

Notes and Comments

CANNOT something be done to persuade the B.B.C. to alter its present practice of televising church services at the actual hour of church worship? In view of the long and wise tradition in sound broadcasting of avoiding these hours, this comparatively new departure is all the more to be deprecated. The ill effects of the policy are, of course, felt more in Scotland than in England where worshippers have a choice of church services, ranging from Holy Communion at an early hour to Choral Eucharist at 12 noon. A broadcast service at 11 a.m. coincides in Scotland with the only service of the morning.

The writer is here concerned, not so much with the usual argument that such services keep people from church, although that may well be so. It is also true that the faithful who do attend church are deprived of these television broadcasts which, as well as being acts of worship, are not without other significance.

One thinks in particular of the devotional, didactic and ecumenical aspects. For example, there must be many ministers in country parishes, having little chance of experiencing for themselves the beauty of Cathedral worship, who would welcome the opportunity of joining in such an act of adoration in their own homes. In the case of newly ordained ministers, students, and also elders, the teaching value of a television broadcast of the service of Holy Communion, according to the *Book of Common Order*, is very considerable, both from the liturgical and ceremonial point of view. Further, in these days when the churches are drawing closer to each other, do we not learn more of others and appreciate their traditions better, when we are able to share in worship with them in this way.

The mind of our Church, especially in regard to the Communion Service televised or broadcast as stated at the General Assembly of 1954, is that these broadcasts should be on a Sunday morning, on a day when Holy Communion is normally celebrated in the parish concerned, and not a service specially arranged. A change of hour to enable regular church-goers to share in these services would not be in any sense contradictory of the policy outlined above.

Our argument actually applies to all religious services broadcast on television, and we believe that their alteration to an earlier morning or later evening hour, would give joy to many who are at present unable to participate in them. We are all grateful to the B.B.C. for the wise direction of religious broadcasting: we should be even more grateful if we were privileged to see the fruits of it.

It is to be deprecated that Notes and Comments should become a place of controversy, and perhaps the fact that the *Annual* is an annual mercifully prevents such a possibility. But there are occasions when both sides of a controversial issue should be stated, and the present writer wishes to challenge the notes in the last *Annual* referring to the *Amen* in public worship. Few will quarrel with the desire to persuade the congregation to take a fuller part in worship, or in particular, to use the *Amen* as a response to prayer. But the attempt to prevent the congregation singing *Amen* at the end of items of praise is a different matter.

There seem to be two arguments suggested against the use of the *Amen* in this way, theoretical and practical. The former seems to say that because the *Amen* was originally a people's response, it should never be anything else. Even if the premiss is correct, the conclusion does not necessarily follow. It might be remembered that the *Amen* was sung in very early times at the end of the *Gloria Patri* with which the people concluded the psalmody, and that is still the case. It would be very strange to sing the *Gloria Patri*, or the Conclusion which many wish to see added to the psalm sections to-day, yet omitting the *Amen*. If we lay down the theoretical and rather doctrinaire rule that the *Amen* must never be used except as a response, curious results would follow. Thus, in congregations where the people do not join the minister in saying the Lord's Prayer, the people ought to say *Amen*; but where the people join with the minister in this prayer, the people (and the minister) must not conclude with the *Amen*, because it is then no longer a response. Again, the normal practice is to end the Creed with the *Amen*, even when the congregation (very properly) repeats it. Is that also to be stopped?

And what of the practical objection? The argument seems to be that the *Amen* is sometimes badly sung, therefore stop singing it everywhere. To use this argument

elsewhere would have startling consequences. Thus, organs are badly played in many churches, therefore, abolish all organs ; or, many ministers preach sermons that are "turgid and dull", therefore abolish all sermons. Surely in every case, the cure is, not "abolish" but "improve". Where the Amen is turgid and dull and fades out, the fault is usually with the organist who does not give a proper lead to choir and congregation. But the minister is responsible for the music as well as for the rest of the service. Let him therefore go into the matter with the organist, and with a little practice and care the Amen will be sung in a manner suited to the particular theme or spirit of the hymn. It will then be realized that the Amen can serve a most useful purpose in providing a real culmination, a summing-up in one word of the praises of the people, which are, after all, mostly prayer.

Last year the Council initiated a campaign for a substantial increase in membership, and its effects are now being felt. We look to Presbytery Correspondents to take this matter up with vigour in their own areas. Individual members of the Society, we suggest, might also render useful service in this direction, in their personal contacts. Many elders would, we feel sure, be interested in our work, and to these might be added organists and choirmasters. The Secretary would be glad, on request, to send, for free circulation, copies of the leaflet setting forth the aims of the Society.

A weak point in our financial organization has always been the delay in the payment of the annual subscription. This hinders us from making prompt settlement of accounts, of which the major one is for the printing of the *Annual*. Henceforth, the Financial Year will close on 15th May, and it would greatly help if members would pay their subscriptions to their Presbytery Correspondent during the months of March or April, each year.

Some may find it convenient to pay *four* annual subscriptions in advance (£1), thus avoiding remitting small amounts. We would gladly welcome this arrangement, where it is preferred.