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THE OCCASIONAL OFFICES.

BY THE REV. J. A. WOOD, M.A., lately Canon of Lahore.

WE have come to the last section of our long day's programme, the Occasional Offices, and I am thankful that the greater part of the changes proposed in them by N.A. 84 are not of the keenly contentious character of many of the matters relating to the Holy Communion which came before us earlier in the day. They are not, however, unimportant, but by reason of their bulk (they occupy forty-seven pages in N.A. 84) I can only touch on the more important of them.

May I begin by suggesting a fourfold test by which all proposals may be judged. Let us ask.—Do they make (1) for reality, (2) for simplicity, (3) for continuity in our doctrinal standards, (4) for spirituality?

(1) If a change relieves a service of that which only by a strained interpretation can reasonably be asked for from an intelligent and spiritually minded Churchman in the twentieth century, we shall welcome the change as making for *reality*.

(2) If, while avoiding a dull sameness, a permitted or appointed variation escapes that elaboration which led Cranmer to write of those "manifold changings of the service" that make the turning of the book "so hard and intricate a matter" that "it is more business to find out what should be read than to read it when found"—then rubrical simplicity has been secured.

Simplicity of language and diction belongs rather to my first test of reality.

(3) If the changes proposed do not alter that balance of doctrine which marks our Prayer Book as both Scriptural and Anglican and not superstitious nor Roman the third test is met, for the compilers of the Prayer Book aimed to leave Churchmen room to live and move and grow, putting "away from time to time the things they perceive to be most abused" and using "such ceremonies as they shall think best to the setting forth of God's glory," for "Christ's Gospel" was to them "a religion to serve God . . . in the freedom of the spirit."

(4) Do the changes make for a truly spiritual worship, a realized contact with God—Father, Son, and Spirit—and thus a means of grace, a true occasion when God's willingness to allow His Very Self to touch our human personalities is blessedly realized in life-giving power? If a modification has this as its successful object we shall give it a glad welcome. And such—thank God—is the case, not once nor twice, but often in the changes proposed in the Occasional Offices, even if there are others where we are more dubious.

I proceed to give instances under each of these four headings, in some cases of welcome, in others of caution or of objection.

I.

REALITY.

(a) The most important change which I would notice—and I do so with hearty approbation—is the change in the office for the Making of Deacons, in the question about Holy Scripture.

The briefest consideration will show us that none of us could answer the question “Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?” in the words “I do believe them” without some kind of mental reservation as to the difference of our attitude towards, let us say, Ecclesiastes and the Gospel of St. John, or to the imprecatory Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount. The new form of the question, “Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as given of God to convey to us in many parts and in divers manners the Revelation of himself which is fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ?” with the reply “I do,” makes such mental reservations, as I have indicated, unnecessary, and what is more, it puts the Bible in the right relationship to the person of our Lord. We love and honour the Scriptures because they tell of Him, because in and through them we come to our knowledge of Him Who is our very life. But the book is a means and not an end.

In the light of recent controversies no change is more significant, and because it makes for reality I trust I may carry the Conference with me in saying that none is more welcome than this.

(b) As to the omission of the reference to the Old Testament in the Baptismal and Marriage services which the E.C.U. Report imagines to be intended “to commend Christianity to the agnostic” and condemns as “an irritating piece of pedantic vandalism,” I see in the omission an honest consideration for those who do not think the marriage ideals of Abraham and Sarah (with Hagar in the background) are the most suitable to illustrate the ideal relationships of men and women whom the Holy Spirit has been leading onward into truth and assisting towards a fuller understanding of God’s ideal for those, whom He joins in marriage, than was given to His saints of old time.

(c) As to Noah and the Red Sea in the Baptismal service, I part with the references with more regret, for I believe they may be justified on adequate exegesis, but yet I must admit they do not help the ordinary devout Churchman to understand the meaning of Baptism, but rather that they tend to distract his mind in a service already somewhat difficult.

