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The Approaching Revision of Series Three

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IT IS NOW ten years since the first of the Church of England's alternative services came into experimental use. The Series One services, based on the rejected 1928 Prayer Book and designed to legalise the *status quo*, had all been authorised by the end of 1966, with the exception of the defeated Confirmation service. The last service to be authorised was Holy Communion, after it had been unsuccessfully resisted because of the expression which it gave to the eucharistic sacrifice and petition for the dead. Series Two Holy Communion, a much more original service, followed in 1967, after a battle, and limited concessions, on the same two issues. Then in 1973 experiment began with Series Three Holy Communion, a revision of Series Two, with the language thoroughly modernised, a richer devotional content, and the two doctrinal problems rather more heavily disguised. However, the two doctrinal problems had now become three, the ecclesiastical courts having ruled that the Series Two rubric about the consumption of the remains had (unintentionally) altered the law, and legalised the reservation of the sacrament; and the Series Two rubric is substantially the same as that in Series One and Series Three.¹

Since the three experimental Communion services raise the same three doctrinal problems on which the 1928 Prayer Book foundered, they have inevitably become a cause of division in the Evangelical constituency, as they have indeed, though for rather different reasons, in the Church of England as a whole. By and large, the opposition that has arisen in the Church of England to Series Two and Series Three has been caused by their radical character. Instead of beginning from the Prayer Book service, they set it on one side and started afresh. Lovers of the Prayer Book service have often felt aggrieved at this policy, especially in parishes where the new services have been treated not as alternatives but as substitutes. When comparison has been made between the new services and the old, the conclusion has often been drawn that, in every respect except modernity, the old is better.

However, there is reason to think that opposition to the new services on the grounds of their dissimilarity and general inferiority to 1662 will diminish, now that it has been recognised in the Worship and Doctrine Measure (1974) and the corresponding new Canons that the 1662 services are the standard services of the Church of England which (unlike the alternative services) the General Synod has no power to abolish. Opposition will diminish the more quickly if it becomes the general custom to give expression to the special position of the 1662 Communion service by celebrating it at a convenient hour once a Sunday in every parish. On the other hand, opposition to the new services on the grounds of their doctrinal character—and this is where the chief objections of *Evangelicals* lie—will not diminish until their doctrinal character is corrected.

In February this year the General Synod accepted the proposals of its working party on *An Alternative Service Book*,³ and resolved to bind up the existing and forthcoming Series Three services into a volume, to be published in 1980 and to last more or less unaltered for ten years. By the end of that period it should be clear whether the Series Three Communion service is going to stand the test of time, or whether liturgical revision will have to begin all over again, this time perhaps from the starting-point of 1662, the Church of England's standard service. Also in the Alternative Service Book will be a conflation of the Series One and Series Two Communion services, lately prepared by the Liturgical Commission, with their doctrinal features substantially unamended. From a liturgical point of view, Series One and a Half (as it has come to be called) is one of the Commission's unhappiest productions. It is a little sad to see Series One and Series Two, which were not without their liturgical merits, being treated in this way, which can only lead to their eventual extinction. However, from a doctrinal point of view they did not deserve to survive, and one cannot spend time weeping over such wasted opportunities, when one has the chance of making positive doctrinal improvements in a service with better prospects of survival, namely, Series Three.³

This chance arises out of the decision of the Standing Committee of the General Synod, under its chairman the Archbishop of Canterbury, that

it is desirable, also, that the first of the third series services—Holy Communion Series 3—should be revised by the Synod in preparation for its inclusion in the proposed book (i.e. the Alternative Service Book).⁴

Consequently, as the Standing Committee has since announced,

The Liturgical Commission will be engaging in consultation with diocesan Liturgical Commissions and Liturgical Officers in assembling and analysing comments on experience gained in using the present form of the rite and suggestions for its amendment. Synod members who have received inquiries which they would like to put forward are welcome to do

so: these should reach the Secretary to the Commission by November 30th, 1976.⁸

This does not give much time, but the guillotine will presumably not be strictly applied, and there will always be the opportunity of influencing General Synod members (who have to approve the text of the *Alternative Service Book*) after the opportunity of influencing the Liturgical Commission is over.⁹

It may well be that some Evangelicals will want to make proposals of a non-doctrinal kind for the amendment of Series Three, but it is to be hoped that Evangelicals will chiefly concentrate on the doctrinal issues, since it is these that are dividing the Evangelical constituency. They should now be given as much publicity as possible, not just in letters to General Synod and Liturgical Commission members but in print; and it is arguable that, at this important juncture, the strict letter of the law should be ignored by those Evangelicals who use the service (as is already being done by some of them) and alterations made at the points where it fails to adhere to the doctrine of 1662, which it is supposed to do, and therefore causes offence. Such changes would help foster informed opinion in the parishes. Especially at significant gatherings which are in the public eye, like the Oxford Conference and next year's National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Nottingham, if Series Three is used, it should be altered in these ways, for the double purpose of avoiding excommunicating some of the Evangelicals present at the conference, and of impressing upon the church at large that Evangelicals are not happy that Series Three should continue in use indefinitely, without some small but significant changes.

