

THE REFORMATION IN WORSHIP: THE MINISTRY OF THE SACRAMENTS.

By the Rev. Canon J. R. S. TAYLOR, M.A.

Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford.

THE title of my paper is, "The Reformation in Worship: the Ministry of the Sacraments." The terms of reference are given in the third cause for thanksgiving commended by the promoters of this centenary celebration, namely "The Reformation by its appeal to the Scriptures led to the recognition of more spiritual conceptions of the Church and Sacraments, to the purification of worship, and to renewed emphasis on the ministry of the word." The three phrases pertinent to this paper are: "The appeal to the Scriptures," "more spiritual conceptions of the Sacraments," "the purification of worship." I will try to follow the scheme there suggested.

1. *The Appeal to the Scriptures.*

Why did the Reformers make this appeal? They were driven to it by force of circumstances. Luther's conscience was offended by the growing scandal and menace of the system of purchasing pardons and dispensations. He appealed to the authorities of the Church, believing that when the full extent of the evil was made known they would initiate reform, but he was disappointed. The power of vested interests was too strong. What was he to do—to silence his conscience and let the matter rest? His conscience refused to be silenced. It had been quickened by a new knowledge of God, brought to him in the New Testament, and the voice of God which had spoken in scripture was authoritative. He must obey that voice, even at the cost of disobedience to the authority of the Church, which till then he had recognized as final. But now he recognized a paramount authority, that of the Word of God. What did the Word mean for the Reformers? It meant first and foremost *revelation*, the good news of the Grace of God brought to men in Jesus Christ, and this gospel proved itself still the power of God unto salvation. But the Word implied more than that. It implied *command*: if God had spoken He must be obeyed. Were not the ten commandments literally the ten "words," and was not this implied in the first answer given by our Lord to the tempter—"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And there was a third significance for the Reformers in the Word: it was that of *promise*. For every word of God must have fulfilment.

Now, while the Reformers found this Word in the Scriptures so that, as Luther said, they contained it as the crib of Bethlehem held Christ, they did not identify the Word with the Scriptures. Indeed, they recognized that the Scriptures themselves pointed to Christ supremely as the Word of God. He was Himself the revelation of the Father. He claimed to be Master and Lord, and gave commands to His disciples—"A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another," "Be ye perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect," "This do in remembrance of Me," "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations." And to His commands He often added a promise, "Come unto Me . . . I will give you rest," "Go ye . . . I am with you all the days."

It was the promise of Christ that for the Reformers gave power to the sacraments. In them the word of Christ was inherent. They had been instituted by His command. They were expressions of His gospel, and as such were means of grace. Luther said: "The Word, the Word alone, is the vehicle of grace," but the sacraments are a mode of the Word. They are *verba visibilia*, acted parables, dramatic declarations, sacraments of the gospel. As Canon Mozley has said, "The Eucharist is as truly evangelical as the pulpit. . . . If the sacraments are not evangelical they are nothing."

Only on this view can we understand the comparative insignificance of the sacraments in the New Testament. The apostolic writers leave no doubt that it was the word of Christ which created the Church, giving it life and light and liberty. As St. Paul put it in the Epistle to the Romans, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." He made his final appeal to the experience of the Galatians with the question: "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?" that is, by believing the gospel message. We remember that he even went so far as to say, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." And St. Paul is not alone in this attitude. St. James writes: "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth," referring to the creation not so much of the world as of the Church; and in his first Epistle St. Peter writes, "Having been begotten again . . . through the word of God which liveth and abideth . . . and this is the (spoken) word of good tidings which was preached unto you." It is true that later in the Epistle St. Peter writes: "Through water which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism," but he is quick to show that it is not the outward washing alone but the inward cleansing, for he at once adds, "Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." And this is in keeping with what we find in the gospels. There the majority of the references to baptism are to John's baptism. We do not know whether any of the Apostles received Christian baptism other than the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Only once is it hinted that Jesus baptized, and then the fourth Evangelist adds that, "Jesus Himself baptized not, but his disciples." That Evangelist, too, is silent about the institution of the Lord's Supper, though he records the discourse on the bread of life about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man,

giving a broad spiritual application to a truth which finds its focus in, but cannot be limited to, the particular expression of it in the Holy Communion.

