

# An Experiment in Ecumenical Worship

An Examination of Public Worship in the  
Protestant Chapels of the Armed Forces of Canada

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IN the "Faith and Order" symposium of a few years ago, *Ways of Worship*, Professor R. Will, the Alsatian Lutheran scholar, said, "There can be no question of creating an ecumenical type of Christian worship."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps he is right; the other essays in the symposium suggest that he is.

But perhaps he is wrong. Surely it is not a purpose of ecumenical discussion to try to predict what is and what is not possible in the working out of the ecumenical impulse, to forecast the directions in which the Holy Spirit will lead us.

For the regular chaplains in Canada's armed forces ecumenicity in public worship is not merely something to be talked about or an academic concept or a bit of high-level ecclesiastical blue-printing, or even a once-in-a-while gesture. For them it is a pressing week-by-week concern. And this concern is being given concrete expression in an experiment in ecumenical worship. In recent years the chaplains have had to face the challenge of groups of servicemen and their dependents in more or less isolated stations, people from all the Churches of the nation who desire corporate worship and congregational fellowship. Circumstances are such that this worship and fellowship cannot be provided denominationally. One answer, of course, would have been a sort of non-denominational community church enterprise. But the Canadian Churches wisely refused to accept that kind of enterprise and demanded that the Church in the armed forces be inter-denominational and not non-denominational. The experiment in ecumenical worship came out of the pastoral challenge provided by the servicemen and their families and from the ecumenical realism of the Churches.

In 1950 the *Divine Service Book for the Armed Forces*, was published under the authority of the Minister of National Defence and with the approval of the Committee on Chaplain Services in the Forces of the Canadian Council of Churches. For some eight years now the use of this book has been mandatory in the ordinary services of public worship in the Protestant chapels of the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army, and the Royal Canadian Air Force. (In the Canadian armed forces the chaplaincies are organized in two separate but parallel branches, Roman Catholic and Protestant. Each branch has its own chapel now in most camps, stations, etc.) It is too early to assess the significance and success of this experiment in ecumenical worship, but perhaps an account of it thus far is of some value in current ecumenical conversation.

1. *Ways of Worship* (London, SCM, 1951), p. 215.

This book was prepared by a group of regular chaplains. In the foreword the late John W. Woodside, then president of the Council, pointed out the aims and the significance of the book in these words:

This service book is designed to meet the religious needs of the men and women in the various branches of the Forces.

It has been most carefully prepared, having in mind always the values attached to both ancient and modern expressions of religion and offering a happy combination of both free and liturgical forms of public worship.

The book breathes the spirit of ecumenicity. It helps to make visible the common ground where we may worship together. . . .

Our hope and prayer is that this book may be greatly used and blessed in the high purpose which called it forth.

The armed forces of Canada had chaplains during the First World War, but there were no regular chaplains serving in the very small regular forces between the two wars. During the Second World War each of the forces had chaplaincies, and after the war regular chaplains were appointed to serve in the considerably expanded permanent forces. In the large permanent stations of the new peace-time forces, with their extensive barracks for single servicemen and housing provisions for married men and their dependents, the problem of the ordering of public worship became one of considerable importance for the chaplains.

War-time methods were soon seen to be unsuitable under the new conditions. The Army, for example, during the war used a small worship booklet which contained a rather stark and inflexible order of service, a few prose psalms, a small handful of the more obvious hymns, and very little else. (It almost seems to have been designed to distress chaplains of all denominations and to frustrate the worshippers!) It was soon apparent that this booklet was most unsuitable for use under the new conditions. Similar difficulties were faced in the other two services.

For about three years the situation was confused. The orders and forms of worship generally were devised *ad hoc* by the chaplains in each place. There was some vague direction from the various headquarters, but each chaplain was pretty much on his own. It is to the credit of the chaplains then serving that, with few exceptions, they were respectful of the traditions and susceptibilities of all denominations.

Most Protestants in the armed forces of Canada are members or adherents (this last term must include those who had to tell the recruiting sergeant something and named the first Church that came to mind) of the United Church of Canada and of the Anglican Church of Canada, and there are considerable numbers of Presbyterians and Baptists, an appreciable number of Lutherans, and a few members of the smaller denominations. Chaplains from each Church are appointed in numbers approximately proportional to the numbers of persons in the forces stating affiliation with that Church.

