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Some Liturgical Considerations.

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TODAY we are conscious of widespread criticism levelled at the Book of Common Prayer and much of this is directed against the Holy Communion service. Many Evangelicals are sympathetic with some measure of revision so long as the doctrinal balance of the 1662 rite is preserved. Nevertheless, whatever our attitude, our criticism must be well-informed and we must be prepared to specialise in liturgical studies and to understand the development of the rites. Only thus can we make a positive contribution to the discussions which must inevitably arise: it is in this way that our opinions will command respect, when it is understood that we speak with authority and sympathy from a deep understanding of the development of the traditional forms in which Christians have worshipped.

The study of liturgical worship is not an archaeological study of museum pieces: it is the realisation of how men and women have come face to face with the living God. For these are living rites: they are the pathways which men have traversed in their answering response to God's search for them. Here is holy ground, and we shall never appreciate liturgical study until we see it related to the hopes and aspirations of the worshipping communities. These are the pathways that the saints of other generations and communions have trod: they are the rites which enabled them to serve God, the routes along which the spirit of man has travelled on his journey to the Celestial City. Detached from the life of the worshipper they become academic and antiquarian, and we miss the reality of the spiritual truths to which they are attempting to witness. If we are not careful we are left in the hands of the liturgical expert who frequently misses the spirit of the rite through being obsessed with the minutiæ of liturgical criticism. Here we need deep human sympathies, a spirit alive unto God, an informed historical perspective and a natural humility which is prepared to learn not only from the faith of the past, but which will approach the subject dispassionately and free from prejudice. It is a very difficult thing to achieve, but a discipline we must undertake. If we wish to make a positive contribution to the discussions that are bound to arise, it is necessary for us to know something of that process of development and reform which brought our rite into existence. Not only must we be prepared to stand firm by the principles of the Reformers but we must understand something of the origins and growth of the early liturgies, and approach them with sympathy and a desire to appreciate their form and expression.

I.

Most of us are familiar with the Roman Mass and we realise how, in the Canon, there is the emphasis on oblation and sacrifice. Some of us will have a superficial acquaintance with the Eastern liturgies

with their atmosphere of mystery and awe. Few of us know much about the way in which these rites have evolved; yet it is desirable that we should appreciate their origins and early forms, for without such a background of knowledge we are unable to assess properly the values of our own liturgy. From time to time it is worth while examining the evidence of the early rites and we must regard them, not as a scientist looks at specimens in his laboratory, but as fellow Christians of those who, in earlier generations, attempted to give expression and form to God's revelation in Christ and of their own deepest understanding of the Christian mystery of life, death, resurrection and judgment—and, too, of communion through the use of simple objects like bread and wine.

The first thing we need to remember is the poverty of the evidence: there is very little that has survived. The early centuries of the Christian era do not supply many details of the worshipping life of the community. There are hints and allusions, a fact which can be understood when we realise that until the conversion of Constantine our religion was proscribed. Christians were in constant danger of persecution, and so there was a natural secrecy about their meetings and worship. "The Apostles and Fathers, who from the beginning gave prescriptions about the Church, guarded the dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence."[1] The *disciplina arcani* of the Church meant that no details of creed or ritual could be published for apologetics or propaganda. These were the private, secret information of the brethren: "it is not allowed to describe the mysteries to those who are not initiated";[2] and this accounts for the scarcity of our materials. Nevertheless, it is possible on the evidence we possess to see an outline of the early service and also to understand more fully the groundwork of our own rite, for though reformed its roots go far back to these early days and we are conscious of an affinity both in thought and order. We err if we imagine that our 1662 Service is a completely new form. It "is not the work of one man, of one society, or of one age: it is like the British Constitution, a precious result of accumulative and collective wisdom."[3]

