

PRAYER BOOK REVISION.

A SERMON

by

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NOW that the Revised Prayer Book in draft form has been submitted to the Convocations, I think that it is proper that I should here speak upon the attitude which, detached as I am from all Church parties, I hold to the Book as it at present stands. I cannot tell what suggestions the Convocations may wish to make, or how the Bishops may receive them. But first let me ask that God may so guide our worship where light and love and truth and beauty lead, and so help us with His Spirit that in personal holiness and national righteousness our own lives may more faithfully reflect what we have seen and heard at the Throne of Grace. Divisions there are, no doubt, among us—truly serious divisions. But even here, thank God! they are only partial and do not touch the deepest depths of our Faith; only may He prepare us here for the purer worship and the grander life There, where the difficulties and doubts and differences of this world will be cleared away.

Let me decidedly state that I support revision. I wish to see our present Book brought up to date with modern language, needs and habits. Sometimes it is obscure, too rigid, its services protracted, its psalms

too long, its petitions too many. It does not provide for situations which have arisen in the last three hundred years. As the Church grows so must its Book.

In many of these respects the new Book seems wisely to meet a new age; I should welcome large parts being at once authorised. But do not exaggerate the meaning of the new age. It is out of all proportion to speak as if the War had drawn one great line between all that went before and all that has and will come after; as if, therefore, Prayer Book Revision, begun temperately before the War, should, after it, be concluded in a way to distress tens of thousands. There is a swing of the pendulum in all English history. It is our way, after making excursions into new adventures, to come back to the old place, with new spoils in our hands, to enrich and not to transform the steady, sturdy English life. Englishmen welcome the recent growth of reverence and dignity in worship, the weekly or daily Eucharist, and other recaptured treasures. But can it be wise to make serious changes at a time when everything is said to be in a state of flux, when on all sides the forces of self-determination, so-called, and self-assertion and disintegration are exceptionally strong? Some ten years ago, in pressing in the Convocation of Canterbury for one service of the Holy Communion, I used to be supported by a great majority of Bishops. Now I have few with me. Can we be sure that, during my own episcopate, the deep views of the Church of England as a whole have changed as much as the personnel of its Bishops?

There are, of course, different schools of thought in the Church of England. One could wish they were complementary to one another: that is the ideal of the existing Book. Now, I fear, they are contrary. At the moment, one school, though not without its rifts,—one school tending rather to exclude than to include, looking back rather than forward,—speaks more loudly than any other. The present revision tends in this one direction. That is not my idea of a revision of the Book of Common Prayer. I should similarly complain if there had been conceded to this school less instead of more than is rightly and really found belonging to it in the present Book. I should say the same about any other set of people who use our comprehensive Book. And, mark you, the same story will repeat itself. More and more will be asked. We get no nearer to finality by advancing the line again and again.

Even if members of this school who, let us recall with respect, did not ask for revision, can, without going against their principles, in any degree accept the new Book with its restrictions, it is foolish to suppose that they will be really satisfied or regard its overtures as anything but an instalment. We shall have upset our Prayer Book for nothing.

It is then desired by this revision to keep together within the Church of England clergy who hold divergent views. But I urge it seems futile to expect that through alternative services and new ecclesiastical courts all the vagaries of the clergy will be controlled. That

needs a new spirit. The clergy do not constitute the Church of which they are the God-appointed ministers. And in this effort, seemingly large-hearted, we run the risk of making the Prayer Book less fitted to be the consistent standard of the worship of the whole Church of England, which is not represented by the more professionally-minded clergy. This "common" worship cannot be advanced by optional alternative services setting up sectarianism within the Book itself. Division in parishes will be worse than ever. It will not be easy for the Bishop to interfere with the desires of the Incumbent and the Parochial Church Council: yet these Councils are not yet sufficiently strong and established and independent to bear such responsibility. Think of the distress of those—and they may often be the larger number—who in their Parish Church find the new Holy Communion practically forced upon them. They may make no loud protest. They will be grieved and go. This kind of thing is happening already. New ways are expelling from our Churches devout men who wish to worship there, but find no welcome. You cannot put it round the other way, and say "Live and let live," and speak of any distress among those who, wanting the new Book, have the old one forced upon them: for the old service is there, and those who uphold the new service tell us there is nothing in it but what is already to be found in the old. This Book will not bring peace.

