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Eucharist and Offertory: The Anglican Tradition

BY DONALD ROBINSON

THE committee of the 1958 Lambeth Conference which considered Prayer Book revision included in its report a list of "Suggested modifications or additions for the further recovery of other elements of the worship of the Primitive Church". Among these suggestions is the item:

"The Offertory, with which the people should be definitely associated, to be more closely connected with the Prayer of Consecration".

This suggestion implies:

- (a) that there is already an Offertory in Anglican worship;
- (b) that the people, who may or may not at present be definitely associated with this Offertory, should be so associated;
- (c) that this Offertory, already connected in some measure with the Prayer of Consecration, should be *more closely* connected with it.

What is the Offertory referred to in this suggestion? While it is recognized that not all the bishops at Lambeth are bishops of the Church of England or use the Prayer Book of the Church of England, the Lambeth Report rightly regards the Book of Common Prayer as the norm of Anglican liturgical tradition. A custom, therefore, which is not only found in the 1662 Prayer Book but was already the tradition of the first English Prayer Book of 1549 may rightly claim to represent the norm of Anglican tradition in the matter of the Offertory. Yet the Lambeth suggestion hardly makes sense if it refers to the Offertory in our Book of Common Prayer. Certainly there is an Offertory in our Prayer Book. With this Offertory "the people" are "definitely associated", since it is they who place "the money given at the Offertory" in a decent bason, and since it is one of their number, a churchwarden, who customarily "receives" these devotions and reverently brings them to the priest. But this Offertory (which belongs to the ante-communion service) is not connected *at all* with the Prayer of Consecration, nor is there any obvious reason why it should be.

One concludes, therefore, that the Lambeth suggestion is using "Offertory" in the sense of a ritual presentation of the bread and wine. If this is so, the wording of their suggestion is unfortunate, for it implies that there is already in our liturgy an Offertory of bread and wine having some—but an insufficient—connection with the Prayer of Consecration. This implication is open to serious question, and the first part of this paper, therefore, is an examination of the Offertory "as the church and realm hath received the same".

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First of all a note on the term itself. "Offertory" is derived from the Latin *Offertorium*. A modern liturgiologist will define the *Offertorium* of the Roman liturgy as "the rite by which the bread and wine are presented (offered) to God before they are consecrated and the prayers and chant that accompany it" (so Fortesque in *The Catholic Encyclopædia*, Vol. II, p. 217). But at the time of the Reformation the term *offertorium* was, in popular use, simply the short anthem or antiphon which preceded the prayer in which the elements were offered on the altar. An example of this usage appears in Thomas Becon's *The Displaying of the Popish Mass* where, describing the Sarum service, he writes: "Then do ye say your offertory, which pope Eutichianus brought in . . . After the offertory is said, ye take the chalice up in your hands, with the little round cake lying upon the patine or cover of the chalice, and lifting up your eyes, ye pray on this manner: *Suscipe sancta Trinitas, etc.*: 'Take, O holy Trinity, this oblation, which I, unworthy sinner, offer in the honour of thee, of blessed Mary the virgin, and of all thy saints, for the salvation of the living, and for the rest or quietness of all the faithful that are dead'" (*Prayers and Other Pieces of Thomas Becon*, Parker Society edn., p. 264). In this usage, the Offertory was not the offering of the elements, but a certain form of words preceding that offering.

When the first English Prayer Book was compiled, the term "offertory" was retained, but it was applied to the Sentences of Scripture which replaced the earlier anthem. This is clear in the two rubrics in the service which mention the Offertory:

"Then shall follow for the Offertory one or more of these Sentences of holy scripture";

"In the meanwhile, while the clerks do sing the Offertory . . .". Nor is there any reason to interpret otherwise the use of the term "offertory", in a rubric at the end of the service:

"The Parishioners shall offer every Sunday, at the time of the Offertory . . .".

The term Offertory was dropped altogether in the 1552 service, though it was retained in a rubric at the end of the service referring to "collects to be said after the Offertory, when there is no Communion".

In 1662 the term was restored in the service itself, in the following rubric:

"Then shall the Priest return to the Lord's Table, and begin the Offertory, saying one or more of these Sentences following".