In other realms, to appreciate the significance of anything, we turn to its finished end: it reveals its true nature in its final achievement. Here we must turn to origins, and we find it in the action of our Lord in the Upper room when He took Bread and Wine, and blessed them, and said, "Do this in rememberance of Me." All rites are an interpretation of that action and a response to that command. There we find its roots; but as it emerges into flower we find that centuries of devotion and worship have played their part in its maturity. We need to study the evidence of these formative centuries and the rites of other communions so that we may obtain a better understanding of our own, and perhaps we may be enabled to make positive contributions to the enrichment of our liturgy so that succeeding generations may be grateful for our insight. At the least, we need to be able to speak with as much authority as any other strand of the Anglican communion. Until recently almost all the research and detailed study has been done by other sections; it is time that Evangelicals made their contribution to the study of worship,

for it is essential that our point of view be represented with scholarship, and with the authority of knowledge.

II.

While we naturally turn for guidance to the Reformers, it must be remembered that research has made available information and knowledge which they did not possess. In appealing to the evidence of the first centuries of Christian faith and practice, the Church of the New Testament and the early Fathers, we are being true to the mind of the Reformers, for they too turned to those same sources. Their appeal was always to the Scriptures and the ancient Fathers. In the Book of Homilies, in the "Sermon against the peril of idolatry," we have an instance of this double appeal: "Aganst the which foul abuses and great enormities shall be alleged unto you; first the authority of God's holy word. . . . And secondly, the testimonies of the holy and ancient learned Fathers and Doctors, out of their own works and ancient histories ecclesiastical." The high regard in which they held the Fathers is evidenced by Cranmer's "Articles of Inquiry at the Visitation of the Cathedral Church of Canterbury" in 1550, when he asks "Whether there be a library within this Church, and in the same St. Augustine's Works, Basil, Gregory Nazianzene, Hierome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Theophylact, Erasmus and other good authors and works."[4] Or we might cite Jewel's celebrated appeal to the Fathers in a sermon preached at Paul's Cross, the second Sunday before Easter, 1560. "If any learned man of all our adversaries . . . be able to bring any one sufficient sentence out of any old Catholic doctor, or father, or out of any old general council, or out of the holy Scriptures of God, or any one example of the primitive Church, whereby it may be clearly or plainly proved that there was any private mass in the whole world at that time, for the space of 600 years after Christ; Or that there was then any Communion ministered unto the people under one kind; . . . if any man alone were able to prove any of these articles by any one clear or plain clause or sentence, either of the Scriptures, or of the old doctors, or of any old general council, or by any example of the primitive Church; I promised them that I would give over and subscribe unto him."[5] We find that writers like Becon, Pilkington and Jewel appear to have knowledge of the liturgies of St. Basil, St. Chrysostom, the liturgy of Armenia and the "Liturgy of the Ethiopes." However, it was always a critical appeal, the final authority was the Bible.

As we have previously stated, the evidence for these early centuries is slight. We are in a realm of conjecture and speculation and no liturgiologist can afford to be dogmatic in his conclusions, for he is building on slender foundations. It is possible that the future discovery of manuscripts might quite easily involve the modification of contemporary theories. It is a study where we must be humble in our claims, and certainly we cannot afford to be speculative in our deductions. There is much upon which we can speak with confident assurance, but there are still fields in which it is wiser to suggest rather than dogmatise.

There seems to exist a widespread impression that the only specific Christian rite of the early Church was the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is true that this is and always has been the characteristic Christian rite ; but it is doubtful whether it was the only service of the early Church. The primitive form of the liturgy can be divided into two parts—the Synaxis, and what we might call the Anaphora. They are, in the words of Maxwell, " The Liturgy of the Word " and " The Liturgy of the Upper Room." Originally these two parts were not necessarily performed together : they could be, and were, held separately. In the earliest detailed description we have of Christian worship, "The Apology of St. Justin," there are two distinct accounts of the Holy Communion service : in one, it is preceded by baptism, in the other by the synaxis. In the " Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus " the accounts of Communion are preceded by the consecration of a bishop and by baptism and confirmation. The evidence suggests that Christians gathered not only for eucharistic worship but for services of instruction and preaching. The early converts were mainly Jews and proselytes gathered from the ranks of the " god-fearers ". They were people who were familiar with the worship of the Synagogue, for at this time this was the real home of the Jewish religion ; and " it was the liturgy of the Synagogue rather than the worship of the Temple which moulded the services of the early Christian community."[6]

