

## The Principles of Divine Service.

THE Public Worship of the Church as conducted in our parish churches is always, so far as my experience goes, rendered reverently and sometimes very beautifully ; but now and then one finds that the prayers are apt to be an incoherent mixture of thanksgivings, petitions, confessions, and intercessions, with no definite order in their arrangement, and with no apparent principle on which the sequence of the parts is based. Now this is an unfortunate thing, for if our worship is to be truly a *united* worship, it ought to be one which all the worshippers can follow alike with heart and mind, and one in which they can make the prayers their own.

So in this paper I wish to try to set forth the Principles of Divine Service as I understand them, and to indicate the continuous chain of thoughts and ideas on which I believe a complete act of worship in the House of God ought to hang.

Historically this sense of order was somewhat slow of developing in Christian worship, and that chiefly for two reasons.

The first reason was that in the early centuries almost the whole attention of those who compiled the Liturgies was concentrated on the Service of Holy Communion, which was regarded as *par excellence* THE Divine Service, and especially on the perfecting of the great Eucharistic Prayer. The earlier part of the service varied greatly in different parts of the Church, though it mostly included all the essential elements of worship.

The other reason was that the lesser services or Daily Offices of the Church, apart from the Eucharist, were not regarded as complete in themselves, but largely as a setting for the Psalms as acts of giving glory to God. Thus in none of the seven of them, except Prime and Compline, is there any explicit Confession of Sin, and even in these two the Confession comes near the end ; and in none of them, except when the Litany was said, is there any direct Intercession, though in the course of time an "intention" of intercession for various objects was read into each of them, to be in the hearts and minds of the wor-

shippers at the various hours of the day and on the various days of the week.

But it was only at the Reformation and in the Forms of Worship prepared for the Reformed and Protestant Churches that every service—not the Eucharist alone, but *every* service in God's House—became a complete act of devotion, containing all the elements of worship, and with each part falling into the appointed place with which we are most familiar to-day. It was due to Calvin first of all that the primary place in each ordinary service was given to the Confession of Sin, and that Intercession became the great central act to which the rest led up. And consciously or unconsciously, the same principles were adopted by Cranmer in compiling the services of Matins and Evensong in the Book of Common Prayer, by Knox in framing the Book of Common Order, and at a later date by the Westminster Divines in drawing up the Directory of Public Worship.

The Principles of Divine Service, I believe, ought to be based on Holy Scripture, and we must look for them and find them in the New Testament. In the Teaching of our Lord we are told that where two agree they shall be heard, and that where two or three are gathered together in His Name there is He in the midst of them : that is our great Charter. Further, as to its form and method, we have the precepts of S. Paul that all things should be done decently and in order, that all things should be done unto edifying, and that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks should be made for all men. Again, we have the great purpose of worship, like that of all Christian life, declared to be to give glory to God. But the supreme thought, that I believe ought to underlie it all, is that which we find partly in the first Epistle of S. Peter and partly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that *all Christian people form a holy priesthood offering unto God spiritual sacrifices through Christ their great High Priest*. He stands at the heavenly Altar, presenting on behalf of His people the merits of His own atoning Sacrifice, offering up the Intercessions of His saints, and shedding down His Benediction on His Church. And we draw nigh to God through Him to have part with Him in all these priestly acts. The Christian Minister is not a priest in the sacerdotal sense of the word. He is the leader of the worship, the organ of the universal priesthood ; and all

alike approach to God and make their offering to Him through the One Divine and Heavenly Priest.

The primary act on our part, therefore, ought to be a common act of Penitence, a common Confession of Sin. We come as sin-stained men and women, stained with the dust and mire of the earthly journey, and we need to have these stains washed off that we may stand in the presence of our God. Ordinarily indeed in our Scottish Churches the service begins with praise; but I would insist that it is not any or every kind of praise that is appropriate at the outset, but essentially a Psalm or Hymn of invitation or approach to God. It is, in fact, simply a Call to Prayer, continued and prolonged in the solemn words of Scripture that call us in God's name to draw near to Him and to bow ourselves at His feet. The Prayer itself also fittingly begins with a petition of access or of invocation. But the primary attitude of heart and spirit to which we are called is that of humbling ourselves before the mercy seat as sinners in need of pardon, and of offering the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart.

The Confession of our sins should not be too detailed nor too minute, since it is meant to express the feelings of all the congregation. But in this, as in all our worship, there must be the note of a deep sincerity. We all should be made to feel that in one way or another we have broken God's laws, and distrusted His promises, and slighted His love, and are unworthy of the least of His mercies. And we all must be taught to bewail the impurity of motive, the infirmity of will, the thoughtlessness of speech, and the selfishness of act, by which we daily come short of His glory.