A new rubric among those at the end of the service speaks of "the money given at the Offertory". It is possible that Offertory here still refers merely to the saying of the Sentences. It is, however, usually taken that the saying of the Sentences is the *beginning* of the Offertory which includes the further action of presenting and placing on the Table the alms and other devotions of the people received "while these Sentences are in reading".

At all events, it is now necessary to discover what constitutes the *offering* made in our Communion service. For this purpose it will be useful, for the time being, to restrict the term Offertory to the reading of the Sentences, and to use the term Offering for the receiving and presentation of what is offered in connection with the Offertory.

What, then, is the Offering in the Church of England? It is the offering by the people of alms for the poor, gifts of money for other charitable purposes, and (since 1662) the presentation and placing of such offerings on the communion table by the priest. This Offering takes place in the Order for Holy Communion after the sermon but before the placing of bread and wine on the table in readiness for communion, where communion is to follow. If no communion is to follow, the Offering still takes place, and the service concludes with collects and (since 1552) the general prayer for the church militant here in earth. The whole action of the Offering is ordered by the Prayer Book (since 1549) to be accompanied by the Offertory, that is, reading of sentences of Scripture concerning the duty of good works, almsgiving and support of those who minister the Word.

There is no suggestion in any authorized English Prayer Book, from 1549 to the present day, that the Offering includes either the bringing of bread and wine by the people, or the placing of bread and wine on the table by the minister in readiness for communion. What is offered in connection with the Offertory is abundantly clear in the rubrics of the 1549 Prayer Book :

“ Then shall follow for the *Offertory* one or more of these sentences of holy scripture, to be sung while the people do *offer*, or else one of them to be said by the minister immediately before the *offering* ” (italics mine).

(There follow twenty sentences of Scripture, all concerned with a right attitude to riches or to the duty of good works in almsgiving or in the support of the ministry.)

“ Where there be clerks, they shall sing one or many of the sentences above written, according to the length and shortness of the time that the people be *offering*.”

“ In the mean time, while the clerks do sing the *Offertory*, so many as are disposed shall *offer* unto the poor men’s box every one according to his ability and charitable mind. And at the *offering* days appointed, every man and woman shall pay to the curate the due and accustomed *offerings*.”

This concludes the Offertory and Offering in the 1549 Book. There is no further reference in the service to these offerings. No prayer accompanied the Offering ; the prayer for the church lacking as yet the petition to “ accept our alms and oblations ” with which we are familiar.

The 1549 service made no suggestion that the setting of bread and wine on the table was part of the Offering. These elements were provided by the “ pastors and curates ”, and a rubric at the end of the service “ ordered that, in recompense of such cost and charges, the parishioners of every parish shall offer every Sunday, at the time of the Offertory, the just valom and price of the holy loaf (with all such money, and other things as were wont to be offered with the same) to the use of their pastors and curates . . . ”.

Thus, while recompense for the bread and wine formed part of the accustomed offerings to the use of the clergy, the 1549 Prayer Book did not invest the placing of bread and wine on the table with any “ offertory ” significance. The rubric read :

“ Then shall the minister take so much bread and wine as shall suffice for the persons appointed to receive the holy communion . . . and setting both the bread and wine upon the altar, then the priest shall say . . . ‘ The Lord be with you etc.’ ”

The revision of 1552 reduced the occurrences of the words “ offer ” and “ offering ”, and dispensed with the term Offertory in the accompanying rubric, which simply stated :

“ Then shall the churchwardens, or some other by them appointed, gather the devotion of the people, and put the same into the poor men’s box : and upon the offering days appointed, every man and woman shall pay to the curate the due and accustomed offerings.”

But the term Offertory was, as we have seen, retained in a rubric at the end of the service, as was an order that the curate and churchwardens “ shall be discharged of such sums of money, or other duties, which hitherto they have paid for the same (*sc.* bread and wine) by order of their houses every Sunday ”.

However, there was inserted in the prayer for the church militant a petition to “ accept our alms ”. Hence it is clear that the alms constituted the Offering. By contrast, there was now no reference at all in any rubric to taking or placing bread and wine on the table.

