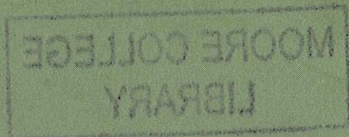


THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS WORSHIP

**Christian Worship in the Light of
The Question of Church Reunion**

by **D. B. KNOX,**



THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS WORSHIP

Christian Worship in the Light of The Question of Church Reunion

by

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Continued from back cover

trends in the Christian world today. He sets out clearly the essence of true worship and then discusses this in relation to the Prayer Book of the Church of England, and to the question of church unity — the failure to achieve it in 1662, and the lessons about freedom of worship to be learnt for any union schemes today.

An excellent book to use in a senior Study Group in any Church. (When used in this way, some members of other denominations may choose to omit Chapter Two on the Anglican Prayer Book.)

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"O come, let us worship . . ."

Psalm 95:6

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INTRODUCTION

A sermon preached before the
Synod of the Diocese of Sydney
in St. Andrew's Cathedral on the
occasion of the Tercentenary of the
Book of Common Prayer of 1662.

THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS WORSHIP

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF WORSHIP

The nature of our worship takes its character from the God Whom we worship, for worship is our acknowledgment of God, our giving worth to Him by our recognition of His nature. Thus ways of worship vary with concepts of God. For example, the way Baal was worshipped was derived from the worshippers' views of what Baal was like. Heathen worship springs directly from heathen views of God's nature, as also the worship of the philosopher is derived from his philosophic views of God. Christian worship is based on the Christian doctrine of God.

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD.

The Christian doctrine of God is **unique** in its essential truths, and consequently the Christian worship of God is unique in its essential principles.

Firstly, the Christian doctrine of God is unique in its source, for our knowledge of God comes, not from the ideas of our own heart which we share with all men, but from the revelation of God Himself. God's Word gives truth about God very different from what we would have guessed if left to the resources of our own minds. Thus if Christian worship is truly to reflect God as He has revealed Himself, it must be scriptural.

Because we are men there will always be a pull in the direction of natural religion, to make our Christian worship conform to the ideas of God which arise from our human nature. But such views of God are distorted and false, and if our worship is to remain true and acceptable to God, it must keep within the revelation of Holy Scripture.

Secondly, the Christian concept of God is unique in regard to our experience of God. Christianity is fellowship with God through forgiveness of sins. Both the doctrine of our adoption into sonship, and the doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are unique to Christianity; and the fellowship with God and with one another which results from the gift of the Holy Spirit makes the Christian faith very

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different from the darkness of the non-Christian, who is "without God and without hope in the world".

Consequently our worship of God must reflect this fellowship, a fellowship expressed in many ways but essentially a fellowship on the basis of forgiveness of sins, the fellowship, or communion, of the body and blood of Christ, a fellowship with God and with one another on the basis of Christ's atoning death.

Thirdly, the Christian concept of God is unique with regard to its content. Psalm 95 directs the worshipper to two primary aspects of God's character on which His worship depends: first, to God's almighty creative sovereignty, "For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods"; and secondly, to His character of love expressed in the covenant, "For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand".

We see that God is our almighty Shepherd, One Who controls in His sovereign power every event in the universe, every electron in the atoms of every galaxy, and Who, with this almighty sovereignty, unites also immeasurable love, protecting and providing, defending and saving the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

He is our Covenant God, our almighty Shepherd and Saviour. No detail of our life, not even the hairs of our head, are too insignificant for His loving care. His love is most perfectly expressed in the gift of salvation, in that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us". This is the unchanging character of God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.

THE ESSENCE OF TRUE WORSHIP.

How may we worthily worship such a God? How rightly acknowledge His character and attribute to Him His worth?

Both Scripture and reason unite in replying that an almighty, all-loving God is only worthily acknowledged by trust and faith. The accepting of His provision for our need is the basic response. That provision is, primarily, free forgiveness, but it also includes an ongoing provision for daily life, expressed in His promises and commands.

Thus worship is offered, firstly, in accepting His forgiveness and in daily trusting Him through prayer and obedience, with thanksgiving. Such is the truest acknowledgment of God's essential character; of the fact that He is our almighty Shepherd and Saviour. All other worship is derivative from this.

Our common worship on Sundays is guided by the same principles. One of its chief objectives is to strengthen and express faith. Thus St. Paul exhorted the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you

richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing **one another** with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God; and whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of our Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

We see then that Christian worship is a day-by-day activity, in which every event of life, and all its problems, are the raw material for the worship of peaceful trust and glad obedience.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what way does the character of the God we worship show up in the way we worship?
2. "Because we are men, there will always be a pull in the direction of natural religion, to make our Christian worship conform to the ideas of God which arise from our human nature." Can you illustrate how this can be so? How can we make our worship remain true and acceptable to God?
3. "The Christian doctrine of God is unique . . ." In which ways is it unique?
4. What is the basic response with which we most worthily worship God?

