



LITURGICAL OBSERVANCE

BY BISHOP W. R. NICHOLSON, D. D.

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It seems timely that attention should be directed to this subject. It is reported that there are those among our clergy who are habitually remiss in the use of the Prayer Book in the " Sunday services; especially so as regards the Evening Prayer. Now while our laws have accorded to us ample liberty for special occasions, particularly so as to the Sunday second service, at the same time it is taken for granted that ordinarily Evening Prayer shall be used as set forth in the book. The proof of this is the fact that Evening Prayer is as fully provided for as is the other, and the two liturgies stand side by side.

In fact, the liturgical character of our Church is pre-eminent. And the more so by very reason of the encouragement given to free prayer; this encouragement being given with the implied recognition of the liturgy as the dominant arrangement. And this, its liturgical character, is the vindication of our Church's right to be. Without her liturgy she were well nigh identical with the Presbyterian Church; for in doctrines, the two churches are essentially the same, while, as regards polity, the difference is not essential, as is shown by the constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland under John Knox. Hardly defensible would it have been to have founded another church upon merely the ground of very slight and wholly human differences of organization. A liturgy, however, changes the point of view.

It is an edifying mode of Divine worship; to many minds the most edifying of all modes. It has, too, a mighty attractive power; to multitudes the most attractive churchward of all mere church influences. And it is intensely educational; training the worshipers, by ever repeated formulas, in the discriminations of truth, in the simplicity and purity of devotional language, and in profound reverence and chaste fervor of spirit. So that a proper liturgy is certainly one method of the Christian Church, having the everlasting Gospel to preach, doing its work in the saving of souls. Yes, the advantages of a liturgy are a sufficient reason for a distinct denominational organization. Evangelical doctrines enshrined in liturgical formulas that harmonize with them perfectly - this, for large numbers of men, is their ideal of a church. Let us appreciate our Church's liturgical character.

Besides, it is no mean commendation of our exact position as a church, that we have the same liturgy as that of the Church of England and of the Protestant Episcopal Church, except only that it has been purged and purified. For this expurgation it is that enables us to put so marked an emphasis upon those great evangelical teachings of our Declaration of Principles. The identity of these liturgies, with only (in our case) the variations expressed in that declaration, is what concentrates attention on those variations. The emphasis thus given to the all-important principles of the declaration, is itself important enough to vindicate our right to exist, in distinction from even the Moravian Church, which is both liturgical and evangelical. It is the trumpet-note of our position; our incomparable vantage-ground as witnesses to the true Church idea. It is therefore our liturgy, as being thus just what it is, that qualifies the Reformed Episcopal Church to be the refuge and home of those who shall become dissatisfied with, and feel themselves repelled by, the Romish corruptions now so rampant in the Church whence we came. Should we not dearly love our liturgy, rejoice in the use of it, and seek to have it mold the people under our care?

I would by no means repress the spirit of free prayer; rather would I diligently cultivate it. I thoroughly believe in its importance. Its exclusion from us would be a great spiritual calamity. And our Church has studiously made provision for it. We have ample liberty on all special occasions, and fullest liberty on all week day occasions. But this thoughtful provision for free prayer is an incident - most important, but merely an incident - to the supremacy of the liturgy.

I am satisfied that we shall both please and edify our people far more by faithfully using on Sundays, the appointed services. Our people are liturgical worshippers by choice. They love the Order, the sobriety, the spirituality, and the Gospel fervor, of which our appointed, formulas are undoubtedly the expression.

Moreover, since the Morning Prayer, as appointed, must be used on Sunday mornings, it is a mistaken notion that, by means of irregular services on Sunday evenings, we shall succeed in drawing into a church thus liturgical many of those (if many such there be) who are repelled by the idea of liturgical

worship.

Brethren of the ministry, let us rally around our flag. Let us be true to our Church's position. Observe the Sunday services as the Prayer Book has ordained them. Even introduce portions of the liturgy frequently into the week day services; they will enrich our extemporary devotions, and breathe over the people a hallowing influence. Let us see to it, that we ourselves feel and enjoy the spiritual fervor of our formulas. Let them be to our own souls heavenly refreshings. And let us be sure to connect with them the earnest, happy preaching of the full preciousness of the Gospel. So shall the power of the Holy Ghost move upon our people.

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Prepared by Lauren A. Busfield