The character of the final revision of 1662 is well known. The term “ the Offertory ” reappears before the sentences : “ then shall the Priest return to the Lord’s Table and begin the Offertory, saying one or more of these sentences following ”. These Offertory sentences are identical with those of 1549 and, as we have seen, contain nothing that can be referred to providing bread and wine for the communion. In this respect the 1662 revisers did not follow the Scottish Book of 1637, in which five new sentences had been introduced having no direct bearing on charitable gifts.

* * * *

Two additions to the 1662 Order further emphasize the distinction between the Offering and the manipulation of the elements. First, the “ alms for the poor and other devotions of the people ”, after being “ received ” by “ the deacons, churchwardens or other fit person ”, in a decent bason, are now “ reverently ” brought to the priest “ who shall humbly present and place it upon the holy table ”. The solemnity of the people’s offering of alms and other devotions, and its character as a sacrifice pleasing to God, are in this manner given liturgical expression by being “ presented ”. In marked contrast to this is the instruction to the priest, after the Offertory, merely “ to place upon the table so much bread and wine as he shall think sufficient ”. This plain wording was not thoughtlessly adopted. The suggestion of Bishop Cosin, that the rubric should read “. . . the priest shall then offer up and place upon the table . . .”, was considered by the revisers, and deliberately rejected by them. They could hardly have made it plainer that the placing of the elements on the table was neither an Offering nor part of an Offering ; the action was purely utilitarian.

Secondly, the 1662 revisers added to the petition “ accept our alms ”,

in the prayer for the church militant, the words "and oblations". A brief explanation will show the reason.

"Accept our alms" had been in the prayer since 1552. Actually, however, three types of money offering, not alms alone, had customarily been made: alms for the poor, other charitable gifts including gifts for the support of the minister, and ecclesiastical duties including recompense to the clergy and churchwardens for the purchase of bread and wine for the communion (see rubrics at the end of the service in the 1549 and 1552 books). In the 17th century, prior to the 1662 revision, there was some discussion of this matter, particularly of the propriety of collecting ecclesiastical dues during the Communion service. Scudamore says: "In 1638 Bishop Mountagu asks at his Visitation whether 'the names of such as intend to receive are taken by the Minister overnight, or the day before, they repairing unto him, that he may examine or instruct them, they pay their offerings, and not disquiet that sacred action in the chancel or church by collecting of them then and there'. Somewhat later Bishop Cosin proposed that the order should be reformed. He agrees with Mountagu that 'If it should be thus observed, and at this time when they come to receive the Communion, it would breed a great disturbance in the Church, and take up more time than can be allowed for that purpose. Wherefore', he adds, 'it is needful that some alteration were made of this rubric; and that the offerings or devotions of the people then collected should be brought to the Priest, and by him presented and laid upon the Altar or Communion Table, for such uses as be peculiarly named in the Sentences then read by him'" (*Notitia Eucharistica*, 2nd edn. 1876, p. 359, italics mine).

Thus, at the revision of 1662 the paying of ecclesiastical duties during the Offertory was apparently dropped, and the petition in the General Prayer was made more exact by the addition of "and oblations" to the words "accept our alms". It should be no longer necessary to refute the popular view that "oblations" here means the elements of bread and wine: Bishop Dowden has conclusively shown that "oblations" mean "money-offerings which were not 'alms'" (*Further Studies in the Prayer Book*, pp. 176-222). Indeed, the rubric added in 1662 makes this clear: "If there be no alms or oblations, then shall the words (*of accepting our alms and oblations*) be left out unsaid". There is no authority for saying, as some do, "Accept our oblations," when there is a communion but no collection of money.

The revisers of 1662, then, did two significant things in regard to the Offering. First, they deliberately rejected the proposal of Bishop Cosin that the bread and wine should be "offered up" as well as placed on the Table (as in the Scottish Book of 1637 and Cosin's Durham Book). Secondly, in modifying the General Prayer they deliberately defined that which God was petitioned to accept as being "our alms and oblations"; thereby, on the one hand, ignoring the elements which had been placed on the Table, and, on the other hand, acceding to Bishop Cosin's earlier desire that the offerings and devotions of the people, collected and presented and placed on the Communion Table, should be restricted to gifts "for such purposes as be peculiarly named in the Sentences".

