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Evangelicals and the Problem of Ritualism.

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THE articles which have appeared on this subject, written by the Dean of St. Aidan's College, Birkenhead, and the Vice-Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge, and published in the *CHURCHMAN* for January and March of this year, have given the Evangelical party the lead for which many of its members have for some time been looking in vain. How much has been actually lost to the party by its negative attitude to the problem of Ritualism it would not be easy to estimate. It is disastrous to a party, whether the party be a political or an ecclesiastical one, if, in reference to a great and growing national movement, it has no constructive policy. The best method of defence is generally that of attack. Perhaps the main reason for the political débâcle of 1906 was that the Conservative party had exhausted its ideas, and had no practical policy worth speaking of to put before the country. The exigencies of the times were demanding a positive and constructive attitude to many problems of social reform. The Conservatives went under because they had no policy.

Now, the ecclesiastical position of to-day is analogous to the political position of yesterday. The progress of thought and feeling in the country with regard to the externals of religious worship have produced a somewhat similar state of affairs. The exigencies of the times have been demanding with more and more insistence a positive and constructive attitude to the problems which attach to the externals of the worship of Almighty God in the twentieth century. The Evangelical party has lost ground because it has had no constructive policy with reference to the growing development of the æsthetic sense throughout the nation.

Some might indeed urge that its losses, through the failure to develop a constructive policy towards the question of beauty, dignity, and ceremonial, in Divine worship, have been more

than made up for by the gains which have accrued to it from its emphasis upon the spiritual elements in worship, in contrast to those which are external, ritual, and spectacular. It has stood out conspicuously for that attitude to the externals of worship which was emphatically adopted by the Divine Head of the Church. "God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." And it is just because it has insistently done so that the Evangelical party, though comparatively small in numbers, is becoming increasingly respected in the Church of England. For though as a party the Evangelicals may be small, as a school of thought they are far from small, and are exercising an increasing influence upon other sections of the Church. "When in doubt," Bishop Montgomery is reputed to have said to a gathering of clergy, "play C.M.S.!" But when the question is asked whether the party as such has kept in touch with the growing advance in the artistic perceptions of the nation which the last few years have witnessed, it would not be easy to give a satisfactory answer. We have been going on quietly much as before, with slight improvements here and there in our churches and services, for the most part, as Mr. Dewick and Mr. Derbyshire have reminded us, in the wake of the Ritualists, adopting here and there improvements and usages which they inaugurated, but have since discarded, but totally innocent of, and apparently indifferent to, any formulated policy.

Meanwhile two things have been happening in England. The first is that there has been all through the nation a most remarkable increase in the standard of comfort, due to the possession of increased wealth, which has resulted in a conspicuous improvement in the popular taste. In matters of dress, not only the feminine, but also the masculine portion of the community has made a remarkable advance in the direction of refinement. In matters of house decoration and furnishing, the houses of the poor no less than those of the rich give evidence to an immense development of artistic ideas. We may deplore, and rightly so, the luxury of the age, and the craze for wealth, and all the pleasures, comforts, and embellishments which the posses-

sion of money makes possible. But when we recollect that this increased standard of comfort and beauty is not only to be found in the mansions of the wealthy, but also in varying degrees in the cottages of the working classes, in the homes of the artisans, and in the day schools, where congregate the poorest children from our most squalid slums, we shall see how impossible a thing it is to put back the clock which registers the march of human progress, and to imagine that the ritual of the Evangelicals of the seventies and the eighties is in keeping with the environment of the twentieth century.

The second notable thing is this, that while one party in the Church has pandered in every possible way to the popular demand for the beautiful, the æsthetic, and the spectacular in public worship, and has thereby gained a considerable following in the nation, in spite of the fact that its medieval and sacerdotal pretensions are absolutely and fundamentally opposed to the deep-seated convictions of Englishmen, the other party, which stands for a doctrinal position, which is far more Anglican, and an attitude to the laity which is far more British, has at best made but slow progress because of its negative attitude as a party towards much that is good and pure and beautiful in the spirit of the age.

The Evangelical party has maintained its position even if it has not greatly improved it, because of its spiritual basis, or, in other words, because of its depth. It might, as a party, have made a most notable advance, if it had been characterized by breadth as well as depth, if a broad, far-seeing outlook had been associated with its deep evangelistic and missionary zeal, and its splendid insistence upon the fundamental pre-eminence of the spiritual in contrast to the external in religion.

