

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SANCTA SANCTIS?

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For me the *Sancta Sanctis* (Holy Things to the Holy) has always been a familiar and special part of our Scottish Communion Service. Nurtured at home in 'the Govan tradition' I learnt that my Mother's Father had used it in his Communion Service, latterly from 1927 at St Bride's, Partick. It was part of the 'normal' pattern. At the Kirk of the Greyfriars Dr Stuart Loudon gave those words a special emphasis - and the 'wonderful exchange' oft quoted from Calvin's Institutes became reality. Now these words have been dropped from *Common Order* 1994 I am forced to ask myself if their deselection is a good thing or a bad thing.

The successive editions of Euchologion produced by this Society from 1867 do not include the ancient liturgical formula: $\alpha \alpha \gamma \alpha \iota \tau \omicron \iota \alpha \gamma \alpha \iota$: Holy things to the Holy. However, the *Sancta Sanctis* was included by Dr Harry Wotherspoon in his 'arrangement' of the Liturgy of St James published in 1893 as

*The Divine Service
A Eucharistic Office
according to forms of the primitive Church.*

A shortened version appears in Prayers for Divine Service (1923 and 1929):

Holy things to the holy
O taste and see that the Lord is good;
Blessed is the man that testeth in Him.

The identical formula (with one punctuation change) was part of the influential Form and Order for the Celebration of The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion in courts of the Church printed in the '*Ordinal and Service Book*' of 1931, 1954 and 1962). Not included in the 1940 Book of *Common Order*, the *Sancta Sanctis* was included in the first two orders of first 'The Divine Service' 1972 and therefore the 1979 book. The memory is yet vivid of my Father's joy on returning from a meeting of the Public Worship and Aids to Devotion Committee. The joy of this conscientious Presbyterian Elder

impressed on me that something special and relevant had been secured as *Common Order* for the Church of Scotland.

Retained by the 1986 Order designed for congregational participation it has been discarded and does not find a place in even one of the five Orders in *Common Order* 1994. While the inclusion of the *Sancta Sanctis* has not been invariable in Communion services published officially and unofficially, it has been a real and valued part of the liturgical tradition of The Church of Scotland.

By 1880 the eucharistic rite of the Catholic Apostolic Church included both the *Agnus Dei* and the *Sancta Sanctis* prior to the communication of the Celebrant. Dr John Macleod assumed the inclusion of the *Sancta Sanctis* in his teaching in the Parish Church of St Constantine, Govan, between October 1888 and October 1889. Sermon eight in 'The Gospel in the Institution of the Lord's Supper' steers us away from Remembrance of the death of Christ, stressing the fact that Jesus himself leads our worship *today*. (page 83)

"And what worthiness shall we bring but the worthiness of grateful acknowledgment of His mercy? Holy things are for holy persons. But there is One Holy, even One Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom are we.

"And if we do indeed believe these things, if our eyes are open so that we see the spiritual reality of these things - there stands in our presence today the Lord Jesus Christ sacramentally, but really, present to give to each Himself the pledges of every blessing in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood...."

This ingredient in the communion Service is almost like a liturgical equivalent of the 'ecce homo' of the Gospels.

In speaking of the Consecration in the fifth sermon (pages 53 and 54) had already adumbrated the holiness/unworthiness paradox of the Service of Communion:

" (2) The Action of Consecration - the Blessing of the Sacrament - is a remembrance to us of our present imperfections.

" (3) And if they remind us of the imperfection in which we live surely they should quicken in us the yearning desire for the time when we shall be free."

Wotherspoon (1893) describes the *Sancta Sanctis* as one of the invariable elements in the primitive liturgies, "before the communicants receive the Consecrated Elements". The *Sancta Sanctis* is indeed found in the Liturgies of St Clement, St James, St John Chrysostom and St Mark.

C. Zvegintzov, writing to explain the worship and offices of the Eastern Orthodox Church to emigré children in Great Britain (*Our Mother Church*, 1968 (p.56), points us to the paradox witnessed to by this important ingredient in a full liturgical rite: "The priest says: "Holy things to the holy." This means that only those who are holy can receive the Sacrament. The choir reply: "One is holy, one only is Lord, Jesus Christ in the glory of God the Father. Amen." Meaning that we are all unworthy, because no one is holy of himself unless made holy through Jesus Christ."

In the first edition of the 'Annual' of this Society (1928/29) Dr John Wilson Baird assumes this element in his article on 'The Service of Holy Communion':

"And now the Minister, having repeated the ancient and awful words - holy things to the holy" - proceeds to break the bread as Christ broke it."

As late as 1971 the *Sancta Sanctis* appeared in congregational responsive form in St Bride's Church, Partick, a daughter church of Govan founded by Dr John Macleod in 1897.

"Sancta Sanctis: Holy things for holy persons.

There is one holy, even one Lord Jesus Christ,
in whom are we to the glory of God the Father."

In omitting this piece of perceived liturgical padding three strands in our common celebration have been weakened. First, the element of paradox, secondly, the sense of majesty and the greatness of God and thirdly, the ecumenical dimension of common witness with the Eastern Churches.

