The Vestments Canon

By The Rev. M. A. P. Wood, D.S.C., M.A.

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THIS year's seven addresses will set out, in this Lambeth Year, seven of the great evangelical truths which it is our duty constantly to bring before the mind and conscience of the whole Church, and I hope these addresses will also help to remove some of the extraordinary misconceptions which are prevalent to-day about present-day evangelical doctrine and practice.

In passing, let us humbly, but boldly, repudiate this unpleasant word "fundamentalism", which is being increasingly equated with evangelicalism by those who do not like the tremendous growth of evangelicalism in the universities, schools, and parish churches of our land, with a corresponding growth in evangelical ordination candidates and clergy. (Twenty-two out of thirty-nine men ordained at St. Paul's Cathedral at Michaelmas are evangelical.)

Canon Law Revision

At last year's Conference, I said: "We who are Proctors must *inform* our constituencies, and propose amendments at the right times, and take our full share in debate and decision, so that our evangelical cause does not go by default. All other evangelical clergy must *gain* information, and keep in touch with their Proctors, and help them in their difficult task of representation."

In the May Convocation, a number of small but important evangelical amendments were passed. Canon Livermore's amendment to Canon 5, concerning the supremacy of Holy Scripture, was passed, together with an assurance from the Archbishop of Canterbury that he would consult the Steering Committee about strengthening still further the phrase about the supremacy of Holy Scripture. Canon Bailey, of St. Helen's, also made a courageous speech in York Convocation, and here too, Canon Livermore's amendment was accepted.

After general debate on Canon 17, the critical "Vestments" Canon, the whole Canon was deferred by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Steering Committee, and this helped Convocation to realize the serious misgivings felt throughout the country about the clause in this Canon to legalize the illegal mass vestments.

In October Convocation, Canon 26 with one hand took away the right of, admittedly, a small Protestant minority, to use unfermented wine at Holy Communion, and in the same Canon gave the right to Anglo-Catholics to use wafers. This Canon is an example of the cumulative effect on the Church if a number of Canons, each of which may seem small in itself, were passed. Canons 5, 17, 21, 26, 56 and 97 (to allow "Stone Altars") and the threat of a new Canon to allow Reservation, are cases in point, although determined evangelical opposition and amendments to the retrograde steps in them have had, and we pray by the mercy of God still will have, their effect.

Against this background, what of Canon 17 which, if passed, will mean that the Church will ask Parliament to legalize the Mass Vestments?

Before the October Convocation, the Archbishop of Canterbury most graciously invited a number of evangelicals of different traditions to Lambeth Palace, and we were able to put our views to him, and to tell him that the permission to legalize the wearing of mass vestments seemed to some of us to be such a serious rebuff to the Reformed and Protestant character of the Church of England, that we would oppose them first in the Councils of the Church, and then in every other constitutional way in the country. I only feel free to mention this private meeting, because His Grace the Archbishop openly referred to it in his most gracious words in his Presidential Address in the October Convocation, when he again withdrew Canon 17 from debate in Full Synod, and again referred it to the Steering Committee to take notice of evangelical anxiety about it. The mention of this meeting prompts me to say publicly how very indebted we are, as evangelicals, for the constant approachableness and kindness shown to us by His Grace the Archbishop, and to thank him for his patience and fairness in these matters.

I feel it right to try and outline the reasons for continued opposition to legalizing the Eucharistic Vestments. There are three possible attitudes for Proctors to take, who are not happy about this Canon.

1. Some feel that vestments have been worn for a long time, and so it is only common kindness to clergy "who like that sort of thing" to let them, even if the Privy Council in 1871, the Royal Commission in 1906, and the Legal Advisers to-day to the Steering Committee, say that they are against the law of the land, and although vestments are usually symptomatic of other High Church practices. Despite this, some feel they can allow the Canon to go through, so long as the clause which will "de-doctrinate" vestments of any doctrines not now found in the formularies of the Church of England is passed. I respect the many central and evangelical proctors who hold this view. This clause is indeed a vital safeguard, but it may well lead to very much interpretative argument. For instance, a leading Anglo-Catholic, and a member of the Steering Committee, maintained in the May Convocation debates that the Church of England *does* teach a doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice, which we would deny, and so he and others would feel entitled to teach that doctrine, by the use of vestments.