Such is the Offering in Anglican tradition. It was adopted as an

element of liturgical worship having the strongest scriptural sanction, and its meaning is defined and controlled by the sentences of Scripture which accompany the ceremony. That section of the Old Sarum Missal, wherein the bread and wine were presented by the deacon to the celebrant and presented by the celebrant to God with a prayer for their acceptance and consecration, was entirely discontinued in 1549, as having no scriptural justification, and nothing like it has found a place in the authorized liturgy of the Church of England (whatever may be said of related liturgies) from that day to this.

* * * *

Having established that there is no Offering of bread and wine in connection with the Offertory of our Book of Common Prayer, nor has been in any English Prayer Book, it remains to examine the supposition of the Lambeth recommendation that an Offertory of bread and wine, closely connected with the Prayer of Consecration was, nevertheless, "an element of the worship of the Primitive Church". (The question as to what is meant by the Primitive Church, and whether the practices of the Primitive Church should be the criteria of worship in a church which professes the rule *sola scriptura*, are discussed in an article on the New Baptismal Services in *The Churchman* for June, 1960.)

Dom Gregory Dix has, in recent years, popularized the notion that an Offertory of the elements, in which "bread and wine are 'taken' and placed on the table together" is part of the "absolutely invariable" shape of the liturgy throughout antiquity (*The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 48). Dix regards this Offertory as the liturgical equivalent of the Lord's action in "taking" the bread and cup at the Last Supper. But while a four-fold shape of the liturgy—taking, blessing, breaking, and giving—has a clear scriptural basis, a moment's thought will show how little ground there is for describing as an Offertory the act of taking the bread and wine.

There was no Offertory at the Last Supper. Jesus "took bread" which was already laid on the table where He reclined. Nor did Jesus "offer" the elements to God. The precise words He used in giving thanks were so incidental to His sacramental action as not to have been recorded in the gospel narratives; but if we may assume that He employed the customary Jewish thanksgiving ("Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, Eternal King, who bringest forth bread from the earth"), He did not ask God in any sense to accept the food as a gift. Neither in the New Testament, nor in the earliest eucharistic prayers known to us (in chapters 9 and 10 of the very Jewish *Didache*), is there the slightest hint that the cup or the loaf were thought of as offerings or sacrifices in any form.

How, then, did the action of bringing up bread and wine arise, and how came it to be invested with "offertory" significance?

The bringing of bread and wine for the Lord's Supper to the president is first mentioned in Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150) but the action there is, as Dr. J. H. Srawley remarks, "quite informal" (*The Early History of the Liturgy*, p. 35). It is invested with no special significance. Though some may regard it as "the beginnings of what afterwards became the ritual offertory" (*ibid.*), it is anachronistic to describe it as

the "Offertory" in Justin's day, as some writers do (for example, W. D. Maxwell in his *Outline of Christian Worship*, p. 13). Justin, incidentally, mentions almsgiving in his section on Sunday worship, but he does not say when it took place, or even that it took place within the service at all. He says: "they that are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, etc." (*Apol.*, 1. 67).

The Roman Catholic liturgiologist, Dr. Adrian Fortesque, regards the bringing of bread and wine to the altar as basically a prior "detail to observe" if the action of the Lord at the Last Supper is to be repeated at all. But "very soon (*sc.* after the simple action of Justin's time) the idea developed that as they are brought they should be offered to God at once, before they are consecrated. This is only one case of the universal practice of dedicating to God anything that is to be used for His service. We dedicate churches: bless the water for baptism and offer to God the bread and wine to be consecrated" (*The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy*, p. 296). Note Fortesque's explanation of how meaning came to be attached to this incidental feature of the service. He does not, however, make clear exactly *when* he considers this "offering to God" to have begun. Even in the liturgy of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, belonging to the second half of the fourth century, "the gifts," he says, "are brought to the altar in the simplest way when they are wanted; there is nothing that can really be called an offertory at all" (*op. cit.*, p. 297).

Another distinguished liturgiologist, Anton Baumstark, whose *Comparative Liturgy* was edited for English readers by Professor F. L. Cross of Oxford and published by Mowbrays in 1958, gives an explanation differing only slightly from that of Fortesque. Baumstark agrees that the bringing of the elements has no intrinsic significance. There are, he says, two types of action in liturgy: those which "from the time of their admission to the cult have had a symbolic meaning", and those which are "intrinsically utilitarian and required by the very course of the function, by its outward structure". The bringing of the elements belongs to the latter group. Baumstark observes, however, that "the devotion of the faithful has been such that they have often found gratification in attaching a symbolic meaning *a posteriori* even to actions of the (latter) kind" (*Comparative Liturgy*, p. 130).

