

LAMBETH AND LITURGY

(A report of the address given at the Annual Meeting of the Church Service Society on Thursday, 24th May 1979, by the Rt. Rev. L. E. Luscombe, Bishop of Brechin.)

The subject of liturgy and liturgical change in its broadest sense has not occupied a major place on the agenda of the Lambeth Conferences. The exception was the Conference of 1958. On the other hand, the question of the Prayer Book and Prayer Book revision has frequently been referred to in Conferences from the beginning. The first Conference of 1867 affirmed the right of each Province to make changes to the services of the Church "provided that no change or addition be inconsistent with the spirit and principles of the Book of Common Prayer". Successive Conferences placed great emphasis on the important place of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer within the Anglican Communion. In 1958 a committee was set up to examine those features of the Prayer Book which were essential in safeguarding the unity of the Anglican Communion. The committee also suggested ways in which further recovery of elements of the worship of the Primitive Church might be made. These suggestions have influenced revisions of the Prayer Book which have been made subsequently and can be seen, for example, in the Alternative Services, Second Series and Third Series, of the Church of England.

There have been basically two structures of Eucharistic liturgies in the Anglican Communion, which stem respectively from the prayer books of 1549 and 1552, and which are expressive of the two approaches to the problem of Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Scottish Liturgy of 1929 and the revised Liturgy of 1970, for example, both derive from the earlier prayer book. On the other hand, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer derives from the second book of 1552. The 1958 Conference agreed with Dr Gabriel Hebert of the Society of the Sacred Mission that the sacrificial action of the Eucharist "is not any sort of re-immolation of Christ, nor sacrifice additional to his one sacrifice, but a participation in it". "The true celebrant is Christ the High Priest, and the Christian people are assembled as members of his body to present before God his sacrifice, and to be themselves offered up in sacrifice through their union with him." This involved a repudiation of certain medieval developments such as the habitual celebration of the Eucharist without the communion of the people, the notion that the offering of the Eucharist is the concern of the individual priest rather than of the assembled Church, and any idea that in

the Eucharist we offer a sacrifice to propitiate God. The Conference believed that, as a result of new knowledge gained from biblical and liturgical studies, the time had come to claim that the controversies surrounding this subject could be laid aside, and the way prepared for the making of a liturgy which would in its essential structure win its way throughout the whole Anglican Communion. They did not wish to impose a rigid form, but recognised that there was a place for variations of rite to meet local situations and needs.

Since then there has been a greater flow of information about liturgical revision through the Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council, which was set up as a result of the 1968 Conference. Another development has been the growing co-operation with other churches in liturgical work. It may be because of the constant interchange of information that liturgy was not one of the main items of last year's Conference. Yet there was a sense in which liturgy was *the* item of the Conference. It was enfolded in worship, each day beginning with the Eucharist and the daily office, celebrated in the same hall where the plenary sessions took place. It was taken in turn (and sometimes in more than one language) by a different Province each day. There was a quite extraordinary awareness of unity in Christ through hearing the Eucharistic prayers in Japanese, Korean, French, Swahili, or even in hesitant English. Austin Farrer once remarked that the Holy Communion is not a special part of our religion, it is just our religion sacramentally enacted. The truth of that was hammered home to the participants at those daily celebrations in Canterbury. The fact that there was no tension between East and West, or friction between conservatives and radicals, was due to the daily sharing in the Eucharist.