The good seed in our Lord’s parable is the message of God, but where it is not understood the birds snatch it away: and because I believe the proportion of those who understand the reference to Noah and the Red Sea is small I should agree to the omission, while protesting against the motive which the E.C.U. attributes to those who propose it. To aim at reality is commendable; to make concessions from fear is cowardly.

II.

SIMPLICITY.

(a) In the case of the Occasional Offices there is little to be said under the heading *Simplicity*. The rather long rubric as to what is to be done when a child is to be baptized and another to be received into the Church at the same time seems somewhat unnecessary, or to presuppose a rather unintelligent minister who cannot solve even a small problem for himself: nothing like as difficult a problem as the proper manipulation at baptism of a lusty child of three or four, whose schooling in obedience has yet to begin. But otherwise I note nothing which tends to make the services complicated or fussy.

(b) Of the second kind of simplicity, that of language, I do not join in the E.C.U.'s condemnation of the alternative simplified Baptism service, for I could sacrifice even some of Cranmer's English if I can help to make Holy Baptism a reality and not a magical charm to those who rarely darken a church door, except when another babe has to be christened.

(c) I regret the opportunity was not taken to bring the form of the Apostles' Creed in the services for Baptism and the Visitation of the Sick into conformity with that in Morning and Evening Prayer. A sick bed is not the place where the mind should be vexed with slight and unfamiliar variations in the form of the expression of fundamental beliefs; nor do I see reason why there should be verbal differences between the Baptismal Creed and that of daily repetition.

III.

CONTINUITY OF DOCTRINE.

You will note at once that I am making my third test not identity of doctrine but *continuity*. The ideal of the preface of the Prayer Book is that of a religion to serve God in the freedom of the spirit. Such freedom means life, and life means growth. Now all change is not growth. Some changes mark decay. Again, some changes mark a fracture, a breach, and therefore this my third test will need to be applied with circumspection, lest what is claimed to be a growth turns out to be a retrogression, or, to involve a breach, which means injury to a living organism.

Now, there are two changes proposed in the Occasional Offices which may involve some change in doctrine: (a) Prayers for the Dead; (b) the omission from the Catechism of the phrase "children of wrath," with corresponding changes in the Baptismal services. We will take these in turn.

(a) *Prayers for the Dead*.—Article XXXI condemns the sacrifice of Masses, in the which it was "commonly said the priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead to have remission of pain or guilt" as "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits," and the reason of this very grave condemnation is contained in the first

half of the article, viz. that thereby is impugned the completeness of the one offering of Christ once made. To this article we have given and do give our assent. The desire to maintain the unique character of Christ's sacrifice of Himself was, we believe, the cause of the omission from our present Prayer Book of all allusions to the faithful departed, with but one clear exception—the thanksgiving in the prayer for the Church militant. In the face of the new proposals we have to ask, Was that complete omission entirely Scriptural, or do the new proposals fall within the liberty which the preface of the Prayer Book claims, in that the new proposals may be justified from Scripture? Let me remind you what is offered to us in the Occasional Offices:

(i) A new alternative form of committal in the Burial service: "We commend into the hands of Thy mercy, most merciful Father, the soul of this our brother departed . . . we beseech God's infinite goodness that when the judgment shall come, which God has committed to his well-beloved Son, this our brother and we may be found acceptable in Thy sight."

(ii) Some optional versicles, including, "Grant unto him eternal rest: And let perpetual light shine upon him." We have to ask, not Are these new? (that they obviously are), but Do they accord with the Scriptural basis in which our Prayer Book rests? We believe in the Communion of Saints, we remember them with thanksgiving before God, we share St. Paul's confidence that He which hath begun a good work will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ. If thanksgiving may be made for the faithful departed may we have nothing of the supplications, prayers, intercessions, which in the case of the living are linked with the thanksgivings enjoined in 1 Tim. ii. ? Or must all such be regarded as denying the completeness of Christ's one sacrifice? If the dying Christian may commend his soul to his Heavenly Father, what meaning is left for fellowship if his fellow Christians may not do so too, when his body is being laid to rest? If St. Paul may express the wish that the Lord may grant him who had shown St. Paul kindness to find mercy in the day of God, then I believe the changes in the alternative words of committal cannot be held to go beyond what is written, for they stop short at the boundary stone of apostolic example, and do not follow Roman error beyond that line in suggesting that any new sacrifice may be offered by the Mass priest.