Now, is it not possible for it to become broad as well as deep? Is there any reason why a deep spirituality should be necessarily associated with a narrow outlook? Cannot we frankly face these developments in the æsthetic sentiments of the nation, and as a party adopt a positive attitude instead of a negative attitude to the national desire for greater beauty and dignity in the externals of religious worship? Cannot we bring the greater refinement of the

nation and its larger access to, and appreciation of, the things that are artistic and beautiful, into closer touch with those great spiritual and Evangelical truths and principles in life and worship which our party stands out conspicuously to represent, both in the Church of England and towards the nation at large? In short, cannot we develop an Evangelical Ritual?

It will be obvious at the outset that such a task would not be "a work of one day or two." The change of front in a party such as ours from that of timid and fearful, if not of open distrust and suspicion, of what is called ritual in any shape or form, to that of frank appreciation of its use, and open adoption of it as a helpful and important accessory to spiritual worship, could only be effected as a result of a gradual and general understanding of, and sympathy with, the changed circumstances of the day. That such a change, were it to come about, would not be without its grave difficulties and dangers is evident. To develop the æsthetic in Divine worship, and yet to lay a great and ever greater emphasis, not on the æsthetic, but on the moral and spiritual elements, would necessitate wise and devout leadership in our party, and equally wise and devout leadership in our individual parishes. It would need more than this. It would need, as Mr. Dewick has well pointed out, the labours of "a rising school of church architects and artists who are at heart Evangelicals, and keen to express Evangelical ideas through their art." But though the task would be a difficult one, surely the conception of its ultimate goal should form a strong incentive towards its pursuit. For it is possible to conjure a vision of the Evangelical Church of the future, with a stately architecture and ceremonial, all expressive of Evangelical truth, where simplicity and spirituality in worship were closely wedded to dignity and beauty, where the eye as well as the ear were receiving impressions of the truth of Christ's Gospel, and where a powerful witness was constantly being afforded to the fact that there is no need to journey Romewards for a ritual expressive of the Anglican Faith, and that there is no artistic gift with which God has blessed us which may not be used to contribute to a worship of God Almighty as a Spirit, in spirit and in truth.

Meanwhile the matter is one for individual thought and study, and for general conference at the smaller or larger gatherings of the clan. It will be well for those who see visions to unfold them, for those who dream dreams to interpret them, for those who have ideas to state them. The process has already begun. Mr. Dewick has boldly advocated the adoption of the Westward position at the Holy Communion, with all the necessary rearrangement of the chancel which the Westward position would entail. Mr. Derbyshire has followed with a proposal consequent on Mr. Dewick's idea, for an abandonment of the tight-fitting frontal (which better befits an altar than a table) and its substitution by a "large cloth or 'carpet' of some rich material hanging freely down on all sides," and further, the vesting of the Holy Table at the time of the administration of the Holy Communion with "a large and visible white cloth."

Now let us see whether we can get any further. What about the East end itself? Instead of a symbolic cross or crucifix, and non-symbolic but artistic vases of fresh flowers, why not substitute in sculpture, carving, or mural painting, a representation of the Living Christ. The cross is, without doubt, a precious symbol of our Faith, and one to be retained in our scheme of Evangelical symbolism, but the cross on the re-table behind the "altar" has become an integral part of the High Church scheme. It has been adopted by large numbers of men of Evangelical views, but it has been none the less either consciously or unconsciously copied from the Ritualists. The cross as a symbol has become so multiplied and hackneyed that it has lost much of its original significance. The crucifix concentrates attention upon the dying Christ to the practical exclusion of the truth that He is not dead, but alive and glorious. As Evangelicals we want a symbolism that will give every possible emphasis to the conception of the Living Christ in contrast to the medieval emphasis upon the dead Christ. We want an artistic treatment of our East walls which shall, if possible, present, whether by stained glass, or statuary, or wood carving, or mural decorations, or all four elements combined, a

representation at once dignified, reserved, and reverent, and yet striking and impressive of the Living Christ. At the Holy Table we "show forth His death till He come." It is as the living, glorious, triumphant Coming One that we want to represent Him. We look back to the cross, but we look forward to the crown! We worship Him not as dead, but as One who was dead, but is now alive! The artistic presentation of the Living Christ must be the outstanding and dominant feature of the new Evangelical symbolism, in contrast to that of the dead Christ which has dominated the medieval symbolism.