We know that there are some devout and earnest followers of our Lord who dispense with and perhaps despise the sacraments as an encumbrance rather than a help to the spiritual life, but such an attitude cannot find its justification in the early history of the Church. For it is quite clear that from the first days baptism was not only familiar, but regularly practised, and that the breaking of bread from house to house was one of the chief features of the corporate worship of the young community. But when St. Paul refers to both sacraments, as he sometimes does, it is not as to something *sui generis*, something apart, but as actions which illustrate and bring home to the deepest experience of his converts the most spiritual aspects of the gospel which he preached. Consequently those who have taken a different view of the sacraments, who have regarded them as something more than the sacraments of the gospel, have had recourse to the Old Testament to supply their analogies and to enforce their argument. They have carried forward from the old dispensation the contrast between the prophet and the priest, and have magnified the more permanent status and the mediatorial influence of the priestly hierarchy. What is the answer of Protestantism to this? As Christ was the end of the law so was He the end of the ceremonial system. He fulfilled in His own person all that was foreshadowed in the sacrifices of Israel, when he became not only our great High Priest, "Who when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever sat down on the right hand of God," but also the Lamb of God who in the heavenly vision stands victorious upon the throne. Hence His Ministers in the Church are not priestly intermediaries but humble followers of Him who said: "I am among you as he that serveth." They are never given in the New Testament the title which might so easily have passed over from Judaism, the title of sacrificing priests. That is reserved in its more abstract form for the whole Church, whom St. Peter calls "A holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

This brings us to the second keynote,

2. *More Spiritual Conceptions of the Sacraments.*

(a) First comes the view of the Eucharist as a representation, not a re-presentation, of the sacrifice of the Cross, as the Latin Mass had clearly become, in which the consecrated elements were offered with these words: "We offer to Thy most glorious Majesty of Thine own gifts, a Victim pure, a Victim holy, a Victim immaculate, the holy bread of life eternal and the cup of perpetual salvation: upon which be pleased to look with a propitious and serene countenance, and to accept." Dr. Franks has summed up the position thus: "As the Middle Ages drew to a close, the supremacy of the view of the Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice continually increased in the Western Church: as is particularly evidenced by the institution of the Low Mass, which was said as a rite of

propitiation rather than as a service of Communion," and further evidence of course can be found in the enormous growth of private masses said for the souls of the departed. Consequently the Reformers immediately began to eliminate this feature of the Western liturgy. The Eucharist was now to be a showing forth to the Church and to the world of the Lord's death as a perpetual memory. So in the English Prayer Book the words of institution are given the chief place in the canon, presenting to the worshipper there by the very words and actions of the Lord His own interpretation of His passion.

And only in response to the Lord's sacrifice thus represented do we offer our sacrifice ; and herein we see the true genius of worship, which is reaction in us to the action of God. God has visited and redeemed His people. " Our worship is but *antwort* to His *wort*, an answer to His word." And it is in response to the marvel of His pardoning love and saving grace, given at such a cost on Calvary, that we offer our spiritual sacrifice, first of praise and thanksgiving, our Eucharistia for His unspeakable gift, our adoration for His infinite adorableness : then the gifts of our alms to the great Giver of all, and what he most desires " our humble, thankful hearts "—our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice.

(b) And spiritual worship must be intelligent worship. To offer God our bodies is to love Him not only with our heart but with our mind and soul and strength, that is with the intellectual as well as with the æsthetic and physical part of us. Because " God is spirit," our reaction must be to worship Him in spirit and reality. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, " I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also : I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also. . . . In the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." How far from this ideal of edification had the mediæval Church fallen ! The Roman Mass was for a large part inaudible, the Priest frequently introducing his own private prayers : but even when it was heard it was unintelligible to the large mass of the people who did not understand Latin, and there was no attempt then, as in the modern missals, to translate or interpret ; so the service became an impressive spectacle, mere attendance at which counted for devotion. In all these matters our Reformers returned to the Apostolic ideal. The whole service was ordered to be said audibly and in the vulgar tongue. So in Cranmer's first prayer book of 1549 even the kyries were translated, and later the 24th Article declared that it is " plainly repugnant to the Word of God and the custom of the primitive Church . . . to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people." Further, the Reformers provided food for mind and spirit in restoring the reading of continuous passages of Scripture. The earliest liturgy of the Christian Church had a twofold origin : it combined the main features of the synagogue service with the Christian Eucharist, and down the ages the main stream of Church worship has preserved the Liturgy of the Word with the Liturgy of the Upper Room. So the Prayer Book preserved the reading of the Epistle and Gospel as well as the commandments, and originally some

metrical psalms (now replaced by hymns), that in the words of Cranmer's Preface "the people might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of His true religion." A definite place was also provided for the sermon, which was to be a *sursum corda* to lift the heart to God. It is a false antithesis which we sometimes hear made between the pulpit and the "altar." What can better stir up our minds and hearts to the worship of God than a true sermon that sets forth His majesty and beauty, His holiness and love? It is our grievous loss that we have divorced the preaching from the Holy Communion, for one of its chief purposes is to lead our minds from private preoccupations and draw them all one way, and so make in effect a Holy Communion.