Just because there are prayers for the dead which are unscriptural and involve dangerous deceits, those who desire to let their thought be guided by Holy Scripture need to beware lest, in their anxiety not to go beyond Scripture, they condemn those who desire to follow Scripture to the full. I must confess that our present words of committal with their mention only of the body seem to me to fall short of full belief in the Communion of Saints in having no reference at all to the soul. To the suggested changes I am therefore prepared to agree, and the more so that their use is not to be compulsory.

(b) The second doctrinal matter centres round the phrase

“children of wrath,” which is to be omitted from the Catechism answer to the question, “What is the inward and spiritual grace (of Baptism)?”—“A death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness, for being by nature born in sin and children of wrath we are hereby made the children of grace.” The Revisers also make two more or less consequential changes. In the certificate about the correctness of a Private Baptism, the words “who being born in original sin and in the wrath of God is now by the laver of regeneration, etc.” become “who being born in original sin is now by the laver, etc.,” and similarly the words “in the wrath of God” disappear from a like connexion in the first prayer in the service for the Public Baptism of Infants. But—and this is important—the words are retained in the corresponding prayer in the Baptism of Adults. The test is “What saith the Scriptures?” And we turn to Ephes. ii. 3, the common parent of all these passages: “We also all once lived in the lusts of the flesh and were by nature children of wrath.” Our existing Prayer Book has interpreted this in the Calvinistic sense, that by our original constitution we are children of wrath. But that *φύσει* does not always refer to origin is clear from Gal. iv. 8, *τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὐδοῖ θεοῦς*, and Grimm, in his lexicon on Eph. ii. 3 makes *φύσει* to be “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature,” and he is confirmed by Eph. v. 3-6, where, after a long list of active sins, St. Paul says because of these things cometh “the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience.” The Revisers in N.A. 84 apparently share this opinion, and, desiring to be true to Scripture retain the phrase referring to the “wrath of God” for adults, but expunge it in the case of the service for infants.

For a like reason they have omitted the phrase “children of wrath” from the Catechism, where, if retained, it will put a false meaning on Eph. ii. 3, and convey to the child learners of the Catechism the idea that children when born are objects not of God’s love and compassion, but of His wrath.

Sin is evil whether in act or in tendency, but thanks be to God, while we were yet sinners God loved us and gave His Son to die for us, and it is a clear gain, while retaining the emphasis on our sinful nature we should avoid a distortion of the image of the God who is LOVE.

The change is an instance of fidelity to the larger principle that our standard of doctrine is Holy Scripture, rather than to the lesser one of leaving the doctrine of the Prayer Book unchanged, and we cannot but be thankful it is so.

IV.

SPIRITUALITY.

(a) I may be forgiven if I refer yet once again to *Reservation*. It is to me a matter of regret that the revised service should not, in cases of real necessity, make it sufficient to recite in the hearing of the sick person that part of the Consecration Prayer which begins,

"Our Lord Jesus Christ the same night that he was betrayed," and thus maintain that important characteristic of our Prayer Book that the worshipper should have the opportunity of sharing intelligently in the service, for while many and weighty opinions of the early centuries may be quoted that the *Thanksgiving* is of the essence of the Consecration Prayer, the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which binds us if any modern utterance can do so, makes the "unfailing use of the words of institution" a necessary part of a valid sacrament.

Such use in respect of the thing consecrated rather than in the hearing of the worshipper seems to me to favour a view of the sacramental rite which is very near to the repetition by a Hindu pundit of the mantra, whereby what was a piece of brass becomes an idol indwelt by the God which it represents.

