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Prayer Book Revision in India

BY CANON S. R. BURGOYNE, M.A.

THERE have been modifications of the Book of Common Prayer, authorised by the Episcopal Synod, ever since March 1st, 1930, the date of severance of the Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon from the mother Church of England. Most of these permissive uses were included in the Proposed Prayer Book of 1951.

Since the C.I.B.C.¹ became autonomous the Provincial Liturgical Committee has had in mind the drafting of a prayer book which would develop "forms of worship congenial to the nature of the Indian races" (Canon 1 "Of the Services of the Church", Chap. XXI Constitution, Canons, and Rules). During the last few years the Diocesan Liturgical Committees have had a number of such draft services referred to them, but most of the groundwork was done by two or three bishops with special qualifications and experience in liturgiology. Unfortunately there was heavy weightage on the side of what may be called Anglo-Catholic ritual, and very little indigenous material was discovered for inclusion.

Departures from the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 were obvious in the printed draft of 1951 which was considered at the Episcopal Synod of that year, and forwarded for consideration by the Diocesan Liturgical Committees. This roused a certain amount of unfavourable comment, but there were those who welcomed the new trend.

The General Council of 1953 was held at Poona, and the writer recalls the stir of interest when the Metropolitan announced that the S.P.C.K. proposed to present a copy of the Proposed Prayer Book to each delegate. However, many were greatly astonished to find the draft printed as a well-bound prayer book, having a title page which clearly stated that it was a book authorized by the Episcopal Synod. Though it was the intention of the President of the Council merely to introduce and table the proposals, a point of order was raised, and two resolutions proposed, requesting that the title page be altered, and the preface re-drafted, so that it might be made quite clear that the alternative services were authorized only for permissive use, and for study, in preparation for the next General Council. As the Constitution clearly states in Declaration 16 that the Episcopal Synod alone cannot authorize a *book* of Common Prayer, these resolutions were accepted, despite a strong challenge from one of the prayer book compilers. This served to indicate that there was a body of opinion which was perturbed by the introduction of draft proposals in book form. For many, this was the first intimation that extreme services such as the Liturgy for India were being suggested as the norm of worship.

There was considerable reaction during the year 1953, largely in the form of clergy discussions, and letters and articles in diocesan

¹ Since 1947 the C.I.B.C. has been the C.I.P.B.C.—the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon.

magazines. Raja Maharaj Singh, an eminent layman (a former Governor of Bombay) with a wide knowledge of Church History, printed a booklet which dealt in detail with the proposals, and it is worth quoting from his publication : " The authors seem to be oblivious of the fact that many of the alterations now recommended were *deliberately and of set purpose* discarded at the Reformation and excluded from our present Prayer Book. They go well beyond even the changes in the proposed Prayer Book of 1928 in England which was twice rejected by the British House of Commons because of its Rome-ward tendencies, particularly on the reservation of the Holy Sacrament. And yet we are now asked to accept Romanisations in India more numerous than what were rejected in England in 1928."¹

The Diocesan Liturgical Committees, during the years 1953 and 1954, gave considerable time to a detailed examination of the draft book, and many notes were submitted to the Liturgical Committee of the Province. Implicit in much of the criticism was the contention, which Raja Maharaj Singh had stressed with considerable force, that there were definite departures from the standards of doctrine and practice in the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. The Chairman of the Provincial Liturgical Committee pointed out, in a letter to the chairman of a Diocesan Liturgical Committee, that the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 would continue to be an authorized alternative for permissive use after the new book received authorization. He went on to state that in his opinion the 1662 Book would then retain the same kind of authority as the Thirty-Nine Articles have in the C.I.P.B.C. (There is considerable question regarding the authoritative status of these Articles in this Church.) What was even more interesting was his protest against the suspicion that the new Book was intended to be a departure from the Anglican traditions of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. Yet, to many individuals, and also some Liturgical Committees, it was patently clear that there were such departures.