CHAPTER TWO

WORSHIP AND THE ANGLICAN PRAYER BOOK

The Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, the 300th anniversary of which was celebrated in 1962, embodies the three principles of worship which were outlined in Chapter One.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Firstly, the Prayer Book is scriptural. Not only does its language abound in Bible quotation and allusion but, more importantly, Scripture controls its forms of worship. Article 6 of the Thirty-Nine Articles reminds us that what is not contained in Scripture is not to be required of any man to be believed as an article of the Faith or as necessary to salvation; and the Prayer Book proceeds on the same principle that what has not the clear endorsement of Scripture is not to find a place in a book for common worship.

This is a most important principle to remember today when Prayer Book revision is under consideration. It is not enough that a form of worship should be primitive, or that, in our estimation, it should enrich the service. If the doctrine that underlies any form of worship has not the clear support of Scripture, it is not to find its place in common public worship. If it were to do so, our worship would not honour the God Who has revealed Himself in Scripture.

Secondly, through the congregational nature of its forms of worship, the Prayer Book expresses the fellowship that characterises Christianity. Doubtless the book can be improved further in this direction, but nevertheless compared with earlier forms of worship — and with some contemporary forms — the Prayer Book is remarkably congregational, and this is one of its strengths. In the Prayer Book, especially in its form for the Lord's Supper as it is intended to be administered, common worship is a fellowship with God and with one another on the basis of forgiveness in Christ.

Thirdly, the Prayer Book makes the response of faith a primary medium of worship. For example, the reading of the Scriptures and their exposition in the sermon are central in the Prayer Book services, because it is only as God's Word is heard that faith can be exercised.

Of course, Christian worship includes many facets which it shares in common with non-Christian religions (for example, adoration, prayer and praise); yet its distinctively Christian character is expressed through

complete trust and faith in God's loving promises and through the glad obedience which follows.

For such worship the reading of the Scripture and the proclamation of God's character, whether through the sermon or the sacrament, is central.

THE RESPONSE OF FAITH

Notice how in each of the three Absolutions of the Prayer Book* the promises of God to the truly penitent are mentioned. This was not accidental, as is illustrated from Archbishop Cranmer's remark to Henry VIII. The King, in revising an early Reformation document, had abbreviated the form of Absolution by omitting any reference to God's promises of forgiveness. The Archbishop expostulated, "The promises are stricken out, which chiefly ought to be known."

Knowledge of God's promises is essential for faith, and without faith there can be no true absolution. It is a pity that the Absolution in the proposed 1928 Prayer Book has not conformed to Cranmer's pattern.

Notice also how the Prayer Book introduces the Comfortable Words after the Absolution in the Holy Communion, in order that when we lift up our hearts to the Lord, we might lift them up in the worship of faith.

Another illustration of the response of faith as the acme of worship is in the words of distribution of the elements. You will notice that the phrase "given **for thee**" or "shed **for thee**" occurs four times in these four short sentences. This again is not accidental, but has arisen from the history of the words. The present form is a conflation of the words of the Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552. In both those Prayer Books, although in other respects the words of distribution vary, the phrase "for thee" was twice included because it is at the point of reception of the elements that faith must be intensely personal. As we receive, so we worship God the Giver.

The worshipper must appropriate for himself the provision of forgiveness in Christ which God has provided for the world, if he is to honour God as a loving Saviour. Without this response of faith all other worship, whether adoration, or prayer, or the offering of ourselves in obedience, is empty.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the three principles of true Christian worship?
2. In what ways is Christian worship similar to, and different from, that of non-Christian religions?
3. What is the relationship between faith and worship?

*These three absolutions are found: (1) In the services of Morning and Evening Prayer; (2) in the Service of Holy Communion; and (3) in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ORIGIN OF DENOMINATIONAL
DISUNITY

Much of the present division between the English Churches (and thus of the Churches of the greater part of the English-speaking world) can be traced back to the events of the years 1660 to 1662. In view of the tremendous interest in all denominations at present in the question of Church union, it is instructive to look back and see why one comprehensive denomination did not eventuate in 1662 but that rather our present system of parallel denominations has grown up.

THE RESTORATION OF THE MONARCHY

By 1660 the Church of England had carried on its life without the use of the Prayer Book and without government by bishops for almost twenty years. During this period of the Commonwealth a great work of God had been effected through the faithful preaching of His Word.

When Oliver Cromwell died, England was faced with the dilemma of whether the military government should be continued or the traditional government by crown and parliament restored. The great majority of the Puritan clergy in the Church of England supported the restoration of the monarchy, though they recognised the possible danger to true religion. However, they hoped that a comprehensive religious settlement would be agreed upon. They were not opposed to episcopacy, though they were opposed to prelacy that governed beyond the law; nor were they opposed to the Prayer Book liturgy, though they wished to see some changes by way of less rigidity.

