

The Future of our Public Worship.

- ‘The Public Worship of God: being the Lyman Beecher Lectures on Practical Theology at Yale, 1927.’ By J. R. P. Selater, M.A., D.D. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1927.)
- ‘Ideas in Corporate Worship.’ By Robert Stephenson Simpson, D.D., the 11th Series of Chalmers Lectures delivered in Edinburgh in January 1922. (T. & T. Clark, 1927.)
- ‘Christian Worship and its Future.’ Five Lectures delivered at Ohio Wesleyan University by G. A. Johnston Ross. (The Abingdon Press, New York, 1927.)

ONE of the most significant features of Christian thought to-day is the increasing prominence given to the philosophy and practice of public worship. In Scotland we have now an almost embarrassing number of forms of service, some of them the production of individuals, others appearing with a measure of official authority. And more and more the subject is claiming entrance into our divinity halls. At last it is being realised that there is something far wrong with a system of instruction which devotes hundreds of lectures and years of toil to the study of the sacred languages, the doctrines of the faith, the history of the Church, and yet sends our students out unprepared for what is perhaps the most important part of their life’s work, certainly the part which touches their people most closely—the celebration of Divine Service.

It was within the Church of Scotland, about the middle of the nineteenth century, that interest in the form and ordering of public worship first revived. The various publications of the Church Service Society did much to diffuse knowledge and to stimulate interest, but the number of books published on the subject during the last two generations is a very small proportion of the total number of volumes issued during the period on theological matters in general, and, outside the Church of Scotland, interest was slow to grow, and the very subject seemed almost suspect. The last few years have seen a great change. Almost every part of the Presbyterian Church has now contributed to the discussion of our worship, and has evinced a keen desire to re-examine the whole subject. We deal in this article with three important books, all published before the Union of the

Scottish Churches, all the work of men who did not originally belong to the pre-union Church of Scotland, and all, it is of interest to note, in their origin lectures to students of divinity. Two of them have the additional interest of a trans-Atlantic origin, showing us the Scottish mind pondering this subject in a new atmosphere.

The books have a good deal in common. Their authors—in origin English Presbyterian, Free Church of Scotland and United Presbyterian—are alike in attaching to the whole question of the form and atmosphere of public worship a primary importance; they are alike in their keen desire to re-examine the subject, without prejudices and without any limitations; they are alike in their willingness to seek for help and guidance from the experience of the whole Catholic Church of God. One of them, the late Dr Simpson, is almost wistfully impressed with the tremendous opportunity which will lie before the reunited Church of Scotland for a real advance in the quality of its worship; from all of them we may glimpse something of what the Presbyterian contribution to the worship of the Catholic Church of the future may be.

Dr Sclater, still best known amongst us as sometime minister of the New North Church in Edinburgh, brings to the students of Yale the fruit of English academic training and Scottish and Canadian practical experience. His lectures are the work of a man of nimble wit and broad humanism. They are, in part, concerned with preaching, which is not strictly within our purview here, but the admirable chapters on the sermon could have been written only by one who knows that the sermon exercises its best influence when regarded as part of a greater whole. Dr Sclater is well aware of the dangers of the present situation—the dangers which beset any reaction from old custom. A mere desire for the beautiful, or for what seems to be beautiful, may run counter to the whole genius of our worship. There must be real spiritual meaning in everything we do in worship.

In the rebound from the bare, it is easy to fall into the meaningless. In practice, the 'beautifying' of our services often means the introduction of responses or of music which have no relation to a concerted act of worship; just as the decorations, which are splashed about our walls, have no relation to the fact that they are the walls of a church.

Dr Sclater's Canadian experiences have brought him up against the queer habit of opening a service with the singing of the Doxology, and he delivers his soul faithfully on the matter:—

Who started this trick of *beginning* services with the Doxology? Was he an Irishman with the entertaining gift, possessed by his race, for inversion? It is quite obviously and startlingly wrong, if the progress of an order of worship is to be psychologically true. We may suppose the reason for its introduction was the semi-laudable desire to 'brighten' services; but I confess that I never see prosperous citizens fling back their shoulders and, full-throatedly, praising God from whom all blessings flow, at the moment when they ought to be trying to be still and know that He is God, without feeling that I have strayed into a Rotary or Kiwanis convention instead of into a church.