2. Others feel that they should oppose in Convocation the clause permitting vestments, but that if it is passed, they ought to go no further in opposition. Concerning this attitude, a leading lay member of the Church Assembly said to me recently: "Remember that whatever happens in Convocation, which is a purely clerical gathering, we lay people will oppose vestments in Church Assembly, and in the country generally, and through our Parliamentary representatives, because this is a matter which affects the whole Church, clergy and laity alike."

3. The third course is to oppose the legalization of vestments every step of the way from Convocation, viz., Church Assembly, and through

to Parliament, and after much prayer and consultation, I and a number of other evangelical proctors feel that we ought to take this course, after carefully weighing the possible consequences, for these reasons, amongst others. (These reasons are naturally compressed, because of lack of time.)

1. *Historical grounds.* Vestments were stopped by the Advertisements of Queen Elizabeth in 1565, which enjoined the cope in Cathedrals and the surplice in parish churches to be used for Holy Communion. Ten years later, in a census throughout the Church, all eucharistic vestments had been either destroyed, defaced, or otherwise disposed of. They were never seen in the Church of England for 300 years, until re-introduced 100 years ago, and then declared illegal by the Privy Council in 1871, and are still illegal to-day; otherwise this proposed Canon would not need to be brought to Parliament.

2. *Doctrinal Grounds.* The Roman Priest must wear vestments at the celebration of the Mass. Lord Halifax, the Anglo-Catholic leader, said, back in 1907, "Vestments witness to the fact that the Holy Communion is none other than the Mass in English." Most Anglican priests who move the Prayer of Oblation from its rightful place, and add it to the Prayer of Consecration, so as to try and introduce, by a false emphasis of words, a doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice into the Prayer Book service of Holy Communion, do wear vestments; although not every one who wears vestments alters the service, of course. Vestments cannot easily be separated from a desire to change Prayer Book usage, and so to cast doubts on Prayer Book doctrine. The priest, wearing vestments, with his back to the people, together with other additions of a High Church nature, can more easily teach that the priest's duty is sacrificial and mediatorial, whereas it is really ministerial and subservient to Christ, who is the centre of His own Feast, and the One High Priest.

3. *Relations with other Churches.* Conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, and between the Church of England and the Methodists, are both now in progress. Legalizing vestments would draw the Church of England and the Free Churches further apart.

4. *The Pax Anglicana.* What will this Canon do for the peace of the Church? If we oppose it, that may hurt the peace of the Church, but if we do not oppose it, and it is passed, it will still hurt the peace of the Church, because of the hurt to evangelical and Protestant sympathies not only within the Church, but throughout the religious life of the nation. Apart from the immense sense of distress within the rank and file of the clergy and laity of the Church, over fifty Anglican, and inter-denominational and Free Church religious societies, have sent formal protests to the Archbishop about this and other Canons. The opposition is deep and wide and real throughout the country.

The peace of the Church is hurt already by this Canon. We must walk humbly and courteously in all we do, yet remembering that the *truth* of the Church is as important to maintain as the *peace* of the Church, and many feel this Canon is a retrograde step, which could open the floodgates to further changes that could alter the balance of

truth enshrined, not only in the formularies of the Church, but in the life of the Church to-day.

When the storm over the revision of the Prayer Book was gathering in the 1920's, and the Church was faced with the dreadful division of two different Communion Services, which would have done untold harm to the peace and unity of the Church, as well as allowing unreformed doctrines and practices, cleansed from our formularies at the Reformation, to be reintroduced, Prebendary Hinde (a great Islington Vicar, and President of this Conference from 1921-1932), wrote in 1924 : " The matter is not yet finally settled, but every step must be contested. If we hold our peace now, and let things go on in the way they are doing at present, we shall have ourselves to blame later for a changed doctrinal position. We have inherited what cost others more than we can say, in some cases life itself, and we must not prove ourselves unworthy of so great a heritage."