Some will consider that the reference in 1 Clement 44 to "offering the gifts of the bishop's office" is evidence for an Offertory of the elements as early as the late first century. Even Bishop Lightfoot holds the expression to refer to the offering of the total worship of the congregation including its charitable contributions and provisions for the eucharist. He draws attention to the mention of such gifts and offerings in Book II of the *Apostolic Constitutions*. But the *Apostolic Constitutions* is a good deal later, even if it is to some extent influenced by 1 Clement. There is nothing in 1 Clement to compel the conclusion that "the gifts of the bishop's office" which the Corinthian elders had "blamelessly and holily offered" were an offertory of bread and wine for the communion. For one thing, the expression may be purely metaphorical. Clement's task is to impress on the Corinthians the divinely ordered character of the episcopal ministry. You must not

throw out men who have done, and done properly, what God laid upon them to do. These men "have ministered unblamably to the flock of Christ". That was their *leitourgia*, their sacrificial service. Clement adopts Old Testament terminology, and his argument is logical. Men who have so ministered, have "offered the gifts" of a bishop's office. Paul used similar metaphorical language when he spoke of offering the gifts of his apostolic ministry (Rom. xv. 16). If, however, we take the language less metaphorically, Clement still provides no evidence for a specific Offertory of eucharistic elements. Even if, in fact, the elements for the eucharist were taken out of the general charitable offerings of the people (Clement does not say so), the bringing up of such elements for use in the communion was subsequent and incidental to the general offering of charitable gifts: it was not itself an Offertory.

Three conclusions may be made at this point.

First, the Offertory as Dix conceives it—the taking of bread and wine and placing them on the table together—is *not* an essential part of the shape of the liturgy.

Secondly, in so far as such an action was carried out in the church of the first and second centuries, it was incidental and utilitarian, and was not invested, so far as we know, with any theological meaning: in particular, it was not an "offertory".

Thirdly, our present rubric—"the priest shall then place upon the table so much bread and wine as he shall think sufficient"—is closer to the informal procedure of the "primitive" church than is the modern "people's offertory" with its various *a posteriori* symbolism (such as, that the elements symbolize the created order, or the fruits of men's labours, or the worshippers themselves).

* * * *

In regard to the first of these conclusions, it is important to note that Dr. E. L. Mascall has recently criticized Dix's inclusion of the Offertory in the four-fold shape of the eucharistic action. Mascall rightly points out that "the first of the four 'actions' of which the eucharist is composed—the 'taking'—does not occur until *after* the elements have been brought up" (*The Recovery of Unity*, p. 149). The four actions, taking, blessing, breaking, and giving, should all take place in close relation to one another and in the canon itself, according to Mascall. As we pointed out earlier, this is exactly what one sees in the action of the Last Supper, when Jesus "took" bread which had already been brought, in some manner unknown, to the table.

Now, if *this* is the action which it is important to reproduce in our liturgy, clearly no alteration of our Prayer Book service is needed in this respect, for the action of "taking" is specifically rehearsed, in imitation of our Lord's action "in the same night as He was betrayed", in the manual acts during the Prayer of Consecration. But the Lambeth recommendation can hardly have reference to such an idea.

However, it is the theology of Mascall which provides the clue as to what really lies behind the Lambeth recommendation. Mascall's view of the Offertory (that is, the bringing of bread and wine to the table) proceeds from his view of the eucharistic action itself. His theology of the Communion is that "there is one offering, an offering of bread and

wine, which, being transformed by divine acceptance, becomes the offering of the Body and Blood; and it takes place in the canon" (*Corpus Christi*, p. 183, *The Recovery of Unity*, p. 149). What then is the meaning of the bringing up of bread and wine? Following the liturgical tendency noted by Baumstark, a symbolic meaning is attached *a posteriori* to this once incidental action. The Offertory becomes, on Mascall's view, "the bringing of the elements for the sacrifice"; it is the "foundation of the eucharist" (though "not part of it"). Naturally, it is desirable on this view that the people should be "definitely associated" with such an Offertory, and that it should be "closely connected" with the Prayer of Consecration. But the justification of such an Offertory stands or falls with the justification of the eucharistic theology from which it is derived.