Dr Sclater lays great stress on the psychological significance of every act of worship, and the whole order of the different acts; he naturally resents the intrusion of intimations and notices, and the increasing number and burden of them, and he stigmatises the attempts at clerical humour for which they sometimes offer an excuse, agreeing with Dr Johnson that such 'merriment of parsons' is 'mighty offensive.' Children's addresses he regards equally as a deplorable interruption to the solemn meaningful continuity of Divine Service. "It is true that people like them," he says, "but that does not prove a great deal. It is human to like candy." His rationale of the order of worship is interesting. It is also extremely complicated. He is, of course, dealing practically with the type of service most familiar to those whom he is, in the first instance, addressing, but one cannot but regret that instead of the Eucharistic service, the proper 'norm' of our morning worship, he concerns himself so much with the actual succession of items of praise and reading and prayer which compose the usual American morning service to-day. It is difficult, in many instances, to maintain that the succession of events in such a service is other than fortuitous, but Dr Sclater rings the changes on his two root principles of Alternation and Ascension, and finally presents us with an ordinary morning service of to-day, divorced from its real origins in the Christian Liturgy, schematised under some twelve heads, and forced into the framework of a rigid psychological order. It is well done and interest-

ingly done, but one wonders if it was wholly worth doing, apart from the many wise and useful things which are said by the way.

Like all our trio of authors, Dr Sclater stands for prayer both free and fixed. His dictum that "prayers should be many and short, rather than few and long" will not commend itself to all, either as a fair presentation of a real problem, or in itself true, but he is all on the side of reverence and reticence in prayer, and some of his practical hints are of uncommon value. "Keep the voice as low as is consistent with being heard" is good and needful advice. His chapters on the Sacrament are admirable. He is speaking to American students, and he wisely deals, not with ideal conditions, but with the stern and often unwelcome facts of the present situation. Deploring the vulgarities of the Individual Cup, he is sorrowfully forced to recognise that in some places it seems inevitable to accept it, and he gives sound advice as to how its baneful effects on our service may be to some extent mitigated. We noted at the outset that all our authors are eager to avail themselves of the experience of the whole Church, and when Dr Sclater turns to the great questions of the manner and the frequency of the Celebration of the Sacrament he makes a most interesting suggestion. "If the Presbyterian use is to be followed," he thinks, "rarity of celebration is essential; for great public ceremonials, intended to express the common life of a society, lose their vitality and power of impact if they come at too brief intervals. The modern habit of having Communion . . . once a month seems to me the worst possible of compromises. It is not nearly frequent enough to meet individual needs, and is too frequent to keep impressiveness as a Church festival." He finds both the Presbyterian and Anglican modes of celebration right and good, and he declines to choose between them. His solution would be to retain our great infrequent congregational celebrations, but to add very frequent celebrations after the Anglican mode for such as desire them. The problem is a perplexing one, but there seems no doubt that such a solution need offend none, and would rid us of many difficulties.

Dr Sclater's book is witty, informative and stimulating. It suggests that in certain matters of importance Presbyterianism may render good service to American ideals of worship, and it can be most heartily commended

to not a few in our own land who are in some danger of borrowing from America some of the less worthy things she has to offer.

The death a few years ago of Dr R. S. Simpson, the beloved minister of the High United Free Church, Edinburgh, deprived the Church of one of her most saintly and devotional minds. His influence in the early years of the reunited Church of Scotland would have been of incalculable benefit. We are well supplied with able men who will help to fuse the outward organisation of the Church, but we can ill afford the loss of one who consistently looked forward to Union as a means of a great advance in making the worship of the sanctuary at once more reverent and more real. His Chalmers Lectures were never revised for publication by himself, but, even in their necessarily incomplete form, they are a precious legacy from one who moved in the very atmosphere of worship, and whose acquaintance with the services of all parts of the Church of God was thorough and profound. The spirit of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' breathes through the book; to him no worship is adequate which fails to make the worshipper feel "a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts." With the widest tolerance and understanding, Dr Simpson remains the faithful and convinced son of the Scottish Church. He glories in the fact that Scottish religion has never favoured a detached piety, that it has been consistently Catholic, and he does not weary in reminding his hearers that many of the things, ignorantly considered 'Scottish' to-day, came in originally from English sectarianism, and have nothing Scottish about them. He would have us go back to the practice of the immediately post-Reformation years, but he would also gladly and gratefully borrow anything of good we may from any of the great parts of the Church. Corporate worship to Dr Simpson is the response of the Church to the amazing, satisfying revelation of the love of God that has come to man in Jesus Christ. It is a response, and therefore the great thought of worship is action. He insists that in real worship something must be *done*.