In the light of these and other arguments, on what *doctrinal* grounds can others ask for vestments to be legalized ? If vestments mean nothing doctrinally, why allow them ? If they simply speak of continuity, and are colourful, we are proposing an amendment in Convocation to-morrow which proposes the use of the cope, which has real continuity, throughout both pre- and post-Reformation Church history, and is colourful, but with no sacrificial significance. If vestments are necessary to teach doctrine, what do they teach which is not already taught by the present order of Holy Communion in the Prayer Book, and the usual dress of the minister ? Why, then, are vestments so important as to cause so much division in the Church ? Those who have introduced them and now desire to legalize them, must share with those of us who oppose their legalization the responsibility for this conflict, distasteful as it is to all concerned, for none of us *enjoys* controversy, and spending time on matters which take time away from our regular pastoral and evangelistic duties.

I was a little boy of seven when Prebendary Hinde wrote the words which I quoted a few moments ago, and was just beginning to grasp the wonder of God's salvation freely offered to all who would put their trust in the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour. There are children of that age, as well as young people and older folk, who need in our present day to discover in every parish church of our land the simplicity and directness of the Gospel of salvation which was safeguarded in the 1920's by the prayers and efforts of leaders like Prebendary Hinde, Bishop Knox of Manchester, Dr. Gilbert, the Principal of the London College of Divinity, Sir William Joynson-Hicks and Sir Thomas Inskip, and many others.

Ultimately our duty in this matter is to safeguard the deposit of faith, so that we may hand on the message of salvation to each succeeding generation, for we are the Church of the land, charged with the care of every soul in our land. What may seem a small matter in the present, can yet have a profound influence on the future direction of the life of the Church, and we must be constantly in prayer for the guidance of God the Holy Spirit, which is needed by all the leaders of our Church to-day, at a time when the world is in desperate confusion. We must pray that our beloved Church of England may be granted by

God a true revival of Biblical theology, of evangelistic zeal, and of deep spiritual Church life, so that we may rise to the challenge of the hour and be a weapon in God's hand to bring the nation once again to the foot of Christ's Cross, in true repentance and faith, and so into a new and living experience of the membership of Christ's Church.

Welsh Revivalists of the Eighteenth Century

By The Rev. Ivor J. Bromham, B.A.

"THEY show a greater respect than other nations to Churches and ecclesiastical persons."[1] So wrote Giraldus Cambrensis, 850 years ago, of the people of Wales. Other writers have endorsed this opinion. Perhaps in the very temperament of the Welsh people lies the reason for Wales being called "The Land of Revivals".

Of far-reaching effect were the religious revivals in Wales during the eighteenth century. A former Bishop of St. Asaph outlines conditions then prevailing in Wales: "The Commonwealth cut off for a century the fertilizing stream of intellectual and social intercourse which had flowed between England and Wales with such benefit to both countries. This isolation led to an intellectual stagnation greatly to be deplored; but the most painful feature in the Wales of the early eighteenth century is the evident deterioration in the character of the people . . . The ignorance and immorality of the lower classes was due to the prevailing disorder and neglect."[2] There was poverty among the clergy; churches and parsonages were neglected, and some were ruinous. Some bishops proved unworthy of their office, while among the other clergy there was all too frequently a spirit of worldliness and spiritual apathy, services being (only too often) irregular, infrequent and formal. But there were some bishops who were examples to the whole Church generally, and likewise some faithful clergy who were (as a Rural Dean in Montgomeryshire reported in 1731) "men of sober and of exemplary lives and conversation, well approved of in their respective parishes for a due discharge of their duties". Small wonder that among the people there prevailed "an ignorance and an indifference to spiritual things, even an atheism which had run through whole families for several generations, so that the peasantry frequented neither Church nor assembly".[3]

Within the limits of a short article some idea of the progress and results of the revivals may best be obtained by outlining the work of the principal Christian leaders of the period.

Foremost among them, and the man who made possible the work which followed later in the century, was Griffith Jones (1684-1761), Rector of Llanddowror, Carmarthenshire. He may more accurately