamorous; nothing to express the quiet joy of communion for tired hearts and minds.

To sum up my counsels—for we have nearly reached our several doors—I am as fully persuaded of this as of anything, that our people have not a notion of the power and beauty which might with a little pains and common sense be put into our service. More and more the choir invades, instead of assisting, the province of the congregation. More and more the organ domineers over both.

I do not forget that Samuel Sebastian Wesley, in his tract

on cathedral music, has something to say about the spiritual help of an occasional silent attention, and that Dr. Jebb is of a similar opinion, as Keble, too, who bids us ask for "grace to listen well." I am willing to concede that this consideration may justify a sparing use of anthems. Nor do I forget in this connection how John Wesley at a critical period in his early religious history tells in his *Journal* of the frequent messages conveyed to him in the words of the anthems he heard at St. Paul's Cathedral.

But I do insist that while these should be left to the choir, very little else ought to be so left. Set services in place of simple chants for the canticles are, for an ordinary parish church, quite indefensible. I wish our Bishops would issue a sharp monition against them. Then let us have one scheme of pointing for the psalter, and have our Prayer-books pointed.* People will *not* provide themselves with a second book, and of course, without the pointing, none can join.

Next, let us be well rid of a good two hundred maudlin sentimental hymn-tunes ; and for the matter of that another good three hundred unreal hyper-emotional hymns. Nothing ministers more disastrously to unreality in worship than the hymns which sin in this direction.

But here we are at your gate. Don't cut me to-morrow for my impertinence. This growl has done me much good. I was reading "Bleak House" last night ; you will remember that there the wind was periodically in the east, even in July.

* As, *e.g.*, the Cambridge Prayer-Book, published by the S.P.C.K.

