

## THE REVISION THAT IS NEEDED: NOT PROVIDED BY N.A. 84.

### I.

BY THE REV. CANON BRIGGS, M.A., Rector of Loughborough.

**I**N some ways the subject assigned to me is peculiarly difficult. N.A. 84 has made so many changes that it might seem to have left nothing more to be said. Most people are much more inclined to criticize the alterations already proposed than to venture upon further suggestions. On the other hand, my task is lightened in at least this respect: I am not asked to criticize N.A. 84. The critics are already sufficiently numerous, and I am quite incapable of saying anything which has not been already, and better, said. I take it that I am simply asked to make such practical suggestions, not embodied in N.A. 84, as experience teaches to be desirable: and my own experience, if it has no particular merit, has at least been a varied one. Whether it is of the slightest use making any further suggestions at this stage, is another matter. Some people will tell us that it is simply beating the air. But I have been asked to make them: and so I make them for what they are worth. They will be made in no narrow spirit. It is a misfortune, perhaps inevitable, that the question of revision is mixed up with doctrinal differences, which loom largely in any discussion. But this must not blind us to the fact that there are many points in which doctrine is not involved, and where the question is purely one of convenience and edification.

Let me begin by emphasizing one word—"revision." Revision is not rewriting the Prayer Book. If it were my business to criticize N.A. 84, I should say that it goes beyond all reasonable revision. It is in many respects a new Prayer Book: and I do not find that a new Prayer Book is generally desired. The old Book of Common Prayer is hallowed to Englishmen by long associations. The laity especially dislike changes of any sort; and unnecessary non-doctrinal changes are almost as unwelcome to them as doctrinal. Sometimes, I think, they are even unreasonable in their conservatism: but their opinion cannot be ignored. I am far from advocating any opposition to reasonable revision. The Prayer Book has been revised before, and must be revised again; and many of the proposals of N.A. 84 are most admirable. But we ought not to make changes for the sake of change. An ancient Service, like an ancient building, should not be lightly tampered with. A little improvement here and there, some addition, some subtraction, some division, and not too much multiplication, will meet most of the needs on which we can all agree. It is obvious, of course, that not everybody will be satisfied with changes which do not affect doctrine. That is no

new feature : at each previous revision there has been controversy upon points of doctrine. Our difficulty to-day is not that there are differences of opinion, which are inevitable in a living Church : but that the differences are so fundamental that it seems impossible to find a basis of agreement. If we accepted N.A. 84, would our Anglo-Catholic brethren ? However, there seems some hope that the doctrinal and the non-doctrinal questions will be considered separately. In any case, doctrinal changes do not come under the heading of a revision which is needed, from our point of view ; we are quite content with the doctrine of the Prayer Book as it stands. The revision which we desire is not controversial.

Moreover, revision, as we desire it, does not mean alternative services. It is argued that absolute uniformity is no longer possible. But if we must have alternatives, let us at least have them within the one Service. That is a practice already established in the Prayer Book : whereas an alternative service is a revolutionary departure. And, with a little adjustment, the same end could be obtained. It is obvious, of course, that alternatives with a different shade of doctrine are on a different footing from alternatives with no such object. But our initial objection to them would be hardly greater than to an alternative service. And there is one consideration which ought to weigh heavily. At present the Church of England is held together by the fact that there are many gradations in her usages. If the alternatives were within the same Service, some Churches would adopt more, and some less, of the changes : and there would be no single cleavage. We are told—though I cannot understand the authority for such a statement—that this will be possible if alternative services are adopted. But is it seriously contemplated that worshippers should have two Prayer Books open in front of them ? I am not advocating alternative uses : I am simply pleading that our Service, in any case, should remain single, and not be duplicated. And that is a position which, I find, is strongly held even by many who desire more latitude than the law at present allows.

But let us get down to particulars. The most popular of our services is undoubtedly Evening Prayer : and in that service I do not think any serious change would be generally welcome. There are minor changes which we should desire. The exhortation is commonly shortened by general consent ; and we should like legal authority for this, even when retaining our present Confession and Absolution. Our Reformers were better at writing prayers than exhortations : which is, perhaps, all to their credit. This exhortation abounds in vain repetitions. " Pray and beseech " is tolerable : " acknowledge and confess," " dissemble nor cloak " are distinctly worse : " assemble and meet together " would have done great credit to Mr. Micawber.