It is natural to suppose that the early Christians would value and assimilate those distinctive elements of Synagogue worship which had enriched and sustained the lives of the Jews of the Dispersion. The heart and centre of this worship was the reading of the Law, and later readings from the prophetic books, accompanied by an exposition. Around this nucleus there gathered the singing of psalms and the saying of prayers. It is precisely these elements which are found in the Christian synaxis : it is " the liturgy of the Word." We gather from incidental references in the Epistles that these elements seem to be parts of services, and as they do not appear to be attached to " the breaking of bread," it is a fair inference that they refer in all probability to services which are separate from the eucharistic rite, a service of preaching, of exhortation, of prayer. Here the emphasis is on the ministry of the Word. From the fourth century the synaxis became gradually fused with the " Liturgy of the Upper Room " and they were regarded as " inseparable parts of a single rite."[7] Even much earlier, probably in the second century, it was usual for the Eucharist to be preceded by this service, marked by its emphasis on the preaching of the Word and the reading of the Scriptures. It would be a mistake to imagine that the ministry of the Word was a mere imitation of the Jewish service. The latter served only as a pattern, for the Christian rite developed its own ways of expressing its message and worship. " There was a new emphasis and content to accord with the new revelation and to express the new spirit."[8] Maxwell suggests that it was the Prophetic books rather than the Law which became the chief centre of interest, and there would be an added emphasis on those passages which seemed capable of bearing a Messianic interpretation, or those which appeared to find their fulfilment in the life and teaching of our Lord. Later the emphasis changed, for

soon the letters and writings of the Apostles began to circulate, and eventually, too, collections of the teaching and life of our Lord which were to have the primary place of honour. When we study the developed forms of the liturgies, the Gospel lections hold a supreme place, and it is clear that the reading of the Gospel is a high moment in the action of the Liturgy.

III.

Through the mists of antiquity, which hide the history of the development of Christian worship, we are aware of these two services, ultimately to be united into one corporate rite. It was a true insight which made them join together these two strands and make them part of one rite. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this development, and it supplies us with a great liturgical principle—the indissoluble unity of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. In our first piece of real liturgical evidence, the Apology of St. Justin Martyr, we are already aware that in the Sunday worship these two elements have been combined. The Apology, written in Rome, probably in 145 A.D., is evidence for the kind of rite celebrated there. He writes, " And on the day which is called Sunday all who live in the city or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the Prophets are read as long as time permits. Then, when the reader stops, the president instructs and exhorts those present to the imitation of those good things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers, and as we have said before, when our prayers have finished bread is offered and wine and water, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings as much as he is able, and the people assent, saying, 'Amen.' And there is a distribution to each and a participation in the Eucharistic elements, and some is sent by the deacons to those who are not present."

This interesting extract is of great importance, for in this primitive form of the rite we see what is substantially the core of the more developed services; for most of them, when they emerge from the obscurity surrounding their early development, have much the same outline. From Justin's account we have the following order:

1. Lections.
2. Sermon.
3. Prayers.
4. The Offering of bread and wine mixed with water.
5. The Prayers and Thanksgivings with Amen.
6. Communion.

This is in the main the plan of our present 1662 rite and we may claim that it does preserve the essential elements of the primitive service of the Church.