The initial problem was to devise a pattern for corporate worship that would provide a suitable instrument of worship for denominationally mixed

congregations. It was necessary to work out something that would satisfy both those accustomed to predominantly liturgical worship (Anglican and Lutheran) and those accustomed to predominantly "free" worship (United, Presbyterian, and Baptist).

The Anglican Church of Canada uses *The Book of Common Prayer* (Canadian revision) with its mandatory liturgy. The various Lutheran bodies also have their distinctive liturgies. In both the United and Presbyterian Churches worship is in the Reformed mode, with its controlling principle of "ordered liberty." Worship in these two Churches is nearly identical, and they can be treated together for the purpose of this study. Each of these Churches has its own *Book of Common Order*. The forms and orders for congregational worship in these two books are not prescriptive: they are merely descriptive and suggestive, and are used only as guides and aids in worship. Worship in most Baptist congregations in Canada is now similar to that in the United and Presbyterian Churches.

The main problem faced by the compilers of the *Divine Service Book* was that of devising a mode of worship that would be fair to the divergent worship traditions and at the same time provide a usable vehicle for corporate worship.

#### DIVINE SERVICE BOOK FOR THE ARMED FORCES

The *Divine Service Book* is designed for use by the people as well as by the chaplains, and its comprehensiveness makes it well suited, in its plan at least, for the purpose for which it was issued. The following is a brief account of its various parts.

(a) *Order of Divine Service*. This is the Order which must be used at regular public worship in the chapels of the armed forces.

1. Call to Worship (Sentences of Scripture)
2. Prayer of Invocation
3. Hymn
4. Prayer of Confession, said in unison. Absolution or Prayer for Pardon
5. The Lord's Prayer ("trespasses" version)
6. Psalm, read responsively. The Gloria Patri
7. First Lesson
8. Hymn
9. Second Lesson (if so desired)
10. The Apostles' Creed
11. Prayer of Adoration, Thanksgiving, and Intercession
12. The Offerings
13. Hymn or Anthem
14. Sermon
15. Hymn
16. The National Anthem
17. The Benediction.

Changes necessary for the use of a Processional and a Recessional may be made. The offerings may be gathered and dedicated immediately after the Sermon. But apart from these minor changes the use of this order in its entirety is mandatory, except for the omission of the Hymns and the Prose Psalm, when circumstances, such as those of field service, warrant omission.

Five prayers of Confession are provided within the Order. The first one is the "erred and strayed" one from Anglican morning and evening prayer. The second one, "sinful nature and prone to evil," is found in *The Hymnary* of the United Church and in that of the Baptists, and in the worship books of these and other Churches. The other three are shorter; all are well-known.

(b) *A Treasury of Devotion: Prayers and Devotional Material for Public and Private Use* is a fairly comprehensive collection of prayers classified under the following heads:

- Invocation and Adoration (7)
- Absolution (2)
- For Pardon (3)
- For Grace (6)
- Thanksgiving (4, including one short litany of Thanksgiving)
- Intercession (3 general, 12 special)
- Prayers of Petition (60, including 14 for special days of the Christian and Civil Years; most of these are in Collect form)
- Children's Prayers (16, including one short litany of Thanksgiving)

This is, on the whole, a good collection of prayers for public worship, and it draws on the worship heritages of all the Churches.

(c) Three Communion Orders are included. The first one is the *Order for the Celebration of Holy Communion* in the Anglican prayer-book. The second is based directly on the first *Order for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion* in the *United Church Book of Common Order*, although the flexibility of the original order has been considerably curtailed. The third one was provided by the Presbyterians: it is liturgically sound.

(d) *Prose Psalms, Responsive Readings and Canticles*. Fifty-five prose Psalms (or portions) are provided for responsive reading. These are all in the Authorized Version, and the selection is identical to that in the back of *The Hymnary* of the United Church of Canada and *The Hymnary* of the Baptist Union of Canada. Four other selections are provided for responsive reading: Isaiah 53 (part), Isaiah 55, I Corinthians 13, and Romans 12.

The Canticles, etc., include most of the standard canticles from the worship books of the various Churches.

