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978-1-107-43289-5 - Elevation in the Eucharist its History and Rationale

T. W. Drury

Excerpt

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE leaders of the Church of England were mainly guided by two principles, when, in the 16th and 17th centuries, they reconstructed her forms of public worship. In the first place stood their appeal to Holy Scripture as the supreme and ultimate authority, and to the judgment of the Primitive Church as the earliest witness to its meaning. In the second place they claimed that each particular or national church had the right to "ordain, change, and abolish" what was "ordained only by man's authority."

What can certainly claim divine appointment is of primary importance and possesses absolute authority. Moreover, the evidence of apostolic use and general acceptance in very early times must have a weight only second to that of divine command.

But rites and ceremonies which lack such authority at once fall into a secondary place, and even widespread adoption and long-established use cannot deprive a church of the right to modify, or even abolish, such practices as rest only on human authority.

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Matters of ceremony belong mainly to the class of things non-essential, for the obvious reason that, while certain *rites* of the Church can claim the authority of our Lord and His Apostles, the *ceremonies*, by which those rites are accompanied and which express their meaning, are, with a few conspicuous exceptions, not of primitive origin.

Accordingly, when a ceremony thus falls into a class of things which have only secondary importance, other principles, of less commanding, though of considerable, moment come into play. The Reformers carefully explain these principles in the historical accounts of the two great stages of development (A.D. 1549 and 1662), which form the introductory chapters to our Book of Common Prayer, and more especially in the chapter "Of Ceremonies."

On the one hand, ceremonies, though in themselves not open to objection as significant of erroneous doctrine, may by their "excessive multitude" "more confound and darken, than declare and set forth Christ's benefits unto us." Or again, "the most weighty cause of the abolishment of certain ceremonies" was that they had been "so far abused, partly by the superstitious blindness of the rude and unlearned, and partly by the insatiable avarice of such as sought more their own lucre than the glory of God, that the abuses could not well be taken away, the thing remaining still."

On the other hand, some ceremonial is necessary,

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both for “a decent Order and godly Discipline,” and also “to stir up the dull mind of man to the remembrance of his duty to God,” and granting this, “surely where the old may be well used, there they cannot reasonably reprove the old only for their age.”

It is to such firmness in putting away, not only what was distinctly significant of erroneous teaching, but also what was excessive and liable to abuse, coupled with a deep strong reverence for antiquity, and a firm resolve to maintain the continuity of Church life and order, that we owe that Book of Common Prayer which has for 350 years been “accepted and approved by all sober, peaceable and truly conscientious sons of the Church of England.” (Introductory chapters to the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

In view of this, and of the fact that many ceremonies are now being practised which have no rubrical authority, the liturgical history of ceremonies ceases to be of merely academic interest, and acquires considerable importance. To ascertain dispassionately the exact facts as to the origin, development, purpose, and meaning of a ceremony is the first step needed for a calm and judicial decision upon its claim to be recognised, in any revision of our services, as a wise and helpful adjunct to divine worship.

Ceremonies cannot be rightly studied apart from the circumstances that gave rise to them, the theological ideas which have become associated with them,

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the impression which they generally produce upon the popular mind. Hooker tells us that they are “resemblances framed according to things spiritually understood, whereunto they serve as a hand to lead, and a way to direct<sup>1</sup>.” That is to say, a really helpful ceremony is not merely the decent accessory to a public act, calculated vaguely to impress the mind with reverence, like the ceremonial of some civic or national celebration, but it is, or ought to be, *significant*, and so likely to teach and stir the hearts and minds of men.

But it must not be forgotten, that ceremonies cannot teach with the same sharpness of definition which is found in an accurate statement as to doctrine or devotion. To be helpful they must correspond to what they are intended to signify, but that correspondence, from its very nature, must be liable to varying interpretations; and a ceremony which has been used for many centuries, and has been associated with widely different ideas, must be regarded in the light not only of *what it is now intended to suggest by those who adopt it*, but of the meaning and influence which it has had in the past, and which it is therefore likely to have on the *popular* mind in the present day. These considerations apply with special force to the ceremony of elevation.

<sup>1</sup> Hooker, *Eccl. Pol.* iv. 1. 3. See the Bishop of Oxford's *Visitation Charge*, 1906, pp. 5—8.

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The history of elevation is full of complicated issues. The ceremony itself is easily adapted to varied interpretations, and it has accordingly been adopted at different points in the service with different shades of significance. Lapse of time has also tended in some cases to obscure the original purpose, and the ceremony has come to be a stereotyped piece of ritual, vaguely significant of devotion, but lacking definiteness of intention.

Six distinct places can be pointed out at which, in one or other of the groups of Liturgies, this ceremony occurs. There are elevations of

- (1) the gifts of the people at the Offertory.
- (2) the Bread and Wine at the words "Qui pridie" and "Simili modo."
- (3) the Bread and Wine immediately after the consecration of each element.
- (4) the Bread and Wine together at the close of the Western Canon.
- (5) the consecrated Bread before the communion of the people in Eastern Liturgies, accompanied by the words τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἀγίοις.
- (6) the consecrated Bread at the communion of the people in the Church of Rome, accompanied by the words *Ecce Agnus Dei, Ecce qui tollit peccata mundi.*

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The object of this enquiry is to trace the origin, use, and meaning of each of these forms of elevation, and where needful to disentangle its earlier from its later purpose. The investigation is historical, and involves an appeal to the Liturgies of the East, the Sacramentaries and Missals of the West, and also to those early and mediæval authors who have written on matters of sacred ritual.