But there is little else in our Evening Prayer which calls for change. The Lessons have already been revised : in my humble judgment, to our lasting benefit. The revision of the Psalms is long overdue ; but of that I must speak separately. There is a

widespread notion that we need an entirely new set of prayers after the third collect. But there is one striking fact to which I would draw attention. During the war most of us adopted with great relief the new prayers which were authorized: but we have gone back with much greater relief to the old prayers. A few verbal alterations would be welcome. We might omit "who alone workest great marvels" from the prayer for Bishops and clergy. And when we pray, in all loyalty, for our "sovereign lord, King George," there is no need to remind the Almighty that he is "most gracious." Compliments are out of place in prayer. Also some additional prayers, for objects not contemplated by our present Prayer Book, are badly needed. But they should not be too numerous, nor too complicated. N.A. 84 supplies us with a very large number of prayers for several occasions: and each has a versicle and response of its own. The officiating Minister will choose them at his own discretion: but I am afraid that he will be half-way through before the congregation has time to find the proper response. There is something to be said for variety; but there is also something to be said for continuity and for simplicity. Revision should not be overdone: and especially in a service which seems dear to the heart of the people.

I have said that the present form of evensong is beloved by the average congregation. But there are exceptions. When I was a chaplain in the Royal Navy, I found that I could get twenty or thirty men to ordinary Evening Prayer, but many times that number for a more informal service. And there are many congregations for which a good deal of liberty must be allowed. The proposed service of Compline, whatever its merits or need on other grounds, obviously does not meet this case. The only way is to allow the incumbent to make abbreviations, with due consent, and always within the bounds of the Prayer Book service. And do let us get away from the regulation "when evensong has already been said." There is no virtue in mere legalism: and experience has proved that there is no protection either.

With regard to Morning Prayer, I am not at all equally contented. There are Churches—for instance, in residential districts, or at the seaside when congregations are overflowing, where it is a most inspiring service. But in the ordinary parish it makes much less appeal than the evening service. Perhaps the time of day makes a difference; perhaps our habit of combining Morning Prayer with Litany or Holy Communion. In any case, the experience is very general.

There are some who would, and do, take the very drastic step of putting a Sung Eucharist in place of Morning Prayer. Their plea is that the Lord's Service should be the chief service on the Lord's Day. On the principle I am entirely with them. Our Lord's own Service is the distinctive service of Christendom: and it should have first place, and not be relegated to the background. Let us make full and frank admission. Like other schools of thought, we have been learning, and we are still glad to learn whatever of good any movement has to teach us. With all our hearts we are ready to co-operate in exalting the Lord's own Service. But we

maintain that it must be the Lord's Service, and not some other ; and that the Service without Communion is not the Service as the Lord ordained it. We gladly recognize other aspects of the Service—of thanksgiving, of memorial, of the offering of ourselves, our souls and bodies : but we insist that the communion of the faithful is at its very heart and centre ; and we are conscious that we have the Prayer Book and the whole tradition of our Church (to say nothing of the historic Institution) entirely with us. If our people generally desired to communicate at midday, we would gladly surrender Morning Prayer entirely, and put the Lord's Service in its place. But the fact is that, with few exceptions, Church people to-day have been educated to communicate before breakfast.

I have written this at some length, to make our general position clear. Perhaps it is an unnecessary digression, as N.A. 84 at any rate does not propose to displace Morning Prayer. But the Service requires further consideration : and I would even venture to go further than N.A. 84. Consider who attend. There are well-to-do people, and some old-fashioned folk who can stand anything in the way of length. But there are also, or should be, children brought by their parents. There are scholars from our Sunday Schools, who have already been to school. These cannot stand a long service. I have been asked very deliberately for greater simplicity. Now see what we provide. Morning Prayer is very like Evening Prayer : but there is much more singing, and at an hour when we are not so inclined to sing. The Venite is an extra : the Te Deum and Benedictus are much longer than the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis. To compensate, I would suggest that the Psalms should be shorter than at Evensong. The Te Deum is so grand a hymn that one hardly dares to suggest a further alternative. But the Benedicite is only used at certain seasons ; and one sometimes gets weary of chants to the Te Deum, and still more weary of choral settings. If we could have a third alternative, of the type of the Gloria in Excelsis, the Te Deum would come in with increased grandeur.

But this is not everything. We tack on to Morning Prayer the Litany or Holy Communion.

Now it is necessary, at least once a month, to have Communion at midday. N.A. 84 proposes to allow us, when Holy Communion follows, to begin with "O Lord, open thou our lips" and break off with the Benedictus. That is quite acceptable : but it still leaves us with two full lessons, and with an epistle and gospel—four readings from Holy Scripture. I would venture to suggest that one lesson should suffice, and that from the Old Testament, since the New is read twice in the ante-Communion office.

When the Litany is combined with Morning Prayer, we are to have no such liberty of omitting the General Confession and Absolution. But why should we not do so ? The Litany is itself a long Confession. "O Lord, open thou our lips" is an historic beginning to Morning Prayer. And to open with praise, and end with prayer, is very much like what our Lord Himself has taught us. Such abbreviation at the beginning, and some further abbreviation of

the Litany itself, when combined with Morning Prayer, would make the combination admirable. It is true that N.A. 84 suggests shortening the Litany : but the only part it cuts out is that which has most variety in it. The suffrages need reduction.

