

An Ecumenical Venture in Liturgy

The Book of Common Worship. The Church of South India. London, Oxford University Press, 1963. 214 pages. 9s 6d. net.

THIS new service-book is both of great importance and of deep interest. The Church of South India was formed in 1947 through the union of Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, an important pioneering move towards Church Unity, and it was necessary without delay to prepare services which would be acceptable to all parts of the Church. Experimental services were prepared, and these were widely used and gradually revised in the light of experience, and now this book containing the revised services has been published. Externally it has a very satisfying appearance, and the printing is of the high standard to which the Oxford University Press has accustomed us.

We shall now describe and comment upon the contents of the book. The first section, which precedes the services themselves, contains "Directions to Ministers" on sixteen pages. These are extremely useful. For one thing, they clarify many points about which there might be difficulty. For example, the rule about the invitation to visitors to join with the congregation at Holy Communion is put thus--"When visitors are present, the presbyter may invite any communicant member of any Church with which the Church of South India is in fellowship to partake of the Holy Communion with this congregation." In connection with the administration of Holy Baptism, the regulations about parents and godparents are clearly set down, with due emphasis on instruction, and various suggestions are made as to the conduct of the service. Secondly, the Directions contain suggestions for alternative words and actions. Thus, the Words of Administration at Holy Communion are given in the Order itself, but the Directions provide three other sets of Words. Again, it is pointed out that the Confirmation service may be held, (a) as a separate service; (b) during a celebration of the Lord's supper; or (c) along with Baptism, and in the last two cases the order of events is detailed. Thirdly, a few additional services or ceremonies are provided for. There are for example details regarding

the rules and methods for the reception of members from other Churches.

It is an excellent idea to have these Directions gathered together at the beginning of the book. It means that ministers are thus given a great deal of help about difficult or obscure points, and also that it is unnecessary to have notes printed in the services themselves.

“An Order for the Lord’s Supper or the Holy Eucharist” comes first, as being the most important, the central, act of worship in the Christian Church. In the Order, the *Gloria in Excelsis* comes near the beginning and the Nicene Creed follows the Sermon which follows the lessons. After a hymn the intercessions are made. The Words of Institution are read within the prayer of Consecration. The Directions state that “Communion may be administered in the place and manner customary in the congregation.”

Following this order, there are the Propers—Bible Readings, Collects and Prefaces, proper for Sundays and Special Days, Seasons and Occasions. For each of these occasions the appropriate Collect is printed, with, for the Morning and Old Testament Lesson, Psalm, Epistle and Gospel; and for the Evening an Old Testament and a New Testament Lesson.

This raises the question of the Calendar and especially the names of Sundays, in which there are several changes here. Thus there are seven Sundays after Christmas, the usual title “after Epiphany” being departed from. These seven Sundays are followed by nine Sundays before Easter. The Sundays after Trinity are numbered as after Pentecost, this being a return to the Roman nomenclature. There are many changes in subjects for individual Sundays. Thus the second Sunday in Advent, widely known as Bible Sunday with Cramner’s Collect, is given the subject, “Christ in the Old Testament,” with a new Collect. The Presentation of Christ is transferred from the traditional date February 2, to the Third after Christmas; and the Transfiguration of Christ is put at Fourth in Lent instead of on August 6, the traditional date. The biggest change is in the Sundays after Pentecost. It was decided to select subjects for these Sundays under the general title, “The Christian Life.” Sundays after Pentecost 2 to 5 are on God’s Call; 6 to 11 are on Bible, Church, and Sacraments; 12 to 17 are on the Life of Devotion; 18 to 23 are on Life in the World, and 24 to 27 are on the End. This series is used only as far as the Sunday next before Advent.

This is an interesting way of dealing with the Sundays after Pentecost, and is much better than some suggestions made elsewhere, but whether it is the right answer to the problem is another question. There is little doubt that many will think of other important subjects which are omitted from this series.

There is a Table of Special Days on Fixed Dates, mostly referring to scriptural saints. But there are also Covenant Day (Jan. 1), Republic Day (Jan. 26), Independence Day (Aug. 15) and Inauguration of the Church of South India (Sept. 27), the last three of which are of Indian interest alone. There are also eleven Common Forms for Commemorations—Apostles, Martyrs, Faithful Women, Preachers of the Gospel, Pastors, Teachers, Doctors of the Church, Healers of the Sick, Prophets and Reformers, Pioneers and Builders, Servants of the Church. Many of the Collects here are new and will be found very useful.

There are three Orders for Morning and Evening Worship. The first is simply part of the Order for the Lord's Supper; the second is built on the pattern of Mattins in the *Book of Common Prayer*: and the third mainly follows the order of the *Book of Common Order*. These are followed by an appendix with two tables (a longer and a shorter) of Psalms for Daily Reading.

As to the orders for Holy Baptism, the first is of persons able to answer for themselves, and the second, of infants. There is also a useful "Office for Making a Catechumen" along with the first, and "A Thanksgiving after Childbirth" with the second. It will be interesting to compare these with the services prepared by the Church of Scotland Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion. The Order for "The Reception of Baptized Persons into the Full Fellowship of the Church, commonly called Confirmation," follows.

A new form is "The Covenant Service," meant to be used on January 1 or other suitable day when the members of the congregation join to renew their covenant with God. It is intended that this should be followed by a celebration of the Lord's Supper, but it can be used by itself. The Marriage Service and the Burial Service follow.

The *Ordinal* contains Orders for the Ordination of Deacons, the Ordination of Presbyters, and the Consecration of Bishops. It is interesting to find in the preamble, questions and ordination or consecration prayer, many points of resemblance to those which appear in the Church of Scotland *Ordinal*.

At the end there is a short order for the Lord's Supper, but this applies only to the preparation and the ministry of the Word, the remainder of the service to be the normal one.

Lastly, and of great interest and importance, are Tables of Daily Bible Readings. These are readings for Monday to Saturday in each week, those for Sundays being found among the Propers. For each day, morning and evening, an Old Testament lesson and a New Testament lesson are provided. Much of the arrangement is *lectio continua* and the whole lay-out is worth careful examination.

It is clear that much thought has gone into the preparation of this Service Book. There is much in it that comes from the traditions of the component communions, but there is also a great deal that is new. It is likely that further experiment will suggest changes of one kind or another in days to come. But the book should be studied by all who are interested in the problems of public worship, and it seems certain that future revisions of services in other Churches will owe much to this of the Church of South India.

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