Assessors, clerical and lay, were called to meet with the bishops in Synod at Deolali in January, 1955, and considerable time was given to discussion of the draft proposals in the light of criticisms submitted by liturgical committees. At the very beginning it was obvious that the reactions to the draft had created some misgivings. One of the compilers deprecated certain suspicions, and stated, rather naively, that in presenting the draft proposals they had only intended to lay all their cards on the table. Some who were present were tempted to ask why the cards were almost all of one colour. He then went on to propose that the main controversial items should be put on one side for inclusion in a " supplementary book " and that the Synod should proceed to examine the proposed services which would form a " basic book ". There was an audible sigh of relief, for everyone, and most of all the Metropolitan, dreaded a Prayer Book controversy.

Detailed work was done in Synod and sub-committees on the draft book, and there was a remarkable spirit of unity shown in an effort

¹ *Thoughts on the Proposed Prayer Book for the C.I.P.B.C.*, Raja Maharaj Singh, 1953.

to produce a book of worship which would command the acceptance of all schools of thought. However, there were a few areas where agreement appeared to be impossible. The evangelical group pointed out that these items, few though they were, would cause grave misgivings, and would convince many that the draft should be rejected.

Throughout the discussions the Metropolitan, who chaired the meetings for many arduous sessions, acted with commendable impartiality, and often refused to accept close votes on crucial decisions. Sub-committees worked late hours to draft acceptable proposals. The final result was a draft for a "basic book" which had considerably fewer controversial items. Evangelicals were encouraged, but there were still unacceptable innovations remaining, and in the background was the spectre of the "supplementary book" which was designed to give room for the blessing of palms, chrism, incense, the kissing of the Holy Table, and similar practices.

During the year 1955 the basic book proposals were produced in galley proof format, and given further consideration by some Liturgical Committees. The situation was, however, confusing for many. In a number of churches the 1951 form of the "Holy Eucharist" had been introduced, and other draft services, issued by the S.P.C.K. in booklet form, were being used. Numerous amendments had been passed at the 1955 Synod, and it was not long before the new draft of the "Holy Eucharist" was published with the Episcopal Synod's authority for permissive use. It was not surprising that with a bewildering choice before them, consisting of the bound Proposed Prayer Book of 1951, the galley proof form of 1955, and different booklets, both clergy and laity were confused.

In January, 1956, the Episcopal Synod met with assessors in Colombo. Though it was obvious that the Proposed Prayer Book draft was the most important item on the agenda it was avoided until late in the proceedings. It was then made quite clear by the Metropolitan that he proposed to present the draft at the General Council for a "first reading", with only general, and limited, discussion, in the same way that a Bill is first moved in Parliament. Clearly, and understandably, this was a plan to minimize the possibility of controversy. However, the evangelical side proposed a resolution which was designed to show that any such concurrence was not final authorization of the draft but a reference to Diocesan Councils for their study and recommendations.

At this stage the difficulty of "assent" by evangelicals to the new book was raised. One of the Liturgical Committees had suggested that any new prayer book should have a preface clearly stating the legal position of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. It was urged by some in the Synod that in such a preface, clauses could be inserted which would safeguard the position of evangelicals in the matter of assent to a book containing controversial permissive uses. This was pressed as a reasonable solution in informal conversations, and the Metropolitan eventually requested an evangelical assessor to be responsible for drafting clauses which would be acceptable.

The meetings of the General Council followed, and there appeared to be the same reluctance to take up the Prayer Book proposals, until

finally discussion was requested, and the Council agreed to consider the subject immediately.

One who had been closely associated with the compilation, the Bishop of Bombay, opened the proceedings, and was followed by Raja Maharaj Singh who expressed himself strongly in opposition to many of the proposals, and urged that concurrence be not given. A number of speakers took part in the general discussion, and the evangelicals were well represented. Again the crucial matter of assent was raised, and it was pointed out that, though many controversial items had been relegated to the "supplementary book", there were still sections which were completely unacceptable even though their use was not obligatory for those who had conscientious difficulty. It was made clear that no honest evangelical could give assent according to the constitutional form (Constitution, Canons, and Rules, p. 42f.): "I believe the doctrine set forth in the Book of Common Prayer . . . to be agreeable to the Word of God and I will preach and teach according to these standards". In this context the evangelical objections to Prayers for the Departed, and Reservation of the Sacrament, both of which are found in the Proposed Prayer Book, were clearly presented.