Those who ask for our one Holy Communion do not try to prevent everyone from finding in that service,

as the text of it stands, whatever he finds to help him. They limit no one's interpretation of that one service. Is it worth while to ask for a different service unless it involves some change of doctrinal balance? For few could wish on merely historical, liturgical or æsthetic grounds to part company with those who use the old. I said doctrinal balance, but "harmony" is a far better word, for if you can quote words from our present Office looking in the one direction, you will immediately find them tempered by others which look in the other; but yet so that the whole is a glorious harmony of heavenly realities, so far as we can comprehend them, not a counterbalancing of conflicting ideas.

Our present Use is no mean one: it is beautiful, it is true: it is deeply hallowed in English hearts through centuries of worship: it is the one which all sorts of people can and do enjoy, even if various groups would like various changes. It holds us together as no scheme of alternatives could. Such a scheme is called a prudent compromise; in my opinion it is rather a feeble establishment of formal disunion, an actual contradiction of unity in the central service of the one Book of one Church. "Is Christ divided?" Loving Christian fellowship with those who do not see eye to eye with us is one thing—may it ever be ours!—it is quite another to abandon the unity of the Prayer Book in searching for a bisected fellowship.

Again, if various strands are found together in the old Book, it does not in the least follow that the meaning

will be unaltered if one strand is picked out and emphasised apart from the others. There is red, white and blue in the Union Jack, but no one could say that, in consequence, a white or blue or red flag would mean the same thing as the whole. Someone, indeed, has compared an alternative service of the Holy Communion to an alternative text-book in the Army. An alternative is no true alternative if it leaves out essential conceptions in the original; just so far as it does this, it is not an alternative to, but a travesty of, the original. Our Diocesan Conference, you remember, has overwhelmingly pronounced against an alternative service of Holy Communion.

To turn to Reservation: this is sanctioned in the provisional new Prayer Book, with accompanying safeguards against misuse. Minor regulations, observe, are liable to variation, with its attendant insecurity. I could have wished that Reservation in the sense of what is called concurrent Communion might have been possible to prevent the repeated reception by the parish priest on one day. But we cannot now revive to any extent the primitive custom of carrying the Sacred Elements straight from the Church to the sick who at home have been following the service and are waiting to receive. But the benefit of communicating can be given to the sick by reducing the service to the very shortest; the new Book excellently provides for this. One so ill, with his senses so little about him as not to be able to follow a service of a few minutes, could gain little from consuming the reserved Sacra-

ment. Our present Book teaches us how beautifully God's love meets the case of one who cannot receive. We must not think more of the means of grace than of God's grace itself. If the Clergy for the sake of the sick would give up their rigid fast, or take a little food as medicine, we should hear much less about the necessity of Reservation.

Experience, alas! proves that the saying "Right use is the cure of abuse" is here out of place; rather must we sadly but decidedly employ Cranmer's words: "The abuses could not be taken away, the thing remaining still." It is clear that if Reservation is allowed, worship will be given to the Blessed Elements when they are taken out from the service of Holy Communion, in which they are the due channel through which, as a part of that whole service, Christ feeds the souls of His people with His Body and Blood.

The Church of England does not give definitions on the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, nor urge special theories. But she protects her children from the error of identifying the living Christ with the consecrated Bread and Wine isolated from the service. The rubrics of the new Book are meant to be safeguards against this. But one who believes either that the consecrated Bread and Wine are Christ Himself, or that, if not locally, yet in or under them He is presented before us in a particular chapel or sanctuary, is by his very reverence for Christ bound to adore the Blessed Sacrament however reserved. So long as It is there, to those who hold such opinions It will offer

the very presence of Christ, and they will worship. At this point the teaching of the Church of Rome and of the Church of England are poles apart. It is not a manner of worship but the truth itself which is in question. The new Prayer Book reintroduces into the Church of England something which all past experience shows must, in the long-run, or, rather, in a very, very short-run, more widely diffuse this cardinal error. Indeed, as I hope to explain in Convocation on March 29th, I believe that the doctrine of the Church of England is at this point already being altered and that the new Book, drawing the line in this matter of Reservation between the living and the dying, draws the doctrinal line in the wrong place.

