

Editorial

Few people have realized it, but we have now reached the half-way point between the appearance of the *Alternative Service Book* in 1980 and the promised revision ('Liturgy 2000'?) which is due at the end of the century. The excitement of the 1960s and 1970s has largely died down, and there is little enthusiasm, either for the existing rites or for change. In the modern Church of England almost anything goes, and it is quite possible that by the year 2000 most of the livelier churches will not be using a fixed liturgy at all.

As long as there is a generation alive which can remember the good (or bad) old days when everyone prayed out of a little black book, there will be a certain sense of the 'norm' which will govern the thoughts of most congregations, and perhaps contain the more pronounced excesses. But already it is doubtful whether such people are still in the majority in most parishes, and by 2000 they are almost certain not to be any longer. Then it will be increasingly harder to determine what worship should be like, and the sense of a living liturgy will be lost, at least among many Evangelicals.

Evangelical lack of interest in liturgy is not new; in some respects it can be said to go back to 1662 and beyond, especially if the Puritans are regarded as our spiritual ancestors. There has always been suspicion at the thought of praying from a set text, and more recent defenders of the *Book of Common Prayer* have been motivated at least as much by anti-Roman sentiment as by a devotion to set forms of prayer.

The Romeward trend of liturgical revision is perhaps less apparent these days, now that everybody has had a hand in it, but there is no doubt that the main principles on which such revision is based tend to lead away from Evangelical principles and distinctives. This is made quite clear in Canon R.C.D. Jasper's recent study, *The Development of the Anglican Liturgy 1662-1980* (S.P.C.K., 1989, 384pp., £19.95). In a fascinating study of Anglican worship since 1662, Canon Jasper recounts the various attempts made to reform the official Prayer Book in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, almost all of which were undertaken by those of a Catholic persuasion. (Others tended to want the Book abandoned, or severely watered-down).

In the twentieth century, attempts at revision led to clashes along party lines in 1928, and (to a lesser extent) in the 1960s. Jasper recounts how lonely Colin Buchanan seemed in the early days of the Liturgical Commission, when he was expected to be the sole representative of Evangelical views. Jasper's own position is historical/political rather than doctrinal, and this approach may be said to have dominated modern Anglican revisions, especially in England. On the

one hand, doctrinally dubious features which belonged to ancient liturgies have been approved of both because of their great age and because of their ecumenical appeal—in the third century there was no undivided Church! On the other hand, great care has to be taken to obtain a text which will be acceptable to Catholics without offending Evangelicals (and *vice-versa*). Add in the Liberal insistence on the ‘responsible use’ of Scripture, and you have an almost impossible agenda!

What gets lost in all this, of course, is a sense of true doctrine, which is reduced to the status of an opinion held by a party pressure-group within the Church. People may dispute whether Cranmer was a great liturgist or not, but it ought to be recognized that if he was, it was by accident rather than by design. Cranmer never studied liturgy; he composed his Prayer Books for doctrinal reasons. The contention of many modern Anglicans that 1549 is just as acceptable as 1662 (that is 1552 slightly modified) is false, because Cranmer himself recognized the provisional character of the earlier rite. To go back to 1549 as a model is therefore to be unfaithful to Cranmer, just as it is to fail to recognize the central importance of doctrine for liturgy.

If Evangelicals are going to hope to make an impression in the liturgical field in the next millennium, they probably ought to think in terms of producing a liturgy which reflects Evangelical concerns, rather than one which will be acceptable to all parties in the Church of England. Such a liturgy could, and should, be fully international, and could be used (as 1662 long was) in almost every province of the Anglican Communion. Just as there are many translations of the Bible, so there may in future be many liturgies, and it seems a pity to waste Evangelical effort in producing an uneasy compromise when it is both possible and practicable to compose a satisfactory rite, even though it will not be used by everyone in the Church. In any case, who knows? If Evangelicals continue to gain ground, it may become the dominant form of service, just as the originally Evangelical *Hymns Ancient and Modern* became the dominant hymn book in the last century.

Certainly, if Jasper’s experience is anything to go by, Evangelicals cannot hope for more than a walk-on part in future liturgical revision undertaken by the Church authorities. Perhaps it is time to let free enterprise take over here, as it already has in Bible translation and in hymn books!

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An appreciation of the late Philip Hughes, onetime Editor of *Churchman*, will appear in our next issue. Ed.