Admittedly, doctrinal changes will be hard to achieve, but not impossible, if the doctrinal convictions of Evangelicals are stronger than those of others, though nothing will be achieved without trying. Limited doctrinal changes were achieved in Series Two, at two of the significant points, before it was originally authorised. Doctrinal changes were achieved at two other points, during the preparation of Series Three, by the insertion of a reference to Christ's finished work on Calvary, and by the modification of the stark Series Two words of distribution. What has been done before can, by God's blessing, be done again. It has probably been the two changes last mentioned which have persuaded many Evangelicals that Series Three is doctrinally tolerable, even though the three original doctrinal problems—petition for the dead, the eucharistic sacrifice and reservation—have been disguised rather than solved. It is to these three problems that Evangelicals must now direct their efforts.

On prayer for the dead, it needs to be made clear that the commendation of the departed at the end of section 15 (p. 13) is an act of entrusting and not a petition. The form of words used was borrowed from the Doctrine Commission, who devised it as a 'prayer for the non-Christian dead',¹⁰ and this is precisely the sort of thing that most

needs to be avoided. The simplest effective change would be to delete the second clause, here bracketed:

We commend all men to your unfailing love [that in them your will may be fulfilled;], and we rejoice at the faithful witness of your saints in every age. . . .

On the eucharistic sacrifice, it needs to be made clear that 'our sacrifice of thanks and praise' in the consecration prayer (section 29, p. 22) is a sacrifice in which thanks and praise are offered (as in Heb. 13: 15 and 1662), not a sacrifice in which something or someone else is offered *in a spirit of* thanks and praise (as in Lev. 7: 12f.; 22: 29 and the canon of the Roman Mass). It was to avoid this latter interpretation that Cranmer moved the phrase out of the consecration prayer, where the mass-sacrifice was conceived to occur, into the optional post-communion prayer of oblation. It was to make this interpretation possible again that the Liturgical Commission brought the phrase back.* All that is needed to correct their perverse action is to remove the whole bracketed clause from its present position in the consecration prayer, as follows:

. . . we look for his coming in glory. [Accept through him, our great high priest, this our sacrifice of thanks and praise;]. And as we eat and drink these holy gifts in the presence of your divine majesty, renew us by your Spirit . . .

and to insert it into the prayer of oblation (section 40, p. 27), as follows:

Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
[Accept through him, our great high priest,
this our sacrifice of thanks and praise.]
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.

On reservation, the unintentional change which has been made in the law, opening the door both to perpetual reservation and to the various practices connected with the adoration of the reserved sacrament, can be reversed in an equally simple manner, by changing one of the tenses in section 36 (p. 25) from the present to the perfect, so that it reads as follows (the existing words being bracketed and the proposed words in italics):

Any consecrated bread and wine which [is not] *has not been* required for purposes of communion is consumed at the end of the administration, or after the service.⁹

Ideally, other changes would no doubt be desirable, but these three simple alterations would be sufficient to correct the service at the three traditional points of doctrinal controversy, and could be regarded as a minimum necessary to make the service permanently acceptable to Evangelical consciences.

- ¹ For details of the legal situation, see the article 'Do the Alternative Services Legalise Reservation?' in *The Churchman*, vol. 85, no. 3 (Autumn 1971), and *Reservation and Communion of the Sick* by R. T. Beckwith *et al.* (Nottingham, Grove Books, 1972), ch. 1.
- ² See the report of that name, ref. GS 284 (London, CIO, 1976), obtainable from Church House Bookshop, Gt. Smith Street, London SW1P 3BN, at 37p.
- ³ Just what the future prospects of Series Three are, it is difficult at present to say. The figures which the writer collected from the fourteen dioceses which had made enquiries (a third of all dioceses), and which were published in the *Church of England Newspaper* and *Church Times* on January 23rd this year, showed about 1,739 parishes using 1662 or Series One, 1,575 parishes using Series Two, and 1,368 parishes using Series Three. At principal celebrations of the sacrament, enquiries in eight dioceses showed about 629 parishes using Series Two, 595 parishes using Series Three, and 525 parishes using 1662 or Series One. Clearly, each of the services is now a minority use, and everything will depend on how well Series Three stands the test of time, and whether the churches which have hitherto used Series One or Two go over to Series Three or return to 1662.
- ⁴ *An Alternative Service Book*, p. 4.
- ⁵ *July Group of Sessions 1976: Report by the Standing Committee on the Agenda* (GS 299), p. 8, para. 25.
- ⁶ The secretary of the Liturgical Commission can be contacted at Church House, Dean's Yard, Westminster. Evangelical members of the Commission are the Rev. C. O. Buchanan (St. John's College, Bramcote, Nottingham) and Mr. H. R. M. Craig (56 Kenilworth Road, Sale, Cheshire). The names and addresses of General Synod members for your diocese (who include your bishop!) can be obtained from the Diocesan Offices in your cathedral city. Evangelical members of the General Synod can be contacted via the Rev. M. R. Hodge (Cobham Vicarage, Gravesend, Kent).
- ⁷ See the Doctrine Commission's report *Prayer and the Departed* (London, SPCK, 1971), p. 55. That this was the Liturgical Commission's source, see their *Commentary on Holy Communion Series 3* (London, SPCK, 1971), p. 16.
- ⁸ That this was the Liturgical Commission's professed motive, see the statements quoted in the writer's *Service of Holy Communion and its Revision* (Abingdon, Marcham Manor Press, 1972), p. 28f.
- ⁹ If it were desired to correct the grammatical mistake in this rubric (singular verbs with a plural subject), the further small change that would be needed would be to replace 'and' by 'or'.