(e) The hymnal section contains 256 hymns, which include seven "specials" (e.g. "Airman's Prayer," "High Flight," and "Veni Creator"). It is easy to criticize this selection of hymns, and nearly every regular user of the book laments the omission of certain hymns. But it is a comprehensive selection, drawn from the hymnals of all the Churches. All except 53 of the 256 are found in the Anglican *Hymn Book*—and of these 53, 23 are psalms

in metre that are found in the Baptist, Presbyterian, and United hymnals. All except 20 of the 256 are in the United and Baptist hymnals, and the proportion is roughly the same for the Presbyterian *Book of Praise*. Thirteen of the hymns are in the section, "For Little Children." It is rather difficult to criticize on denominational grounds this selection of hymns.

(f) The miscellaneous materials in the book include a section on *How to Use the Bible* (a leaf from the Gideons!), an order for *The Commissioning of a Ship*, and a brief *Order for the Burial of the Dead* for use when a chaplain is not available.

The *Divine Service Book* is issued in two editions, words-only and words-and-music. The format and binding are similar to those of *The Hymnary* of the United Church of Canada, and most of the music is from that book. This is not any indication of denominational preference: the Ryerson Press—which is the United Church Publishing House using a trade-name—produces the book for the Government because it is the only Canadian firm that is able to produce such a book in its entirety and able to maintain facilities for immediate new printings and revisions.

#### USING THE *Order of Divine Service*

Perhaps at this stage a description of the normal Sunday morning worship in a military chapel will illustrate the nature of this experiment in ecumenical worship much more adequately than a more generalized discussion.

St. Barbara's Chapel is the garrison church for the Protestants at Picton Military Camp, Picton, Ontario. This is a fairly small camp, and I am the only Protestant chaplain on the camp staff. The chapel is of simple, modern design, with seating for about three hundred. It is completely equipped with good quality church furnishings. From both the outside and the inside it is seen to be quite obviously a church.

Except on certain special occasions (once or twice yearly), at eleven o'clock on Sunday St. Barbara's very much resembles a small church in a new suburb. It is customary not to wear uniforms at the service; and rank is checked at the door. Families attend as families. The chapel has a Sunday School of about two hundred children. There are two choirs; the senior choir is generally present at the service, but a children's choir leads the praise five or six times a year. The chapel is equipped with an electronic organ.

It is not easy to lead an interdenominational congregation in the worship of God. Mine is a rather intimidating task. It is one thing to conduct worship in a church of a particular denomination with its consistent traditions and characteristic customs; it is quite another thing to lead in worship in a fellowship of people drawn from diverse traditions and ways of worship. Our various traditions and customs are not always readily harmonized. Each of us who worships in St. Barbara's Chapel experiences frustrations and disappointments. Each of us misses certain emphases of the worship in his or her own Church. The Anglicans often yearn for the Morning Prayer

they have known and loved, and for the stately grandeur of the full choral Eucharist. The people from the Presbyterian and United Churches are often homesick for the simpler dignity of the worship in their Churches and for the deep and abiding solemnity of the great congregational celebrations of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Baptists miss the warmth and the holy simplicity that characterize the worship in their churches. And the Lutherans can never forget the gracious blending of ritual and warm piety that marks Lutheran worship.

The *Order of Divine Service* is admittedly a compromise. It is, I think, a fair and honest compromise; and as such it seems to satisfy, in terms of the purpose for which it was designed, all except the die-hards of each denomination. If the worshippers allow this compromise to make for their frustration as worshippers, then this experiment in worship will eventually be proven a foolish enterprise. But this compromise can be a creative one, and it may be helping to blaze the way to greater unity in the Christian Church. In these military chapels we are facing some of the practical problems that our Churches will have to face in the future as they strive to give effect to our Lord's prayer that "they all may be one." We can learn something of one another's traditions and customs in public worship. We can learn the way of ecumenical courtesy which is so necessary a lubricant in all inter-Church endeavours. And we can learn, in the words of Dean Inge, that "Christendom has never been divided in the chambers where good men pray and meditate."