Many of the readers of the *CHURCHMAN* will doubtless have seen the statue of Christ on the Meggenhorn, the jutting crag of rock which marks the entrance of the north-western arm of the Lake of Lucerne, and close to which thousands of tourists pass by every day in the steamers which ply on those romantic waters. The statue, which is one of considerable size, is that of the living Christ standing erect with outstretched arms, and gracious mien, and a winning smile upon His face. It is the very antithesis of the crucifix, and affords a refreshing and moving sight after the eye has become wearied and the mind depressed with the countless representations of the Saviour in the helpless attitude of death. Christ is alive! Let our Churches say so in their symbolism, as well as our clergy in their sermons.

In harmony with this I should further suggest the substitution of the Comfortable Words in the place of the Ten Commandments, so dear to the heart of the old-fashioned Protestant. What is there in the Ten Commandments that is so specifically Evangelical? Is it not rather the case that the Ten Commandments are connected by association with the old-time penitential discipline of the Church, which they have superseded? Are not the Comfortable Words far more expressive of Evangelical truth than the Ten Commandments? What is there outside long party usage that so weds the Protestant to the Ten Commandments? The Gospel is better than the law; and while we stand for the law, we stand much more emphatically for the Gospel!

I pass by the question of how to secure the treatment, at the same time artistic, and also characteristically Evangelical, of the lectern and the pulpit. Let me take up another matter which the High Church party has developed to its no small advantage—I refer to the Choral Communion.

Now to many an Evangelical the Choral Communion of his High Church brother is a strange blend of the attractive and the repellant. If any part of the liturgy should be hallowed, softened, and beautified by the tender, restful melody of music, and the quiet singing of words which give point and emphasis to the sacred theme on which the soul is meditating, it is the office for the Holy Communion. Singing is nowhere more appropriate than connected with the administration of the Holy Communion. But, as a matter of fact, what is the Choral Communion even in a church that is very far from being advanced? It is, as a rule, and it is, in the main, a performance by a non-communicant choir! It is a singing of the most sacred words at the most sacred time, not by the communicant congregation, but by a professional body of singers, men and boys, who may or may not be communicants, and whose demeanour may or may not be a reverent and devotional one. Moreover, it involves as a rule a distracting and disturbing interruption by the singing of a hymn at the moment when the clergy are uttering the words of administration; or the communicants, having received the sacred memorials, are desiring quiet for silent prayer. It is as disturbing to the clergy as it is to the communicants, and suggestive more of a professional performance than of a congregational communion feast.

I should like to advance the suggestion whether it would not be possible to introduce the helpful element of singing into the administration of the Holy Communion in a manner which would be in emphatic accord with Evangelical sentiments and habits of devotion? If a hymn could be sung immediately after the consecration by the congregation as a whole, led by a small choir of adult communicants who took pains to prepare for and perform this office as an act of worship and a labour of love, a

very different effect might be produced. If, when it was thought desirable, this could be coupled with the singing, again by the congregation, of the *Ter Sanctus* and the *Gloria in Excelsis*, to simple and yet beautiful melodies, would not a warmth and a colour be added to our rendering of this service which it often lacks, and would not a large number of people be impressed with the beauty and devotion that it was possible to associate with a characteristically Evangelical administration of the service of Holy Communion?

There are three other suggestions which I might briefly submit towards the evolution of an Evangelical Ritual: 1. It would be a commendable feature in the worship of our churches if, on the entry of the choir and clergy, the congregation unitedly joined with them kneeling in silent prayer. The service would tend to become more truly devotional in character if it were prefaced by a united act of prayer to God for grace to render to Him, each in his several ways, that heart-felt worship which is His due and in which alone He delights.

2. The Evangelical party has stood out conspicuously in the Church as the great advocate of Foreign Missions. It has continually taught the importance of prayer for Missions, but has not practised its teaching by introducing it into its public worship. I should suggest that the Collect for Foreign Missions, authorized for use by the Upper House of Convocation for Canterbury, be, after the receipt of the permission of the Diocesan, adopted for regular use in church morning and evening after the Collect for the day.

3. As a party we want dignity as well as simplicity in the dress of the officiating clergy. We also want distinctiveness, for we are proud and not ashamed of our heritage. The coloured stole with its tassels, its embroideries, and its varied hues, is both effeminate in appearance and associated in its origin with the sacerdotal vestments. I suggest that Evangelical clergy adopt in place of the stole, coloured or otherwise, the broad scarf or tippet of rich black silk, which would be at the same time legal, simple, dignified, and distinctive.