At first it seemed that their very moderate requests would be met in full.

When Charles II was at Breda on the Continent before his return to England he had issued the following promise with regard to the settlement of religious affairs: "We do declare a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matters of religion which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom."

Later that year, after his return — in October, 1660 — he issued what he called "a declaration to all his loving subjects of his Kingdom

in England concerning ecclesiastical affairs." In it Charles and his chancellor, Clarendon, declared their intention of meeting the main Puritan requests. Indeed, what Charles undertook went far beyond what the Puritan clergy of the Church of England were asking for.

Unfortunately, however, Charles was a man of no character or principle. Time showed that this declaration was simply meant to deceive and keep the protestant party quiet till the time was more propitious. Indeed when a bill was introduced into Parliament to give legal force to the October declaration, the king and his ministers took the lead in obtaining its rejection.

When the Act of Uniformity prescribing the present Church of England Prayer Book was enacted a little later, it conceded nothing, and made the conditions of subscription to the Prayer Book by clergy more stringent than they had ever been before in the entire history of the Church of England.

The Act of Uniformity was followed by the eviction of 2,000 clergy from their ministry: that is, almost one fifth of the clergy (and they unquestionably the most earnest and successful section). In the words of Dr. Henson, a former Bishop of Durham, "The Act of Uniformity left them no choice between retirement and infamy." The declaration which that Act required of every clergyman and schoolmaster could not be subscribed to by a conscientious supporter of the Commonwealth without perjury, and, moreover, if the clergyman concerned had received his ministry from other than episcopal hands (and this was the case with very many, for episcopacy had been disused in the Church for the last twenty years) he could retain his church only by submitting himself for re-ordination by bishops, and thus publicly branding his original ordination as invalid, and casting a slur of suspicion upon all his ministrations. Bishop Henson, in his sermon in Westminster Abbey, continued:

"No man of genuine piety could lend himself to a procedure so profane. The victims of the Act of Uniformity were ejected from the national church not for disobedience to the Prayer Book but for refusing to lay guilt on their consciences by uttering an evident falsehood and for refusing to acquiesce in a sacrilegious farce. None therefore could pretend that they were separatists for a slight cause, or question their motives for their compulsory dissent. They went forth to poverty, privation and suffering."

PERSECUTION OF NON-CONFORMISTS

Such intense persecution followed that twenty-one years later saintly Richard Baxter could write: "The jails are filled with non-conformists. Nine ministers are in Aldergate and many more in other

places, and almost all of them mulct and fined far more than ever they were worth, their wives and children in distress and want. I myself was distrainted of all my goods and books on five convictions before ever I heard of any accusation or saw a judge, and so it is with many others."

We may perhaps see God's judgment on the perfidy, the revenge and the mean persecution of the Clarendon Code which accompanied the settlement of 1662 in the great plague of 1665 when 100,000 people perished, and in the great fire of London of 1666; but it cannot be denied that the real judgment of God was the moral degradation into which England was plunged during the years that followed the Restoration, and from which it did not recover for a century, till the evangelical revival under Whitefield and Wesley renewed the life of the nation. It is interesting to note that both of John Wesley's grandfathers were Church of England clergymen who had been ejected in 1662.

It is a matter of thanksgiving that the providence of God so overruled in 1662 that the Church of England received again in its new Prayer Book a form of worship which dated back to the purest time of Reformation theology, for the 1662 Book is practically the same as the Book of 1552. In view of the dominating theology of the Restoration Church leaders who authorised it, this is indeed a cause for praise.

Yet we in the Church of England must join real penitence with our thanksgiving as we recall the events of that time.

Although 300 years old, the events of 1662 are still with us in their effects, so that it is difficult to review the history of that time without our emotions being fiercely aroused one way or the other.

But wherever our sympathies lie, we should look beyond the event to see the hand of God, for nothing takes place apart from His control. The lesson of those days is surely this: that the liberty for every man to worship according as his conscience approves the truth, is more precious than a comprehensive, all-inclusive denomination.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What steps did Charles II take to gain support for his return?
2. Why were nearly 2,000 clergy evicted from their ministry in 1662?
3. What circumstances have led to the present "parallel denominationalism"?

CHAPTER FOUR

ONE COMPREHENSIVE CHURCH AND FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

At the present time negotiations and conferences between denominations are taking place in many parts of the world. In the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, for instance, we see on the one hand discussions between the Baptist Church and the Churches of Christ, and on the other, the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches have been considering questions of Church union. The ultimate goal in each case is the uniting of existing denominations into larger, more comprehensive denominations.