Not all who urge the introduction of an Offertory of elements into our liturgy will go all the way with Mascall's theology of the sacrament. But there can be no justification of an Offertory which does not regard the bread and wine as *in some sense* offered to God in the eucharistic action itself. The Offertory cannot be anything but an anticipatory action. Even the startling language of the Offertory prayer in the Roman liturgy is generally interpreted now as anticipating the *offerimus* of the canon itself.

The Church of England nowhere in its formularies teaches that the Lord's Supper was instituted as a means whereby we might offer bread and wine to God, either as a material oblation or as representing something else. Our church does not teach this, because the New Testament does not teach it. To give thanks for bread and wine, or for what bread and wine may represent by Christ's ordinance in the sacrament, is the very opposite of offering those elements as oblations or gifts to God. The compilers of our liturgy preserved the biblical paradox that a worshipper offers a sacrifice of praise (that is, glorifies God) by the very act of *receiving* with faith and thanksgiving the gift of God, but at no point did they allow that bread and wine are presented to God. Nothing is offered in our Prayer of Consecration except the petition "that we *receiving* these thy creatures of bread and wine may be *partakers* of His most blessed body and blood". If nothing is offered to God in the form of bread and wine at the Consecration, there can be no point at all in an anticipatory Offertory of such elements.

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The chief conclusions of this study may be stated thus :

1. The furnishing of bread and wine is a necessary, but incidental and utilitarian, feature of the sacrament of Holy Communion.
2. There is no evidence that the bringing up of bread and wine for the Communion was regarded as an Offertory either in the New Testament or in the second century, although the bread and wine for the Communion may, as early as the second century, have been taken from the charitable gifts furnished as alms by the worshippers.
3. The conception of an Offertory of the bread and wine is inseparable from a conception of the sacrament itself as being in some sense a sacrifice of material elements to God.

4. There is no conception of the sacrament as being a sacrifice, nor is there an Offertory of elements, in the New Testament, or in the Anglican tradition as represented by the Book of Common Prayer from 1549 to 1662, that is to the present day.
5. The Offertory in the Book of Common Prayer is the Offertory of alms and oblations as sanctioned by clear scriptural teaching, and this Offertory has no connection with the action of the sacrament itself.

Huldreich Zwingli, Swiss Reformer

BY JAMES ATKINSON

ALL the Reformers have suffered misunderstanding because of the generalizations of historians and theologians.

It is true that misunderstanding arises from other factors. Sooner or later all the Reformers found themselves involved in controversy and polemic, and frequently this had the effect of sharpening their views to the mischievous point of a catch phrase. For example, Luther was and is criticized for his alleged one-sidedness in his emphasis of *sola fide*, but men forget that his emphasis on faith was an effort to redress the balance of a wrong emphasis on works. Luther never taught anything other than salvation in Christ, but in an atmosphere of a semi-Pelagian and semi-Judaistic interpretation of Christianity which resisted salvation in Christ *only*, his responsibility was to say so and make it clear beyond compromise and confusion. Calvin experienced a similar difficulty when men rushed in to define and explain his plain Biblical and catholic emphasis on predestination (though their anthropocentric terms were powerless to do so), thereby removing the doctrine out of its one setting that validates it, namely, the mercy of God active in Christ. Zwingli suffered, too. He lost his life in controversy on the as yet unsolved question that if Christianity is true, what, then, is its relation to society in general? Even Luther misunderstood Zwingli in his relation to humanism and the sacraments. He even suspected him of enthusiasm. Small wonder is it that lesser men have to make quick judgments on the Reformers and pass on to fill in the picture of history, leaving these false judgments and misunderstandings for all time.

If truth pays a high premium to controversy, it pays higher ones to prejudice and ignorance and natural conservatism.

Controversy, polemic, prejudice, ignorance, and conservatism are fairly easy to see, and a man who stands in the freedom wherewith Christ has set him free may understand, assess, and allow for all these. What he is not in an easy position to estimate are the general judgments of historians and theologians, because in large areas of his