Yet thus confessing our sins to Him, we plead His forgiving love as revealed in Christ Jesus. We come through Him Who has offered the one eternal Sacrifice, and through Him we receive the assurance of pardon and peace. So we are led by our great High Priest up the three great steps—in Dante's striking image, the stained and spotted step of human sin, the blood-red step of His own precious blood, the pure white step of His Spirit's cleansing power,—up to the Holy of Holies of our God. This is the true Absolution, not in the words of man, but according to the promises of God, confirmed and sealed through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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So pardoned and accepted, we enter into perfect communion with our Father, and pour out before Him the desires and longings of our hearts. Our Supplications may well begin with a fresh dedication of ourselves to His service, and should contain petitions for the grace and blessing that we need alike for body and for soul ; and in offering them we can use some of that great devotional heritage, which has come down to us from the early centuries and forms part of the common treasury of Christendom, in which we are joined to the great multitude of our fellow-Christians in all the ages and through all the world. And this great first Prayer, all offered in the name of Christ our Lord, most fittingly closes with the sublime form of prayer that He has taught us, which unites us all as children round our Father's knees.

Having thus presented our wants and desires to God, the natural response of our hearts is an outburst of Praise to His name. And Praise, like Prayer, should be regarded as a Sacrifice, a holy offering to God, presented in the name of Christ our great High Priest. The special form of praise that through the centuries has been used at this point of the service has been that of the ancient Psalms. It is not in my province to discuss *how* the Psalms should be sung, but I would just say that, if they can be chanted with reverence and joined in by all, it is well they should be rendered so ; but for the great majority of our congregations I believe it is best that they simply be sung in the metrical version to our noble old Psalm tunes. Yet even the metrical Psalms might well receive a Christian note by ending, as for eighty years after the Reformation in Scotland they always did, with a metrical doxology.

So we are attuned to hear the Word of God to us, through which we continue our fellowship with Him ; and the reading of the Lessons from Holy Scripture is an important part of the Service. The Westminster Directory enjoins that the Scriptures should be read consecutively, in order that the lessons may form a continuous course of instruction in Bible history and Bible truth ; and it is an injunction to be seriously laid to heart. It is a pernicious habit to make the selection of passages read depend upon the subject of the sermon, and thus to " hop about from place to place," for it is certain that the same favourite chapters will be read again and again, and many invaluable parts omitted ; and I believe that one of the

great *desiderata* of our Church is a good and workable Lectionary.

The Old Testament Lesson is naturally followed by an act of praise, and the Hymn or Psalm at this place should be one of pure praise—not a merely subjective expression of Christian experience, but one of the great objective Hymns to the glory of God. The New Testament Lesson likewise, whether from the Gospels or the Epistles, finds its fitting response in the recital of the Apostles' Creed, or in a Hymn of Faith. In Knox's Book of Common Order, it should be remembered, the Creed had a place in every Morning Service.

So we are led up, through penitence and pardon, through fellowship with God in prayer and praise and in His holy Word, to that which ought to be the crowning act of all our ordinary worship—the offering of the Sacrifice of Intercession. For Intercession is the crown of all, the main purpose, after the glory of God, for which from week to week we neglect not the assembling of ourselves together. And next to the celebration of Holy Communion, in which indeed it has a central place, it makes the greatest demand on the heart and soul of Minister and people alike. Here we come into closest union with the work of our great High Priest. He standeth at the altar ; He offereth every prayer ; and every time the Church bells ring it ought to be the intimation to His people that He is there presenting Himself, ready to offer our united intercessions perfumed with the incense of His love.

The Intercessions in Divine Service ought not to be too detailed nor too long ; but there are certain great things for which we ought always to pray. First, there is the holy Church of God, that He would enrich it with His grace and blessing, pouring forth His Spirit on those who bear Ministry therein, and binding all His people in the bonds of faith and unity and love. Then there is the world that is in darkness, that He would shed on it His heavenly light, and hasten the victory of His Kingdom in the hearts of men. Then there are our King and country, and all the nations of the earth with those who rule therein, that they may be guided and governed in righteousness and peace. And lastly, there are the suffering and distressed, that He would bestow His pity on the afflicted, His strength on the weary, and His comfort on the desolate and sad.

And while we remember the Living, we should never forget the faithful Departed and the blessed Dead, but thank God with solemn hearts for all they have been and for all they are, beseeching Him to keep us knit with them in fellowship of spirit, and to bring us with them to His eternal rest and joy.

And all we ask and all we offer is in and through Him, the eternal Intercessor, out of Whose hand the incense of our prayers continually ascends to heaven.

It seems a natural transition from this special thanksgiving for the saints of God, with which our intercessions end, to the General Thanksgiving for all the gifts that He bestows—for the bounties of His providence, and the riches of His grace, crowned with His unspeakable gift in Jesus Christ our Lord—so that our devotional service may end on an exultant note of praise.

The Hymn that follows usually has a bearing on the subject of the sermon, but on the sermon itself, important though its place is in our Scottish service, I do not dwell, for it is not within the scope of this paper.

But after the sermon it is right that the Offering should be taken, so that the gifts of the people in outward things may have a place in our worship, and be presented as an offering to God.

And the service ends, after the closing Hymn of Praise, with the solemn Benediction. And here again we have part with our great High Priest. Even as our living Lord in ascending into heaven lifted up His hands and blessed His disciples, and even as He stands with His hands uplifted still, so do His ordained servants in His name pronounce the word that bids His people go in peace.

Thus, based on the principles I have sought to indicate, our worship in the House of God pursues an orderly sequence of thought and devotion which every one can follow, so that we can worship with our understandings as well as with our hearts ; and in offering the sacrifices of our prayers and praises, we are led to present ourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.

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