Comprehension can bring much benefit: and a degree of comprehension — the inclusion of Anglicans and Presbyterians within one Church — was almost achieved in England in 1662. The factors which diverted events into another direction seem so slender that as we read them it seems unbearable that it was not achieved.

But it would have been a comprehension without any liberty or toleration for those, such as the Quakers, Baptists and Independents (the present Congregationalists), who were outside it. For neither prelate nor Puritan was willing to concede toleration in 1662.

PARALLEL DENOMINATIONALISM

However, by 1689 events had forced all to recognise that toleration was the real solution.

"The eviction of almost 2,000 incumbents," said Bishop Henson, "and they unquestionably the most earnest and successful, led to consequences of great moment which were perhaps little contemplated by the leaders of the re-established church. Religious dissent became for the first time both considerable and respected. For there could be no doubt anywhere that the ejected Puritans had been treated with gross perfidy, and that they had preferred their conscience to their interest."

Twenty-seven years of persecution demonstrated that they could not be suppressed.

Thus in place of an intolerant comprehension, we have inherited parallel denominationalism, which ensures the legal liberty of every

man to worship according to his conscience, and liberty for a congregation to come into being in order to worship God in a way which its members believe to be comfortable to His mind.

The danger of parallel denominations is, of course, clear. They may provide **false centres of loyalty**, of loyalty to our group over against other groups, instead of loyalty to Christ's people; and secondly they may tempt us to limit our Christian fellowship to our own denomination. But these are temptations which may be avoided if we are determined to seek the glory of Christ only, rather than the glory of our denomination, and to exercise true Christian fellowship on the basis of our common faith and sonship and experience of God, rather than on mere denominational membership: that is, if we avoid allowing our denominational limits to limit our fellowship in Christian things, but regard all God's sons as our true brothers.

Religious liberty is the fruit of parallel denominationalism and historically has only flourished under such a system. The unitary denomination has always been a persecuting denomination, and still is, wherever it exists today.

FREEDOM OF WORSHIP ACCORDING TO CONSCIENCE

As now negotiations are once more afoot for amalgamation of individual denominations into a comprehensive denomination, we must be careful to preserve the right to worship God according to conscience. This is no easy thing to secure, paradoxically enough, in a comprehensive denomination: for those who give a large measure of liberty within the comprehensive body begrudge it all the more intensely to those who are not satisfied and who continue to worship outside. There is still no real willingness among Christians, even among ecumenical Christians, to allow with goodwill other Christians who do not as yet see the truth exactly as they see it, to worship in their own congregations apart from the main group. Goodwill should be the link to bind Christians, but still we keep ourselves apart by asperity, if no longer by active persecution.

Till we attain this genuine goodwill to allow other Christians to worship separately if they believe God's truth so requires, without our diminishing our feelings of love and fellowship towards them, negotiations for reunion (if successful) will simply once more restrict religious liberty.

Yet religious liberty — liberty to follow the truth as we see it in a spirit of love and goodwill towards others who do not see it exactly as we do — is a pearl of great price, obtained at great cost. Moreover, it is essential for Christian worship. For God is glorified by **truth**, not by unity without truth; and if we are to worship God through

faith, which is the distinctly Christian worship, then our worship must be based on truth. For faith cannot be exercised towards that which we conceive to be a falsehood. Nor can Christian worship be expressed through forms of worship of which the conscience does not approve the truth.

"The true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. For the Father seeketh such to worship Him." (John 4:23.)

May we not see the melancholy events which accompanied the restoration of the Prayer Book and the Act of Uniformity of 1662 to be just such a seeking by God, Who is able to make the wrath of man turn to His praise?

For these events, in the wise and inscrutable providence of God, have resulted in this: that all may now worship God freely and according to conscience and — in the way the original compilers of the Prayer Book intended the users of that book to worship — in a worship based on God's Word as we each understand it, and a worship offered through faith and trust in our almighty Shepherd.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What have been the overall gains and losses to the Christian Church which have resulted from the eviction of the clergy in 1662?
2. What are the advantages and dangers of "parallel denominationalism"?
3. What important principles of worship must be preserved in any plan of Church union?



THE CHRISTIAN and HIS WORSHIP

CANON D. B. KNOX

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Canon Knox has given us here a small book in which a great many important things are said in short compass.

It should be read by all Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists in relation to the question of union amongst these Churches or between them and the Church of England. It should be read by all Anglicans concerned with the matter of church reunion and also in regard to the important present-day issue of Prayer Book revision. It has also some relevant comments to make on considerations which would affect the position of Baptists and members of the Churches of Christ and other Christian bodies in the event of a union of the larger denominations in which they are not included.

Canon Knox writes as an informed Anglican who is keenly aware of the

Continued inside front cover