

CHURCH LIFE TODAY IN DENMARK (AN ILLUSTRATION)

Many Danes are individualists – maybe to keep their integrity in a rather small and crowded country. This seems to hold good for the clergy too. If you think you are acquainted with the Danish ritual for a Sunday service in your church, you very often will be surprised. The variations are many – even in the same church.

The ‘ordinary’ – authorized – sequence of a Morning Service should be as follows:

Preludium on the organ. The organ-loft is mostly behind the congregation in the west, and the choir sings up there too. The priest goes to the altar and kneels there.

A short *prayer*, read by the church-warden, who is clad in black with white tie. In the country he functions as a cantor too, walks up and down the centre aisle of the church, singing the hymns aloud, leading the people – maybe a reminiscence from times when there was no organ.

A *hymn*, 6-8 verses. People sit.

Pax vobiscum.

Collect prayer of the day, read from the altar.

The *first lesson*, read – or sung – from the altar by the priest. This is called the Epistle and is usually from the N.T. letters. People stand.

A *hymn*, rather short. People sit.

The *Gospel* of the day, read from the altar. People stand.

The *Credo*, which is mostly sung by the congregation without organ, or read aloud by the priest. People stand.

A *hymn*, can be rather long. The priest goes to the pulpit.

The *sermon* begins with a short prayer.

The *text for the day*, read by the priest. People stand.

There are two series of epistles and gospels, so the texts of the day change every second year. Recently a third series has been published as the result of the work of a committee, appointed by the Church department. It has never been authorized but is used in several churches. The sermon lasts about 15 minutes.

Prayer from the pulpit for the sick and anxious, prisoners all over the world, sailors, fishermen, mission, the Queen and her house, parliament, judges, etc. Acute disasters in our world are specially mentioned in these prayers, which are very free.

Banns and prayer for the young couples.

Hymn, rather long. The priest goes to the altar.

During the last verse of this hymn the children who are to be bap-

tized come in with their godmothers (-fathers) and parents and take place in the choir. The congregation rises, when the procession, led by the church-warden, comes in, but continues to sing the hymn.

A short hymn for the children.

After a prayer (for the children) and the gospel about Jesus and the small children the priest makes the sign of the cross both on the forehead and the chest of the child who is to be baptized. He asks the 'godparent', who is also called 'the answerer' for the child: Do you defy the devil, his essence (German: 'Wesen') and all his doings? So follow the three questions about the Credo, which is read *in extenso* and responded to individually for each child if there are not more than four. The godparent holds the child over the font during the baptism, and the church-warden stands by and dries the child's head and says Amen. After Our Lord's Prayer and blessing of the child (children) the priest turns to the sponsors and relatives of the children and requests them to follow the development of the child with their prayers and good example. People stand during most of the baptism service.

A hymn for the children. Especially in country churches the church-warden goes down to the babies and stands singing to them.

A rare instance of church discipline is found in several churches, where sponsors and relatives of the children are asked to be present in church from the beginning of the service, while in other churches they just appear for the baptism and leave the church directly after that. In our church in Copenhagen they are not only asked to come to the beginning of the service, they – and even the children – are requested to stay for the beginning of Holy Communion and to remain until the words of Institution have been read. So the procession with the children walks out to the vestry, which is very often behind the altar.

Holy Communion is now often celebrated without any Confession of sins and Absolution. In several churches the Eucharist *with* Confession and Absolution is celebrated at the evensong and one of the week days. High church priests hold a Confession and Absolution service a quarter of an hour before the ordinary morning service, i.e. 9.45. For the Confession and Absolution the priest has his ordinary black gown with the white fluted ruff. During the hymn after that he goes out and changes into the robe with the liturgical colours of the season.

The Preface is followed by Sanctus and Benedictus, sung by the congregation. Agnus Dei is a hymn here, with three verses, all beginning with 'O Lamb of God'. After a short prayer the priest reads or sings Our Lord's Prayer and after that the words of Institution. People stand.

Saying the holy words of Institution, the priest shows first the bread and later the Communion cup to the congregation. High

church men even observe the 'elevation' and lift the chalice high over their heads, facing the altar.

Already for the Absolution people have been kneeling around the altar rail, maybe 20, 30 persons. The absolution is individual, the priest lays his hand on every person's head; many women remove their hats before going up to the altar. For the hymn after Absolution people return to their places on chairs in – or near to – the choir; directly after the Institution words they again assemble at the altar. The church-warden can be helping with serving the bread. The wine is served in small individual cups from the big chalice. I have heard that a rector, recently appointed to a country church, was shocked to see that the 20 persons around the altar waited for each other and took their wine at one time as a natural sign of fellowship. This is many years ago – now I hear that at some experimental services with Holy Communion in Copenhagen, young people can be seen greeting each other – very respectfully – before taking the wine. This is only one of the many signs of new forms for Holy Communion being under way.

People remain kneeling around the altar until all are served, then the priest gives them a word of promise from the New Testament and makes the sign of the cross with the chalice. People rise and return to their places. After a short prayer a last hymn is sung. The church-warden comes again with a prayer, thanking for the Gospel.

Postludium. People mostly walk out during the postludium. In some churches the rector now tries to 'educate' the congregation to stay during the postludium by remaining at the altar, facing it. It seems to help!

But, as I said before: The variations are many. A confession of sins *can* come directly after the first Pax vobiscum in the beginning of the service. In some churches they have more recently introduced a Kyrie and Laude. But the Confession can also come as beginning of the Holy Communion part of the service and is followed by the Absolution. In that case people come up twice and kneel at the altar rail, first time for the Absolution.

The Baptism can also be placed at different moments in the service. Sometimes the children are carried in after the second hymn and are present at the second lesson and the general Credo. Usually that does not hinder the priest from repeating the whole Credo with the questions to every child, i.e. godmother or godfather, if the children are not too many.

Children are mostly allowed to take part in Holy Communion. So Confirmation of the young is a double confirmation, and the first H.C. does not become the last for so many. I have heard the rector ask the children from the pulpit to come to the altar, and several times I have seen small girls – about 6 years old – with a doll on the

arm, accompany the parents or even 2 or 3 small friends to the altar.

Great attention – and criticism – has been attracted by a clergyman in Copenhagen, who has started a special children's service, where 200-300 children partake and where everyone comes to Holy Communion. This man has written new 'hymns' for the children such as 'Why is God stronger than Batman?'

Lots of 'experiment services' are held with different 'programmes'. Holy Communion can be served on long tables with white cloths in the middle of the church, and the clergymen go around offering bread and wine. Services with guitar and beat-music are said to be popular in some small churches, but here the authority of the rector and his contact with the young audience-congregation is vital.

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