The first complete extant Liturgy which we possess is the so-called Clementine Liturgy preserved for us in Book VIII of the Apostolic Constitutions (c.375-80 A.D.). Unfortunately its historical value has been weakened considerably because it was compiled by the same person who edited the Epistle of Ignatius, and the Liturgy reveals marks of his individual style. Yet there is no doubt that it is based

upon a living rite and it has the advantage of being free from the modification and changes which are characteristic of a developing rite. It enables us to obtain a glimpse of the kind of service that was used in the East, and here again we are conscious of the unity of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. Before the deacon begins the litany of the faithful, the service starts with Bible lections and sermon.

It is interesting to realise that we have no details of the *Anaphora* or consecration prayer earlier than that contained in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, written in Rome about the year 217 A.D. The evidence suggests that there was at first no definite prayer of consecration; the phrase ὅση δύναμις αὐτῷ in Justin's Apology seems to indicate extempore prayer. There is other positive witness to corroborate this fact. Thus in the Didache the prophets were to be allowed "to give thanks as much as they desire," and the words ὅσα θέλουσιν certainly seem to indicate extempore prayer. Further, Tertullian, speaking of prayer, can write, "We pray without a monitor because we pray from the heart."[9] The First Church Order is even more dogmatic. "It is not altogether necessary for him to recite the same words which we said before, as if learning to say them by heart in his thanksgiving to God; but according to the ability of each one he is to pray. If indeed he is able to pray sufficiently well with a grand prayer then it is good: but if also he should pray and recite a prayer in due measure, no one may forbid him, only let him pray being sound in orthodoxy."[10] We might expect that this liberty of expression would result in all kinds of divergencies and variations. It would seem that we should traverse a tortuous desert arid with men's prejudices and idiosyncrasies. This was almost an invitation for subjection to run riot. But when we examine the emerging rites there is much agreement in the main features of the prayer. This can be appreciated when we realise that they have a common origin in the command of our Lord, they aspire to reproduce the essential meaning of that holy hour. One thing is clear from the evidence of the earliest anaphora we possess, there is no moment or formula by which the elements were consecrated. It is only later, and is typical of the West, that the words of institution are regarded as a consecrating formula. This is of vital importance for it gives us the mind of the primitive Church about this matter.

One other principle must be emphasised—that the striking feature of the Church's life in the pre-Nicene period is the *corporate nature* of its worship. It is one of the things which Dom Gregory Dix in his important study, "The Shape of the Liturgy", emphasises that the service is a Liturgy of the whole Church. Undoubtedly, the fellowship of the Worship was maintained by the act of communion, which is the proper climax of the service. There is no indication of a communion service where those present did not communicate—such a practice would have been regarded as a travesty of our Lord's intention. Even in the fifth century "Liturgical Homilies of Narsai," in Homily 17 ("An exposition of the Mysteries"), we read: "Again, another proclamation is made in different order: 'Let every one that receives not the Body and Blood depart from hence'."[11] This

act was the basis of their fellowship in which the Christians realised their fellowship with Christ and through Him with each other. "We, being many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. x. 17). It is quite evident that the Church regarded this as the true fulfilment of the Service, and the growth of non-communicating attendance is alien both to the mind of Christ and to the practice of the early Church. We have seen that two fundamental principles of early liturgy were the uniting of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament in one great corporate act of worship, finding its completion in the act of Communion.

IV.

It is outside the purpose of this essay to examine the work of the Reformation Fathers to see if they appreciated the significance of these two ideas: this would require a separate study. However, we must examine briefly our present rite in the light of those principles to see if it fulfils these two basic liturgical conceptions. We can appreciate their achievement only when we remember the background of medieval doctrine and practice, for worship is always dependent upon doctrine. During the Middle Ages alien ideas of priesthood and sacrifice had distorted the action of the liturgy. The emphasis lies on sacrifice which has become the central theme of the rite. There had developed also an individualistic piety, and the Roman mass is "deficient in the sense of corporate fellowship." The development of national language meant that few people could follow the words of the service and so take their rightful part in the worship. The growth of the idea of the sacrifice of the mass also undermined the corporate nature of worship, for communion is overshadowed by this conception, and the mass becomes a repetition of the sacrifice of Calvary. The growth of votive masses and masses for the dead undermined congregational worship, and individualism became rampant. Maxwell quotes Heiler, who says that these private masses became a cancer feeding upon the soul of the Church. The doctrine of transubstantiation also weakened worship, for the communion of the people ceased to be an integral part of the service, and the central act was the elevation of the host. It is little wonder that the worshippers ceased to be a congregation but were a group of disassociated individuals.