I am convinced that we shall not recover the habit of church-going in our land, unless in our Reformed Protestant worship we lay more emphasis upon the fact that something

is *done* in public worship. In the worship of the Church of Rome, which centres in the Mass, it is openly proclaimed that something happens. The tendency at times in Protestant worship is to suggest that the value of the worship lies in its effect upon the worshipper. That is not so. The central thing in worship is objective, not subjective. In worship we do not only receive but primarily we give.

There he undoubtedly gets down to essentials, and once this great principle is really understood in the Church we may begin to have less need of deploring empty Churches. Dr Simpson rejoices in the traditional Scottish association of Word and Sacrament, and it need not be said that his ideal of preaching is fundamentally a worshipful ideal, but he emphasises also the strong traditional Scottish realisation of the Presence in the Eucharist.

It is amazingly impressive when, in the great ritual of the Roman Church, the moment comes when the Host is raised and the whole congregation in silence adores. Equally, if not more impressive it should be to us in our own Communion Office, when every voice of man is stilled and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself hands to each the token of His Passion, saying Himself the words: "My Body broken for thee; My Blood shed for thee."

There is an interesting chapter on the Psychology of Worship in which the author successfully evades the pitfalls of any such discussion. Worship is primarily objective still, and in its worship the Church is wholly dependent upon the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. He has an interesting reference to the concealed Epiklesis in the Roman Canon, and he reminds us that there should always be a distinct Epiklesis in our Scottish rite. But he is well aware that the Spirit works through laws and processes, and that certain outward things dispose us to the reception of the grace of God. There should be in every Church, at the hour of worship, stillness. There should be beauty. Our Churches should be places into which men and women and little children can step from the busy street and have quiet and be cheerful with God. He does not think that lasting influence is produced upon children by artificial efforts to make certain parts of the service bright and interesting. The great impression made upon a child's mind comes from the atmosphere, the tradition, the subtle consciousness of the whole service. Ritual of some sort there must be. Silence there must at times be, and beauty.

Dr Simpson deplotes any clear-cut distinction between the two sets of ideas concerning worship which have come to be known as Evangelical and Catholic. He would have a synthesis of both. The supernatural element in worship there must be:—

If our Protestant worship passes simply into speaking, singing, lecturing, emphasising subjective impressions alone, in spite of all intellectual difficulties, men and women will turn, in these difficult days, where in worship the presence of the supernatural is frankly and openly taught. . . . The Church is not a lecture-room; it is not a place for public address, it is the house of God. Men grow weary of being continually spoken to, they grow weary of their own enthusiasms, their own ideas and schemes of life. They grow weary of discussions about doctrines and discussions about life. In the deep places of their hearts they are thirsting for God, and the Church service to which men will return at last is the Church service which provides a worship that emphasises the supernatural.

It is an amazing phenomenon to Dr Simpson that a Church which has so emphasised the priesthood of all believers should give to the congregation so small a part in the priestly offering of its worship. He finds it impossible to overstate how much is missed through the absence of a liturgy, and it is clear that he has no great hopes for the future unless some sort of liturgy is given to us. And he means, of course, a book of prayer which will be in the hands of the people, and which they will be encouraged to follow. As regards frequency of celebration of the Holy Communion, he agrees with Dr Sclater that we should retain our great stated Communion seasons, but should add to them frequent Communions for all who desire them. To him there are two elements of supreme importance in the Sacrament: the element of reception and the element of offering. If we think chiefly of the former we will naturally think of the Sacrament as the means of deepening the individual spiritual life; if of the latter, we will see in it rather the presentation of an offering to God by the individual and the community. He thinks that the wisest method for us in Scotland would be to combine this double thought. We have been talking about some such advance in Scotland for the last fifty years. The net result would appear to be that in one Church—one out of three thousand—there is a weekly celebration, while in perhaps a dozen

there is monthly Communion. May Dr Simpson's closing words be heard by us to-day:—

I should like to make an appeal that when the two great branches of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland become united—may God hasten the hour—one of the most conspicuous marks of the historic Church of Christ in Scotland should be that it is supremely a worshipful Church. The rekindling of the sense of God in our land is our greatest national need.

Dr Simpson's book is supremely a beautiful one; it demands, and repays, careful study. One would like to see it circulating widely among the younger ministers and the students of the Church.