I am certainly not speaking of minor things like the mere dress of the minister, which seem of little importance, when I say that I cannot regard this revision as an English revision. It is not a normal development of the devotional expression of that undemonstrative English religion, which by God's grace has made English goodness and piety a great and beneficent power in the world. It does not belong to the main stream of the flowing life of our Church of England. Some parts of the new Book may have the authority of the Church of Rome, or the Greek Churches, or the Scottish Church : but the question I ask myself is, Are the new items in harmony with the best Catholic English worship, liberated and clarified in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries? Are they progressive along that line, or retrogressive?

Then notice the very complicated and cumbersome character of the new permissive Book. As a safeguard against an excessive amount of variety, it is rightly enjoined that those who employ an alternative section must employ it in its entirety, and not select bits here and there. But, even so, and even if these directions are understood and in practice followed, when we now go to Church, we shall never know where we are. For at least many years there will be amazing confusion. Once more we shall reach an authorised chaos which it was one of the very purposes of the English Prayer Book to dispel. "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 Realm shall have but one Use." No doubt the growth of the Free Churches has largely discredited this fine claim in its fulness. But still, in my humble judgment, it is more than a matter of convenience. It touches the very fellowship of the Church of England, that with the cry of "Only an alternative" on our lips, we should, with liturgical experts as our guides, break up its coherence into these selective forms of worship. "Please yourselves each in his own way" is no motto for the public worship of a united host advancing in earnest for the cause of God.

Many will think that the Book has, from all the learning bestowed upon it, some of it aloof from common worship, an academic flavour, not likely to attract ordinary worshippers to-day; and, of course, another

generation may care less for liturgiology than ours. The Book is clever in many ways. But in portions it obviously reveals the spirit rather of the ecclesiastical parliamentarian, if I may use the phrase, than of the Christian English statesman: it is guided as much by policy as by principle. And it seems to me not quite fair that the contentious and non-contentious parts of a Book, specially of a Book so loosely hanging together, should be pressed through at one and the same time in order that the desirable non-contentious parts may carry through on their back, as the phrase is, the parts which are very dubious.

The adoption of the Book would not be justified by the claims, in which there lurks an obvious danger, that the old Book stands while the new is merely alternative, permissive, provisional, experimental, and that the new does not alter the doctrine of the Church of England. This latter statement I question, and as to the former, those who prefer our present Book are already being characterised as elderly and old-fashioned, whose place is not to tolerate but to be tolerated.

But even if the Book is reactionary, cumbersome, confusing, un-English, this would not mean that all the patient work bestowed upon it by devout, learned and high-minded men would be thrown away, if the Book, as I trust, fails to win its way. These same men, I believe, can, very soon perhaps, use much of their own work.

I see hope in the very heaviness and difficulty of

this Book—of shallow synthesis which can evoke no enthusiasm—I see the hope that the Book itself will quietly drop out in face of religious public opinion, without contention, and without any body of people looking for a victory over any other body, as the Church of England in the widest sense, and the devout English nation as a whole, deliberately, simply and good-heartedly comes to exclaim, “Well meant, but not our Book.”

A four-fifths majority in the Church Assembly would quickly carry all that it seems to many wise to enact now, and this amounts to a considerable portion. Such a large body of agreement, once registered, would form a fine starting-point from which the same authors or others could later, if necessary, proceed further. Mutual respect and confidence would grow towards concord. That, I believe, would be enough for the present. Do not be afraid when you hear people say, “Either the new Prayer Book or Disestablishment.” The country is not asking for Disestablishment, nor the Church, which is not identified with any small advanced body of clergy breaking away from the tried traditions of English piety. Some of you may have read in my little book, *The Nation and the Church* (John Murray), published at my recent Visitation, my views on the relation between the Church and the State, and on other points connected with this whole issue.

If this new Prayer Book were—as I hope not—to pass the Church Assembly, and the point were reached where Parliament wished to interfere in the matter,

Parliament would make no defiant challenge to the Church, if it asked for the adoption now of only some three-quarters of the Book, which I believe would be generally acceptable; the Book naturally falls into four or five sections. As for the smaller part of the work to which objections will be widely felt, Parliament might urge delay. This idea I hope to develop, with an answer to some objections already raised to it, on March 29th.

Now, in conclusion, may I recall the final words of my own and every Bishop's consecration? "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and love and soberness": I ask in simple humility for God's forgiveness and for your indulgence, if in anything that I have said I have shown the spirit of fear, or used any word that is out of harmony with the spirit of power, the spirit of love and the spirit of soberness.