Quite obviously, the first task of the Reformers, after the repudiation of the doctrine of transubstantiation and sacrifice, was to provide a service which would be congregational and which would emphasise the heart of the Christian Gospel—justification by faith. We may claim that Cranmer succeeded in achieving this.

The first step to make the services congregational was the introduction of *English* as the language of worship and devotion. This was done gradually, and in 1549 we have our First Prayer Book in our mother tongue. The principle is laid down in the Preface, "And moreover, whereas s. Paule would have suche language spoken to the people in the churche, as they mighte understande and have profite by hearyng the same; the service in this Churche of England (these many yeares) hath been read in Latin to the people, whiche they

understoode not; so that they have heard with theyr eares onely; and their hartes, spirits, and minde, have not been edified thereby." In the Communion Service the communion of the people was restored and erroneous ideas of sacrifice removed. In their emphasis on communion the English reformers were guided by the primitive practice of the Church. On the Continent Luther had done the same at Wittenberg. They had rediscovered "the Pauline conception of the mystery of fellowship."[12] In all of Luther's Church Orders the principle is laid down, "No mass without communicants."[13] We do not realise what a revolution this was in Church practice, both on the Continent and in England, and the Reformers' intentions were defeated only by the conservatism of the people; for during the past centuries they had been used to infrequent communions. Calvin, too, wished to introduce a weekly celebration of communion at Geneva, but the magistrates of the city would not accept this. Though Calvin had to yield to their wishes, he frequently expressed his dissatisfaction with the arrangement whereby the Lord's Supper was celebrated only four times a year. "Indeed," he writes, "this custom that enjoins that men should communicate only once a year is certainly an invention of the devil. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated in the Christian congregation once a week at the very least"; and again, "I have taken care to record publicly that our custom is defective, so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily."[13] Communion thus became an essential part of our rite, and the custom that has grown up in some churches of having a sung service without communicants is foreign to the mind of the Book of Common Prayer. The balance of the service is upset, and in the words of Bishop Gore, it "represents a seriously defective theology."[14]

We are conscious in our service that Cranmer gave new emphasis to the ministry of the word. This is natural, for it was the rediscovery of the Bible that gave birth to the Reformation. During the latter part of the Middle Ages there had been a decline in preaching, and Cranmer reintroduced the sermon in the first part of the service. Christ, God's Word, was to be presented in all His glory to the congregation. Here, those who were ordained "to preach the Word of God, and to minister the holy Sacraments," were permitted to exercise their dual ministry together. There is no antithesis between these two functions, they are meant to be united in our ministry. Sunday by Sunday in our lections God's message is read and is to be followed by the Sermon, and this is in accordance with the Reformer's conception that "there is no true sacrament without the prior word of promise." The same Word which is preached audibly from the pulpit is preached visibly from the holy table.

The Anglican Reformers did all they could to encourage preaching. Schools for preachers were established in many of the parish churches. The Books of Homilies* were published because of the poverty of the preaching, but they were regarded only as necessary substitutes and their reading "is nothing comparable to the office of preaching. . . .

* The writer is aware that the Homilies were also issued to avoid controversial subjects being treated in the pulpit, but the main reason for their use was the lack of true preachers.