(c) For the third conception of the sacraments which the Reformers sought to restore was that of the fellowship of the feast. They did this first by encouraging the worshippers to communicate more frequently, for in the Middle Ages the laity commonly attended without partaking, and by 1215 A.D. the Church required participation only at Easter. Habits of such long standing take time to break down, and the Reformers' efforts in this direction often met with failure. But they were more successful in bringing the administration of the sacrament into the main action of the service, in which the climax is not reached with the offertory or the consecration, but with the delivery of the elements to the worshippers. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a partaking of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a partaking of the body of Christ?" It is to the believing disciple who takes and eats that the Lord says: "This is My body," and it is to those who drink in faith that the wine is the blood of the New Covenant. This emphasis again resulted in a more spiritual view of the sacrament, because it laid stress on the corporate action of the rite rather than on the consecrated element. Just as in baptism the focus is not on the water, but on the act of washing in the Name of the Holy Trinity, so in the Holy Communion it should not be on the bread, but on the breaking and eating of the bread; for hereby is the Church, His Body, receiving from her Lord's pierced hands the gifts of His forgiving love, and the pledges of her intimate union with Him. And as He dwells in us and we in Him we are all knit together in one Holy Communion and fellowship.

3. *Purification of Worship.*

Of the more detailed purification of worship little remains to be said. We have already seen that the more spiritual conceptions of the Reformers found expression in some drastic recasting of the content and arrangement and language of liturgical worship. What was attempted by Cranmer in the first revision of the Book of Common Prayer is well set out in his Preface to the 1549 Book, and in the dissertation "Of Ceremonies" which he places after the Communion Service in that Book.

(a) In keeping with the transformation of the Mass into the Holy Communion, he found it necessary to reject some of the ceremonies, "which not only for their unprofitableness, but also because they have

much blinded the people and obscured the glory of God," were worthy to be cut away. And similarly he adds in the Preface, "Here are left out many things whereof some are untrue, some uncertain, some vain and superstitious."

(b) In like manner in seeking to make the liturgy intelligible and congregational he aimed at greater simplification both of the prevailing complexity of form and variety of use. So in restoring the reading of consecutive passages of scripture he ordered that there "be cut off anthems, responds, invitatories, and such like things," and he used the same method in simplifying the rules which needed to be kept, "so that they are plain and easy to be understood." And with the same purpose of increasing the fellowship in worship he ordered that "whereas heretofore there hath been great diversity in saying and singing in Churches within this realm; some following Salisbury use, some Hereford use, etc.; now from henceforth all the whole realm shall have but one use"—a uniformity which we have gone far towards losing!

In this commemoration we are taking a look back over four hundred years, and thanking God for the heritage of our English Reformation. But perhaps it may not be out of place for the reader of this paper to spend the last minute in taking a look around and a look forward, particularly in view of the events of ten years ago, and of what has happened since. May I express the hope, and indeed the prayer, that those who have authority in ordering our public worship may be given the moderation and courage of Cranmer, who would not lightly jettison what was of true value in the traditions of the past, but on the other hand saw clearly that "Christ's Gospel is not a ceremonial law but it is a religion to serve God not in bondage of the figure or shadow, but in the freedom of the spirit." May we not be hidebound by liturgiologists or diplomats, but be free to find the most perfect expression that we can of true spiritual worship, remembering that worship is essentially the glorifying of God, and that it will never be perfectly realized

"Till we cast our crowns before Him,
Lost in wonder, love and praise."

"The Road to Victory" is the title of the *C.M.S. Review* for the year 1936-37. It contains many inspiring narratives of the advance made throughout the mission field, and tells of the many openings and opportunities for further work for which the call for means and helpers is urgently needed. The appeal is urgent, and "the victory will not be complete until the Gospel is verified in a redeemed society."