The act of elevation, that is of lifting up the Bread and Wine, set apart for consecration or already consecrated, may signify one of two distinct things.

(1) It may partake of the nature of the heave offering, as illustrated in the Peace Offering of the Jewish ritual<sup>1</sup>. The parts assigned to the priest in that offering were lifted up before the altar as “a declaration in action” that they belonged to God. It was a symbolical offering of certain parts of the victim to God, which were then taken back as a gift from God and consumed by the priest.

This view of the ceremony includes the presentation of gifts of all kinds to God for His service, whether of “alms and oblations” generally, or specially of the Bread and Wine for His blessing before Communion.

<sup>1</sup> Bona (*Rerum Liturg.* II. xiii. 2) quotes a curious perversion of the Chaldee Paraphrase on Ps. lxxii. 16, “Erit placenta tritici in capitibus sacerdotum,” in support of this kind of elevation. The ultimate source of his erroneous statement about this Targum is the “Additions” of Paul of Burgos (1400 A.D.) to the *Postillæ* of Nicholas de Lyra.

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It also includes the idea of a presentation to God of a memorial of the Sacrifice of our Blessed Lord, or, as it came in later days to be regarded, an act in which “the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt” (Art. xxxi.).

This is the *God-ward* aspect of elevation.

(2) It may be employed for the more usual purpose of displaying to the people the elements now prepared and consecrated for their use. But here a yet more marked divergence of view appears, for this form of elevation has denoted very distinct theological ideas.

(a) Sometimes the simpler idea has prevailed of presenting to the people the gifts as they were brought forward for their act of communion. Thus regarded the ceremony was both an invitation and a warning—an invitation to draw near, a warning that holy things are only for holy men. The exhibiting of the sacred symbols of redemption would naturally serve to stir dull minds to a more vivid remembrance of their Redeemer, and would thus call forth more intense devotion.

(b) But this earlier use of the ceremony acquired a different meaning, when the belief in an objective presence was developed by the Schoolmen into the doctrine of a corporal and local presence, and issued in the dogma of Transubstantiation. The devout worship of our Lord’s spiritual presence in the Sacrament came to be directed towards His very Body and Blood as

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present in substance under the form of Bread and Wine, and the ceremony of Elevation became a signal that, the consecration being now complete, distinct reverence was at once due to the consecrated species. It will appear that this doctrine, thus sharply defined in A.D. 1215, produced a great crisis in the development of Eucharistic ceremonial in the West.

This is the *man-ward* aspect of elevation.

These main lines of divergent thought will appear again and again in this enquiry, and must constantly be borne in mind. Other subsidiary shades of meaning will also appear, but they can generally be differentiated by means of these fundamental distinctions.



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## CHAPTER I.

### EASTERN LITURGIES.

IT is natural to begin by examining the Liturgies of the East. The ceremony of elevation appears in them for the most part at one definite point of the service, not at several points as in the ritual of the West. Its meaning moreover is less complex, the enquiry being disturbed by fewer cross-currents of doctrine and variations of usage. Our first enquiry will therefore be this—Where did elevation occur, and what did it mean, in the Eastern Liturgies?

#### (1) *Elevation at the Offertory.*

The offering of the gifts, and specially of the Bread and Wine destined for Eucharistic use, was a marked feature in the Oriental rite. As this offering eventually came to be accompanied by a distinct act of elevation in the West, it might well be expected that the same ceremony would accompany it in the East. But there is no trace of such a ceremony in this connexion in the *public* part of the services, though it is found as a

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later development in a *Prothesis* of the Liturgy of St Chrysostom of about the 14th century, and is referred to by Cardinal Humbert in the 11th century<sup>1</sup>.

The offering of the unconsecrated gifts once occupied a marked position at the commencement of the Mass of the faithful before the Anaphora. It is probably referred to by St Clement of Rome (I *Epist.* c. xlv.) where he speaks of the sin of casting off those who “without blame and holily offer the gifts<sup>2</sup>”: and several early writers make it clear that the offerings of the people, including the Bread and Wine afterwards used at the Communion, were placed upon the Holy Table by one of the ministers and so offered on behalf of the people<sup>3</sup>. In other words there was a lay oblation

<sup>1</sup> Brightman, p. 548, λαβὼν τὸν ἄρον ὑποὶ αὐτὸν ἀκροδάκτυλον (*Lit. St Chrys.*). The *Prothesis* is really the second part of the Offertory (viz. the preparation of the elements after the offering of the people), put out of its place at the commencement of the service and performed in a side chapel. This *Prothesis-elevation* is alluded to by Cardinal Humbert (c. 1050, *Contra Græcorum Calumnias*), “Porro in præfatis sanctis ecclesiis cum ipsa sancta patina sanctam anaphoram, i.e. oblationem, exaltant.” He is speaking of the ritual preparation of the elements with the *λόγχη* in the *Prothesis*. Brightman, p. 541.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Lightfoot raises the question in what sense the presbyter might be said to “offer the gifts.” After quoting various passages, he adds, “They led the prayers and thanksgivings of the congregation, they presented the alms and contributions to God, and asked His blessing upon them in the name of the whole body. Hence Clement is careful to insist (§ 40) that these offerings should be made at the right time, and in the right place, and by the right people.” Bp Lightfoot, *Clement of Rome*, Pt I. Vol. ii. p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> *Const. Apost.* ii. 25, 27, 34, 53. Ambrosiaster, *Quest. ex Vet.*