Besides, homilies were devised by the godly bishops . . . only to supply necessity for want of preachers; and are by the statute not to be preferred, but to give place to sermons, whensoever they may be had."[15] Hooper, among others, did all he could to re-establish preaching. "The true preaching of God's Word hath been so long out of use, that it shall be very difficult to restore it again. . . . When the Bible and true preachers thereof be restored into the church, God shall restore likewise such light as shall discern every thing aright. . . . The preaching of God's Word is of all things most necessary for the people."[16] From the earliest days the Sermon had been an essential part of the service, and now it is again to take its true place.

V.

We began this essay with the plea for liturgical study and we have seen that our rite fulfils two important liturgical principles: in it is united the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, and its true climax is in Communion. There are wide fields we might have explored. We could have made a detailed study of the consecration prayers, or considered the theology of the Epiclesis, or the place of the offertory in the action of the service. There are numerous points which need investigation and research. We must prepare carefully so that if a demand for revision arises we shall have a carefully thought-out plan. Liturgy is not static: if it is living it must develop. Evangelicals have been accused recently of liturgical obscurantism, and it is necessary, by our interest and studies, to show that this criticism is unjustified. It is impossible to ignore the fact that in many parishes experiments are being made in public worship; in many churches changes and modifications are being introduced into the services; we are lapsing into congregationalism. We must think out our worship in terms of doctrine and theology. We are not concerned merely to defend the *status quo*, although most of us are content with the 1662 rite. Some feel that in certain directions it could be enriched, but we do not wish the structure of the service to be altered, or any innovations introduced which would change its doctrinal emphasis. Many of us would be glad to see the inclusion of an *anamnesis* which would recall not only our Lord's death but His Resurrection and Ascension. In some of the older liturgies this feature is very full and has the merit of not confining the thought merely to one moment of the Passion, but brings before us the triumph of the Easter morning and the joyous Victory of our faith, and the mention of the Second Advent brings an added and needed eschatological note into our Eucharist. "Therefore we also who are sinners, remembering His life-giving passion, His saving cross, His death, His tomb, His resurrection from the dead on the third day, His ascension into Heaven and the session on the right hand of Thee, the God and Father, and His glorious and terrible second coming, when He shall come with glory to judge the quick and the dead"[17] (Liturgy of S. James of Jerusalem). Some feel that the collection has tended to obscure the real meaning of the offertory and would like it to have the position it held in the early Church, and the bread and wine become again the offerings of the congregation presented by their representatives to the minister.

These are improvements which would leave the 1662 structure unchanged.

We have inherited a rich legacy, which it is ours to use and guard. For nearly three hundred years our present service has been a source of inspiration to countless pilgrims, pointing them to Heaven and revealing to them the resplendent figure of Christ. It is a rite full of sacred associations, and there is danger that in an anxiety to be up-to-date, we short-cut the purposes of God and attempt to achieve too much by our own deliberations and cleverness instead of being led by the Spirit of God.

1. S. Basil, De Spiritu Sancto, 27.
2. S. Athanasius, Ap contra Arianos, 11.
3. Bishop Jebb, Thirty Years' Correspondence between John Jebb and Alexander Knox, vol. i, p. 368 (quoted by Haléry, A History of the English People in 1815, vol. 3, p. 12).
4. Parker Society, Vol. 2, p. 161.
5. Works, Parker Society, Vol. 1, pp. 20-1.
6. Dugmore, The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office, p. 7.
7. Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy, p. 37.
8. Maxwell, An Outline of Christian Worship, p. 3.
9. Tertullian, Apology 30 (*cf.* De Oratione, 9).
10. First Church Order Sabid, version § 34.
11. Dom R. H. Connolly, The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai, p. 2.
12. Brilioth, Eucharistic Faith and Practice, Evangelical and Catholic, p. 133.
13. Quoted in Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 117, 118.
14. Gore, The Body of Christ, p. 276.
15. Grindal, Works, Parker Society, p. 380.
16. Works, Parker Society, Vol. 1, p. 205.
17. Linton, Twenty-five Consecration Prayers, p. 42. The Greek text in Brightman, L.E.W., 52, 30.