There is a raggedness in our worship at St. Barbara's—but there are creative values in the very raggedness. Some worshippers kneel for the prayers, and others simply sit and bow their heads: ragged, yes; but they are learning to pray together and learning to avoid that petty heresy which contends that in matters of what can be called "church etiquette" there is only one correct and proper way of doing things. Again, some (among clergy and choir) face the Holy Table for the saying of the Creed, and some do not; some bow at the name of Jesus Christ, and some do not: ragged, untidy, yes; but we are learning to respect customs that differ from our own and to accept the fact that it is not mere dissidence for its own sake, mere cussedness, that causes the other fellow to do as he does. We are learning to be slow with criticism of the manners and modes of worship that differ from those to which we are accustomed. Of course, this raggedness, this untidiness, makes us all a little uneasy—but perhaps out of it will emerge some insights into the ordering of worship for "The Coming Great Church."

The selection of prayers for the services requires great care. One of the great dangers is a curious patch-work effect. We chaplains, if we are at all sensitive about these things, understand what P. T. Forsyth had in mind when he wrote, "Public prayer is, on the whole, the most difficult part of the work of the minister."<sup>2</sup> Public prayer becomes especially difficult when the minister must strive to be fair to several worship traditions.

2. P. T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (London: Independent Press, 1917, 1951), p. 75.

At St. Barbara's we make use of all five of the Prayers of Confession that are found in the *Order*, with most use being made of the first two because of their Anglican and United-Presbyterian-Baptist associations. The Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession are varied in form from week to week. One week all will be taken from the *Treasury* section of the *Divine Service Book*. Perhaps the next week they will take the form of free or extempore prayer, which is an honoured practice with many of us. Occasionally all the prayers will be taken from the order for Morning Prayer in the Anglican prayer-book. Another time they will come from the worship books of other Churches—Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United.

The people of St. Barbara's are learning to pray together and to appreciate the rich variety in ways of corporate worship. It is good that the non-Anglican learns something of the riches of *The Book of Common Prayer*. It is good that Anglicans and Lutherans learn something of the essential values in the "free" tradition in worship. It is good that each of us learns something of ways and forms of worship differing from those of his or her own Church.

#### SACRAMENTAL PRACTICE

The Holy Table in every chapel is so placed and set up that, without any changes in the arrangement, the Anglican and Lutheran chaplains can celebrate from in front of it and the Baptist, Presbyterian, and United chaplains from behind. Vessels etc. for both methods of celebration are provided.

All Communion services in the chapels are, by tacit agreement among the Churches, "open." When a Communion service is announced the rite or usage according to which it is to be conducted must be stated, and this is followed by an invitation to "communicants of all Churches." Most people do attend the services which follow usages to which they are accustomed, but there is appreciable attendance at "strange rites."

Ordinarily every chaplain is required to conduct a Communion service at least once a month, and must arrange for regular services according to usages other than his own to be conducted by other chaplains or by civilian clergymen. Communion services must be held at times other than the times of the ordinary divine service; at St. Barbara's they generally come immediately after divine service.

Baptism may be administered during divine service or in the chapel at other times. Generally a chaplain or other clergyman of the parents's denomination officiates, but often parents ask the chaplain to officiate when he is not of their denomination. When this is done the chaplain uses the rite of his own Church, with a non-Anglican chaplain adding the exhortation to godparents when baptizing an Anglican infant (and presumably this is omitted in part when an Anglican chaplain baptizes a non-Anglican infant). Baptist chaplains, of course, are not required to baptize infants.

In administering the sacraments the chaplains are required to follow the usages and practices of their own Churches.

## VESTMENTS

Chaplains wear clerical collars when officiating at divine service. Anglicans and Lutherans wear cassock and surplice. Baptist, Presbyterian, and United chaplains wear preaching gowns, and they may wear cassocks and bands with them. Academic hoods may be worn. All chaplains wear the chaplain's scarf, a simple black scarf ornamented at the ends by a crest (each of the forces has a distinctive chaplain's crest), with medal ribbons (or the medals themselves on certain ceremonial occasions) affixed at the left breast position. On sacramental occasions an appropriate stole may be worn in place of the scarf, but no other eucharistic vestments may be worn.

