

WORSHIP AND THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.

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The Ven. Archdeacon Fortin, D.D., preached the second of a course of sermons on "Worship and the Prayer Book," on Sunday evening in Holy Trinity Church, Winnipeg. We give the sermon almost in extenso.

Text: II. Tim. 1, 13: "Hold fast the form of sound words."

The Church of England possesses in her Book of Common Prayer, a very precious heritage, a means of rendering public worship not only more decorous and devotional, but also of more real value to those who engage in it. The Rev. John Watson, better known as Ian Maclaren, in his recent lectures at Yale University says: "It is too late to discuss the lawfulness of a prayer book, for that indeed was settled when Jesus was pleased to give his disciples the Lord's Prayer." Thus the germ of a Christian Liturgy was laid by the Saviour himself. And, indeed, he was in this only following the custom of the ancient Jewish church. For it is certain that the Jews used forms of devotion in the Temple and in the Synagogue before the incarnation. Now, as the services of the Christian church were unquestionably influenced by those of the synagogue, it seems to be a fair presumption that Christians also adopted set forms in their public devotions from an early period. Nor is it a matter of inference merely; we have the precious testimony of history. When Justin Martyr, at the beginning of the 2nd century, describes the Christians as standing up together in a body, and uttering prayers, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that the harmonious utterances of a multitude must have taken some well known form in which all could join, for otherwise there would have been confusion and not harmony. Celsus, also, the great opponent of Christianity, tells us that he himself saw certain devotional books in the possession of Christian priests: and as we advance a little along the centuries, the testimony becomes clearer and clearer. We meet with long catalogues of church books and hymnals that were used in the services of the sanctuary. It is undeniable that in the Jewish church, and also in the Christian church, from the beginning, prescribed forms of prayer were used. It was therefore the mind of God that it should be so—for the church was not a spontaneous growth of man's devising. The pattern thereof was designed in Heaven itself, according to the mind of the spirit, and unfolded here on earth under his guidance.

It must be clear to all unbiassed minds, that what was done in the very infancy of the church, immediately after the apostolic age, must have been in harmony with the teachings of these inspired men to whom Christ committed the fortunes of His cause. How is it possible to explain the presence of numerous books for the conduct of divine worship, wherever the Gospel had penetrated, from the Malabar coast to the Spanish peninsula, if it was the mind of the Apostles that set forms of prayer were undesirable and that public worship should be conducted extemporaneously?

The fact is, that the authority of Christ as distinctly requires common prayer as it requires prayer

in secret. If He said, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet," he also said, "After this manner pray ye, 'Our Father, which art in heaven.'" The first devotional utterance, therefore, of the disciples, was common prayer. Their voices blended together in that divine prayer which in all ages since has been found equally suited to express the adoring sentiment of the great congregation and the simple aspiration of the child at its mother's knee. Around this grand model of supplication grew other prayers and thanksgivings, according to the ability and spiritual fervour of the various bishops. We do not claim that there was one single liturgy for the whole church. No, there were several uses, as they are called, but they all had a common origin—all proceeded on the same plan. Never was the service all performed by the minister, but the people had their vocal share in it, and thus when the final prayer came to be said, "O God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee," the people could, with real meaning, add a loud "Amen" to it.

Enough has been said, I think, to show that liturgies are as old as the church itself. If it were necessary, a great array of irrefragable proofs could be adduced, but this you can do for yourselves by consulting any book on church antiquities.

Let us now, then, turn our attention to the manifest advantages which a book of common prayer leaves to the Church of God. These are stated, in order, as follows, by the author whom I have already quoted, Ian Maclaren, a distinguished Presbyterian divine as you know.

1. A liturgy whose materials have been drawn from the classical ages of devotional literature, has a certain stateliness of thought and charm of style which satisfy the ear and cling to the memory.

2. A liturgy being instinct with the spirit of undivided Christendom, will lift its children out of sectarian and provincial ideas of religion, and bring them into the communion of the Church Catholic.

3. A liturgy being framed for the use of the body of Christ, not to express any individual mood or experience, will embody the ordinary wants of all kinds and conditions of men.

4. A liturgy makes the worshippers independent of the officiating clergyman, so that his faults do not hinder their devotions.

5. A liturgy affording a common and uniform means of worship, serves to bind together all the members of a church, both old and young, into one fellowship and loyalty.

6. A liturgy is especially suitable for old people because of its unchanging form of words; for people wearied with the week's toil, because their minds are not strained following a prayer through an unknown country: for young people, because their interest is sustained; and they have some part in the worship.

And lastly, a liturgy can be taught to children from early years in the church, and unto their last days they will love and respond to the dear familiar words.

Now, it may be asked, if a book of common prayer is so useful, so desirable and helpful, why did not the Apostles themselves frame one, and incorporate it in the writings of the New Testament? To this we may reply, that if the hymns and forms of prayer