I have already referred to the Psalter. Very occasionally the Psalms are a drawback : in some poor districts, and in other Churches when we have large numbers present who are not accustomed to the Psalms. This demands a certain amount of liberty. But by our own people the Psalms are beloved. Yet we need a bold retranslation. Some parts are hopelessly obscure. " When the company of the spearmen . . . are gathered together among the beasts of the people " is only one instance of mere gibberish. In less conspicuous instances there is sore need of an intelligent rendering. Our musical editors might help us more than they have done. And is there anything very terrible in missing out certain verses, of historical interest, but not applicable to us ? It is our own worship, not that of the Jews, for which we are providing. We read extracts from the other Scriptures without dishonouring the Bible. Why not extracts from the Psalms ?

And now for the Holy Communion, the storm-centre of controversy. But let us get away from controversy, and see where we are all agreed. Whatever our views about the Eucharist at a later hour without communicating, we all welcome communicants before breakfast. Some of us welcome them at any hour when they can come, but we can all agree to exalt the Lord's Service at the beginning of the day. In an ideal Church the whole company of the faithful would be gathered round the Lord's table. But the real difficulty to us all is that of administration. The shortening of the words is a relief, but a relief only. We want more hands to help. Some weeks ago, in the *Church Times*, there was an account of the establishment, in South Africa, of an order of subdeacons to administer the chalice, among other duties. Many of us would prefer a permanent diaconate : some would even accept Lay Readers. But whatever the status agreed upon, let us have the men. We need them. It is a point on which we can all agree.

With regard to the form of service, I have no suggestions for serious changes : my own people would certainly resent them. But some of the Epistles might surely be improved upon ; as for instance, the Epistle for the 4th Sunday in Lent, where the allegory conveys nothing to edify our people : and for All Saints' Day we might begin " After this I beheld," and go on to the end of the chapter. With the proposal to shorten the Commandments and to allow the alternative summary I am personally in sympathy, though my congregation are not. But I would venture on a suggestion which I have not yet seen made. Could we not have, in whole or in part, the Deuteronomy version of the Commandments ? Its account of the institution of the Sabbath is magnificent. It is the Day of Deliverance from bondage—not the Day of Rest, which we have over-emphasized, but the day of Mercy, which is our Lord's own emphasis.

The Prayer for the Church Militant should surely contain, in these modern days, the High Court of Parliament.

The E.C.U. Report contains two suggestions which we might heartily support. One is that the remains of the consecrated Elements should be consumed immediately after the Administration, and not after the Blessing. The other is the very beautiful mutual confession, and prayer for absolution, of priest and people. Could that find some place in our Service?

I have spoken of Communion early in the day; and of further provision, less frequently, at midday. But there are still two classes of people to provide for. There are the sick. I have a large industrial parish: and I find no need of reservation for the sick. But I have found it an appreciable benefit to take to them, on great Festivals, the consecrated Elements straight from the Holy Table. It is not reservation; it is simply counting them as sharers in the one Service. This could be authorized without any great danger of abuse: and it would meet most of our real needs.

There are also mothers of young children, who are only free in the evening. For years together they are practically excommunicated. Their one opportunity, without neglecting their children, is after evensong; and the service, if held then, must be somewhat shortened. Can we not raise this question above the level of party conflict? We all desire to make the Blessed Sacrament accessible to all. Is there really a valid objection to Evening Communion? I pass over the Lord's own example, though to ourselves it is conclusive. But surely, on any Church principle, it is illogical to provide Communion at noonday, and frown upon it in the evening. I understand—but cannot guarantee the authority for the statement—that one Church of "Catholic" views already has a celebration at 9 p.m. I know another man of "Catholic" mind who tried to combine Holy Communion with evensong. Personally, I dare not tamper with Evening Prayer, which draws large congregations. It is better that the Service should be separate. But it needs some abbreviation, to meet this special requirement. To begin direct with "Ye that do truly" is a practicable way. Could that be permitted, on condition that the whole Service had already been taken that same day?

To go on to the Occasional Services. The Burial Service I find adequate—but with some verbal alterations. There is already suggested a welcome omission from the Lesson. I should like to see certain verses, not appropriate to the occasion, omitted from the beautiful 90th Psalm. "When Thou art angry, all our days are gone," jars with "we give Thee hearty thanks." And there are other verses, historic, but not appropriate.