## ASSESSMENTS AND SPECULATIONS

It is tempting to claim too much for this experiment in ecumenical worship. This method of ordering and conducting corporate worship has been in effective use now for some eight years, and we sometimes tend to presume on this and to take unquestioning satisfaction in the successes so far attained. But all of us, chaplains and regular worshippers, experience frustration, frustration that sometimes verges on despair. In this experiment, despite its real successes, there are points of stress, points of contention, points of danger.

The people from the Churches having fixed and mandatory liturgies are often ill-at-ease in services ordered and conducted much more freely than are the services they are accustomed to. On the other hand, people from the Churches with a "free" tradition in worship do not easily adjust to the more formal, more liturgical, elements in the service. There has been a good deal of sincere give-and-take in the attempt to resolve this stress, but it remains a ground of frustration to chaplains and worshippers from all the Churches. The "raggedness" does have its creative values—but it can become a bit tiresome and distracting at times. About twenty-five years ago, Friedrich Heiler wrote: "The liturgical problem is one of the most important and difficult domestic problems in modern Protestantism."<sup>3</sup> Some of the dimensions of this liturgical problem are laid bare, and in a very practical way, in this experiment in worship.

Each of the Churches has its characteristic ethos which has a profound effect on the response of its people (except the utterly insensitive) to various modes of worship. And it requires great imagination and sympathy for a member of one Church to understand and appreciate an ethos different from that of his own Church. The Baptist writer, Paul Rowntree Clifford, made this point when he wrote, "There is a remoteness of language and thought (in Anglican public worship) which is a serious handicap to those who have not been steeped in the Anglican tradition from early days."<sup>4</sup> By the same token, Anglicans have similar difficulty with respect to "free" forms of worship. This conflict, which comes out of inarticulate, emotional ele-

3. F. Heiler, *Prayer* (Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 303.

4. P. R. Clifford, *The Mission of the Local Church* (London, SCM, 1953), p. 42.



ments in the inner lives of the Churches, cannot be resolved by a bit of liturgical scissors-and-paste work, however skillfully it may be done.

Another point of stress is in sacramental practice. The Anglicans are accustomed to "early celebrations," and the Anglican chaplains carry on that practice. But they are unable to follow the practice now customary in most of their parishes of having a congregational Communion service as the main service once monthly or more often. As a United Church chaplain I must say how inadequate (to the point of being slightly exotic) it sometimes seems to me to officiate at a Communion service that is not a congregational celebration but merely a special little service for a few people who have remained after the main service of worship. Efforts are being made to face the inadequacies of the sacramental provisions for all Churches, but at present this problem, in view of an intensifying in recent years of sacramental concern in all the Churches, remains a point of menacing weakness in our scheme of worship.

Most of us have only a very superficial understanding and appreciation of worship traditions of Churches other than our own. But the circumstances and problems of our interdenominational ministry are impelling many of us to study the worship traditions and the undergirding ethos of each of the other Churches. A. G. Hebert has said, "If the different churches are to understand one another, the mutual study of their liturgical traditions is more important and more fruitful than the discussion of their theological traditions."<sup>5</sup> That is probably a bit extravagant, but Father Hebert does underline a principle of which we have become increasingly aware in our work. Evelyn Underhill further explicated this principle when she wrote, "No ritual pattern can be understood by us until we have penetrated below its surface and observed the spiritual realities which it embodies and seeks to express."<sup>6</sup> This experiment has now reached the stage where mere practical concern can no longer keep it lively: the time has come for study at the deepest levels of the problems and implications of such ecumenical worship.

But despite these weaknesses, despite the problems that may at present seem insuperable, despite the frustrations from which both chaplains and worshippers suffer, this experimental arrangement for corporate worship which came out of practical necessity has been the basis of active and creative congregational and parish life in the permanent camps and stations of the Canadian armed forces. Despite my own doubts and misgivings and frustrations, it has been for me an enlightening and satisfying experience to lead in worship week-by-week in this ecumenical pattern. And as F. R. Barry has written: "Any parish anywhere in Christendom that is building up a significant community of worship and life is performing a vital service both to civilization and to the Christian mission."<sup>7</sup>

5. A. G. Hebert, *Liturgy and Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935, 1944), p. 226.

6. Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (London: Nisbet, 1936), p. 245.

7. F. R. Barry, *The Recovery of Man* (New York: Scribners, 1949), p. 29.