Dr G. A. Johnston Ross, whose name one is glad to notice now on the roll of ministers of the Church of Scotland, belonged originally to the United Presbyterian Church, and for many years was an eminent professor in the United States. His Merrick Lectures on "Christian Worship and its Future" were delivered to the students of the Ohio Wesleyan University. We doubt not that they profited by them, but we could wish a much wider public for this little book, which is hardly known in Scotland. Its author has the rare faculty of looking at familiar things freshly. He has a delightful style, and he has profited by the opportunity of observing the manners of many races which life in America gives so abundantly. The book is from its first page to its last the work of a scholar, but of a scholar who bears his learning lightly. He himself assures us that "there will be no display of borrowed learning" in his pages. There is none, but there is constant evidence of wide and up-to-date reading and reflection on matters liturgical. Dr Ross is interested in the resurgence all over Europe of a demand for the expansion of all the worshipful instincts. He finds a new desire for beauty and orderliness in many departments of life, for instance, in the academic world, and we are interested to note his statement that he has nowhere seen more stately, ornate, orderly, artistically organised and reverent worship than in a great Negro Church in New York City. All the different liturgical movements in the Churches of Geneva, France and Prussia are by no means a mere expression of a desire for the 'enrichment of the service'; they go

much deeper than that. "The old objection to forms, and the old devotion to forms, are both breaking down." People are yearning for worship which will be more real and more intense, and they are willing to look anywhere in search of elements which will help them to secure their desire. All this, according to Dr Ross, attaches itself to some of the most hopeful instincts of our time. It is connected with the post-war *passion for the real*; worship must have truth and sincerity and meaning if it is to continue to exist at all. It is connected with the longing for what he can only call 'universality'; men who are seeking a satisfactory internationalism in politics also desire to break through ecclesiastical frontiers in the established modes of worship. It is connected with a yearning for the lost bliss of sacrifice. Equally with the late Dr Simpson, Dr Ross sees clearly wherein lies the most powerful appeal of the Roman Mass:—

The Mass consummates itself in a great transaction of sacrifice; it is this that has given Catholicism its tremendous post-war prestige, especially in Europe, whose Protestantism, like our own, has never found an adequate method of expressing and releasing this sacrificial desire that is our own most royal human endowment.

Dr Ross cannot get away from the pathetic human individual craving for Communion with God:—

I shall never forget watching at a respectful and, I hope, not a prying, distance the devotions of a Japanese woman in a Buddhist temple in Kobe. Of her agonised sincerity there was possible no more doubt than of one's existence. As I watched her I remembered my Scottish mother's words to me as a little boy, "Never despise the gathering of people together for worship." I saw behind that Japanese woman the aspirant soul of the race. What a history it is! Could it all, this stretching of the human heart, this ache for the something more than our imprisoned amputated life affords—could it possibly be illusory and frustrate? To think of our fellow-men as individual worshippers is to love them, to believe in them, and to hope great things for them.

He finds adoration disgracefully neglected in our Protestant Churches, and he looks to the example of the Holy Orthodox Church to teach us something of the art and discipline of adoration. We may discover, he thinks, that a cultus, duly organised to express adoration, may do more than carefully built up theological

exactitude to maintain a lofty and worthy and expanding conception of God. All the elements of worship, he asserts, should find their culmination in an act of corporate self-devotion. His description of the influence of real worship on the individual is one of the finest treatments of the subject which we have come across anywhere. The broadening of the soul's horizon, the tranquillisation—how aptly he remembers the first thought of Gerontius in the unseen realm—'How still it is'—the mental and spiritual enlargement, the sense of healing and of *en-swathement in God*—all these things remind us how supremely important worship is. When he comes to consider the community at worship he is forced back on the thought of a new catholicity:—

It is time we recognised the fact that that glorious liberating movement, which we call the Reformation, contained within itself no guarantee that it would, in organising itself, contain *all* the devotional values which had grown up in the Catholic Churches, both Latin and Greek. For these values, to-day, I believe we must make patient search, lest our lamps of devotion go quite out.

He wishes the Church to recapture that sense of joining itself to the Alleluias of the redeemed in heaven, and believes that we must seek for it from the ancient Churches of the East. He pleads, too, for a new interpretation of the connection of God with material things, and would open our Church doors wide to nature. Of our present worship it might be said, as of Michelangelo's work, that, excellent as it is, it has never a blade of grass in it. We admit blatant rows of organ pipes, often to a dominating place in the sanctuary; why not admit objects suggestive not so much of human ingenuity as of the divine love?