It is to avoid such a possible interpretation of the meaning of the *epiclesis* that the Life and Liberty book prays the Holy Spirit may bless and sanctify both the communicants and the elements.

Let us show all the intelligent brotherly understanding we can with the practical difficulties of the loyal High Churchman, who is, for example, chaplain in a big hospital, by a modification of rubrics where needed (the Priest, who has already communicated, should not be required to communicate with the sick person), but because Reservation has a tendency to a magical rather than a truly Christian view of the Sacrament, let us stand by our five brethren of the minority report to N.A. 60 in resisting it. But let us make it plain that in so doing we have sincerely sought to understand the practical difficulties which make many loyal High Churchmen ask for Reservation, and ask for it honestly intending to use it only for the sick.

(b) Amid many changes that are wholly admirable in the Visitation for the Sick, and which make the five parts into which it is divided and its concluding note on prayers and passages from Scripture a real handbook of pastoral theology, I must plead that in the last commendatory prayer, after mention of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to-add:

"Go forth upon thy journey from this world, O christian soul."

"In communion with the blessed saints, and aided by Angels and Archangels, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers and all the armies of the heavenly host. Amen."

is to me an *anti-climax*. Angels have their blessed work of ministry—one ministered to our Blessed Lord Himself in Gethsemane—but the passage in Col. i. 16 is too much associated with the Colossian heresy and, to quote Bishop Lightfoot's paraphrase with an "ignoring and degrading of Christ," to introduce it here in a last commendatory prayer. Once again, as in the case of Reservation, we have a concession to what partakes of the nature of incantation and magic and not of the open-air simplicity of the Gospel:

"In communion with the blessed saints, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,

and aided by Angels sent to minister to the heirs of salvation.
Amen."

if you will, but for myself I would plead that my last thoughts be not confused with the mention of thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, dragged in by very questionable exegesis.

CONCLUSION.

What will stand the fourfold test of reality, simplicity, continuity, and spirituality let us accept with humble, grateful thanksgiving to God, such things, for instance, as the admirable rubric about the minister being assured of repentance, faith, and desire to be baptized before baptizing an adult in immediate danger of death, or the explicit recognition of Lay Baptism, which cuts at one root of magical as distinguished from spiritual efficacy, but things that fail to pass these tests, these let us seek to amend, doing so patiently, courteously, considerately, and courageously, for it will be by the temper we exhibit as least as much as by the arguments that we employ that we shall carry the great central body of Churchmen with us, or drive them into the arms of those whose allegiance is with a Latin rather than an Anglican form of Christianity.

"THE MIND OF THE SPECTATOR."

In previous issues of the *CHURCHMAN* we printed two delightful articles from the pen of the late Rev. G. S. Streatfeild on "Addison as a Student of Nature." They were very greatly appreciated by our readers, who will be glad to know that we have other papers on Addison by the same writer which we hope to print in due course. Meanwhile we desire to call attention to the volume entitled *The Mind of the Spectator under the Editorship of Addison and Steele*, written by Canon Streatfeild and just published by T. Fisher Unwin, price 7s. 6d. The volume is one of deep and abiding interest. Canon Streatfeild was a careful student of Addison, and, in this volume, written with all his wonted grace and charm, he has brought out for us the best features of Addison's work, and has shown with skill and precision the applicability of much of the great writer's message to the needs of to-day. We shall return to the volume later, but we must lose no time in urging our readers to obtain this most excellent volume and to study it for themselves. It is one that will be read from cover to cover with interest and profit.

Christ and Colosse; or The Gospel of the Fulness. By the Rev. H. H. Gowen, D.D., Professor of Oriental Languages, University of Washington. *Skeffington & Son.* 3s. 6d. net. These five lectures on St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians are designed to supply a general introduction to the Epistle, that will enable readers to grasp its contents. They deal with—"The Instrument"; "The Question"; "The Answer"; "The Argument"; "The Application."