The Baptismal Service has one obvious defect, which N.A. 84 partly remedies. It is so long that we are driven to the desperate expedient of making it a service in itself, and so practically abolishing Public Baptism. We all agree that Holy Baptism should be at least as public as Holy Communion. The only remedy is a very drastic abbreviation. But there is one thing which I should even

like to add. It is a reminder, in the strongest terms, that the child is now not only the Church's child, but the child of our branch of the Church, and even of our local branch. Holy Baptism is a first-rate, and a legitimate, opportunity of enlisting recruits for our Sunday schools: and we ought to make every use of the opportunity.

The Service for the Visitation of the Sick has never been, I must confess, of much use to me. The revision of N.A. 84 is an improvement, but still far beyond me. Perhaps my people are not very well-instructed Church folk. I am certain that if I entered a house saying "Peace be to this house," people would wonder what was the matter with me. Nor would the sick person be prepared to undertake elaborate responses. Some of the suggestions of N.A. 84 are helpful; but if we are to have a set form, it should be more simple.

There remains the Marriage Service: and I find there the greatest need of change, and change that is not suggested. I take more weddings than most people, and I find the solemn pledges nearly always unintelligible. "According to God's holy ordinance" ought to be simple enough: but it is generally "holy audience," which, after all, is not bad. "Holy ornaments" is distinctly worse. What does "with my body I thee worship" mean to the ordinary man? "I, thee and thou" is an old joke, which I have not personally experienced; but the phrase "with all my worldly goods I thee endow," is simply not true, and ought not to be said, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." "I plight thee my troth" assumes some strange forms. There is a legend in my own Church that a man once went to the extreme length of saying "I plight thee my clothes": which was a real vow. Altogether, there is ample room for revision. I hardly dare say it, but I should like to see omitted the word "obey": for I feel it to be unreal. The contract should be on equal terms. And are we really incapable of improving on the closing Exhortation? Does anybody nowadays read "and are not afraid with any amazement"?

I have tried to keep away from controversy. I do not know what weight we shall carry, or if any weight at all: but I know well enough that any merely negative position will be useless. Nor do we wish to take such a stand: we would make, if we can, our own contribution. We are not Low Churchmen: we repudiate the name. Even the noble term Evangelical needs to be properly understood. Nearly all schools of thought, to-day, have caught something of the true Evangelical spirit: and in any narrow sense the term does not apply to us. Our position is that of our Reformers, with their appeal to Scripture: which, as Gwatkin used to teach us, is the appeal to antiquity. We are Prayer Book Churchmen; and the Prayer Book is wide enough for Cosin and Andrewes as well as for Latimer and Jewel. I trust that even these, who would find Cosin and Andrewes, and Laud himself, much too Anglican, and even too avowedly Protestant, would find nothing offensive in my paper. As for the great body of English Churchmen, who love the Prayer Book as we love it, it is high time that both they, and we,

realized that our fundamental position, in all vital respects, is the same.

## II.

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We have listened to two very excellent and informative Papers on "The Revision that is needed" by Canon Thornton-Duesbery and Canon Briggs, and it makes it very difficult to add much to what they have said.

We have already had shown to us the many causes that make revision necessary and urgent. The sooner that urgency is recognised the better, in order that we may accomplish our task, and proceed with our real commission in life, to express to our people the Gospel of Jesus Christ anew.

There are many suggestions before us as to what the line of revision should be. We ourselves, unfortunately, have made no real contribution in preparing a suggested revision which might be before the National Assembly, but we have now at least four definite contributions towards revision:—

(a) *We have the E.C.U. Book*, and we are very grateful for the scholarship and care which have there been shown; but I am bound to point out that there is something very subtle about it, and I do not think its compilers are quite fair in putting in two parallel columns the things they do not wish for but are prepared to have in order that they may get the things they desire and which they think others may not be prepared to give. I see no parallel between the two.

(b) *The Edward VI Prayer Book*, which we must remember is being supported by several in authority, and we are bound here to remember that when it was first introduced, it was considered to be not merely non-Roman but distinctly anti-Roman.

(c) We have the *Communion Office* as prepared by the Life and Liberty Movement, with a foreword by the Bishop of Manchester.

(d) And the *N.A. 84*, which is the one we really ought to consider, and here the compilers have tried to:—(1) Modernise; (2) Enrich; (3) Abridge; (4) To restore the balance of doctrine, by which some mean the making of the Communion Service a greater aid to worship and more of an Eucharist than at present it is found to be; but by others it means the restoration of certain doctrines which by many are believed to have been set aside at the Reformation.

We remember that by the provision of *N.A. 84* we are to have an alternative book, and we find everywhere a growing dislike and a determined opposition to such a provision, and the longer revision is delayed, the less likely are we to see an alternative book accepted. If there be an alternative book, then we must remember that men may use either the old or the new, or parts of the old with parts of the new. In dealing with this matter we should remember, not