In a most interesting passage he deplores the separation, the necessary separation at the time, of the two parts of the Eucharist, the *Missa Catechumenorum* and the *Missa Fidelium*. Ideally the two should never have been separated, and he goes on to see Christian worship to-day in the grip of an evolutionary process:—

Here and there one meets and hears of men and women who are cherishing dreams of an inclusive form of worship, which shall be a synthesis of the types which have been seen at work in pre-Christian and Christian history; which will despise nothing that God has made, will use for His glory

all that He has made, and all relevant powers of men in art and science, in the love of beauty, of splendour, of ordered dignity, of calm, of simplicity, of peace; and all, not that the childlike upward look and gesture of the individual should be thwarted but that it be released, and that God and the heart of men may more fully meet every aspect of life made holy and golden by His divine touch.

Perhaps the most interesting chapter in the book is that which deals with the worship of to-morrow. He has no doubt that men will continue to want to worship, but the forms of their worship will expand. There will be behind it a more adequate conception of God as the Father who is interested in all our work and even in all our play. The placing of a 'Sports' window in the great Cathedral of S. John the Divine in New York, he regards as emblematic of the new outlook. Protestant worship of the future must be recognised as an outgoing not of the intellect only but of our whole nature. It must not be possible for a ribald journalist to write in the future, as he did not long ago: "Go into a Protestant Church of a Sunday morning and you have no idea what is going to happen to you. All that you can be sure of is that one of your fellow-citizens is going to argue with you at great length." Churches will be beautiful. (One wonders how the students of the Ohio Wesleyan University reacted to this:—

Protestants, when travelling, steal into Cathedrals and beautiful Churches not always to sightsee, but often for devotional refreshment. And then they return comforted to their own repellent Churches.)

There will be a definite element of sacrifice. Dr Ross is glad to note the beginnings here and there of a reaction against the pompous emphasis made upon a monetary offering of a routine sort. In the Church of the future he hopes that other offerings will find their place. There will be gladness, music, pictures, colour, even perhaps incense. The official dress of the clergy may change: Dr Franz Delitzsch is quoted as saying that black stands for everything which Christianity is not. . . . The altar of sacrifice will be restored, and at a definite point of the service minister and congregation will face it in a common act of self-oblation to God. There may even be evolved some international hierarchic language to take the place of the Latin, whose service to the Roman Church he illustrates by a striking anecdote concerning his feelings

on seeing two members of his own household—serving-maids, one Irish, one a recent Polish immigrant—able to join together in, and to understand together, the great service of their Church.

These are startling suggestions, and they leave us in a field of wide speculation. Dr Johnston Ross was not making them to Scotsmen, and perhaps in making some of them he was subconsciously inspired by the not unworthy aim of stabbing the spirit of Ohio broad awake. Doubtless he succeeded. And, whether we agree or disagree with some of his prophecies and some of his desires and hopes, we shall certainly find in his delightful pages a stimulus to fresh thinking, and to a renewed effort to make our worship a wonderful and a beautiful thing. Dr Ross tempts one to over-lavish quotation. We end our review of his book by transcribing a passage in which he prophesies that the common folk at least will welcome the greater use in worship of the beauty of God's universe:—

And in that day it will be found that the God of beauty is not the enemy of the God of piety; and that splendour may be a function of awe, and spontaneity and joy express themselves fittingly in the happy use of the golden glories of God's good world. If comfortable bourgeois Protestantism sniffs at all this from the eminence of its intellectual ease, the industrial thrall, whose personality is depressed, whose love of beauty is starved, who is robbed of sunshine and of the sight of clear flowers and green grass by the tyrannies of the factory and the mine, he at least will appreciate the frank acceptance by the Christian Church of all ancillary support from the beauty of the earth for the setting forth before the Lord of the sacrifice of praise.

The three books with which we have dealt suffice to show that Presbyterians are not afraid of fresh thought and of wide vision when they come to consider the worship of the future. They show that, while Presbyterians are proud of their own heritage in worship, they will not disdain to seek help and enlargement from any part of the Church; and they suggest to us, almost accusingly, that now in Scotland is the accepted time for a courageous effort to win back the multitudes to the house of their God by offering them the opportunity to take part in a worship more worthy of the God to Whom it is addressed.

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