Soon it was obvious that, though there were those who favoured acceptance of the draft as it stood, there was considerable uneasiness about "first concurrence", and a general feeling that Diocesan Councils should first be consulted. According to the Constitution, Prayer Book proposals follow the same procedure as that for a new Canon which must be considered and passed at two sessions of General Council separated by a reasonable interval, during which Diocesan Councils must be given opportunity to consider the draft. However, the General Council clearly hesitated to give any sign of approval before the dioceses had considered the draft.

A sub-committee was therefore appointed to prepare a new resolution which would be acceptable. Their study of the Constitution brought to light a reference to the possibility of consulting Diocesan Councils in matters affecting faith and order. The resolution brought forward was then accepted in the following form :

"That this Council receives the draft of the Proposed Prayer Book for the Province, as amended by the Episcopal Synod, sitting with assessors in 1955 and 1956, and in accordance with Canons VII and IX of Chapter XXXV refers it to all the Diocesan Councils with a view to their replies being received and taken into consideration by the Episcopal Synod before it makes its proposals to the next General Council."

The Council also made clear its desire for a printing of the draft of the basic book in the form which is to be considered by Diocesan Councils. Such a publication should clear some confusion, and also eliminate from the area of consideration several objectionable items. It will also make possible much wider study, and it is hoped that evangelical scholars will give positive help in this examination so that as Diocesan Councils meet between now and 1959, when the next General Council will probably be convened, there will be useful material to present. It has been the aim of evangelicals within the C.I.P.B.C. to make their contributions to the discussion of the draft

as positive as possible, though at the same time they have taken a strong stand against unscriptural teachings and practices. As a direct result much of the controversial material has been eliminated from the basic draft which is to be considered for authorization. The opinions of scholars in England have been sought on several points by the High Church group, and it will help considerably if scholars who are evangelicals will give careful study to the draft proposals, and pass on the results to those in India who believe that they are facing problems similar to those with which their brethren in England were confronted in 1928.

We must accept the fact that the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon should have a book of worship which is peculiarly its own. It is regrettable that the compilers of the 1951 proposals largely sought their foundations in documents which are basically pre-Reformation in character; though it must be admitted that there is a great dearth of suitable indigenous material. It was hoped that there would be considerable simplification of the worship book. Instead the proposals amassed a pile of former permissive uses, and added many innovations to the 1662 use, making a prayer book of nearly one thousand pages!

However, we must appreciate the general desire to produce a book which will command the respect and approval of all groups. The delay in giving first concurrence is proof of this. Apparently many felt it was urgent that the Church enter into the projected Church Union scheme in North India carrying her own worship book. Unfortunately they have not realized that many in the non-Anglican churches are just as strongly opposed as evangelical Anglicans to practices and teaching which are contrary to the spirit of the Reformation. The plea is that the Church is Catholic as well as Reformed. It is regrettable that so often, if the 1951 draft proposals give any guidance, the definition of "Catholic" has a Roman emphasis. Though evangelicals reject the accusation that they condemn everything that comes from a Roman use, however good it may be, they may be forgiven for their tendency to be suspicious when pre-Reformation emphasis is preponderant in a book which is to be for the Church of India.

Since the Colombo meetings there has been close consultation with evangelical leaders and scholars both in India and England regarding the proposal for a safeguarding preface which would make assent to the book possible. It is interesting that there is complete unanimity in opposition to acceptance of any such device which, it is felt, would neither be wise nor satisfactory. It would merely serve to stress the fact that a certain group regards some sections of the authorized Prayer Book as repugnant to Scripture.

Evangelicals, though always seeking the way of peace, are under compulsion to oppose the authorization of any Book of Common Prayer which includes teaching and practices unwarranted by Holy Scripture, and they must insist that, even though the 1662 use is recognized as a legitimate alternative, the basic book of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon must be a document which carries the same emphasis upon Scriptural foundations.