

## 23/87 Church Furnishings etc

(This report was received by the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney in October 1989.)

### Resolution 23/87

1. The Synod resolution is –

"Synod notes the variety of furnishing (fixed and unfixed), and their arrangement, currently found in Anglican churches, chapels and other licensed places within the Diocese and requests the Standing Committee to establish a committee to investigate the current regulations, guidelines and considerations relating to the internal furnishing (fixed and unfixed) and the internal layout and arrangements of such buildings with specific reference to the theological factors relating to such furnishings and their arrangement, and that the results of the investigation be reported to the next session of the Synod".

### Membership of the Committee by Standing Committee

2. The members are –

Mr G. Bray	The Rev J.S. Normand (Secretary)
Canon D.B. Knox	The Rev J. Ramsay (Convenor)
Archdeacon W.H. Newmarch	Canon J.E. Whild

### Introduction

3. The committee met on eight occasions (Canon Knox retired in September 1988).

4. The committee allocated various responsibilities to its members and contributions were received on the following topics –

- (a) Present regulations regarding buildings and furniture for churches in the Diocese of Sydney.
- (b) Extracts from the following books -
  - (i) Building for Worship - S. Smallery
  - (ii) Sacrament Sacrifice & Eucharist - A.M. Stibbs
  - (iii) Sydney Anglicans - Cable & Judd
  - (iv) The Protestant Dictionary - article "Lord's Table The"
- (c) Discussion paper of church furnishings and a response.
- (d) The rubrics, articles and preface of the 1662 Prayer Book in their reference to church buildings and furnishings.
- (e) Biblical relationship of word and sacrament.
- (f) Symbolism: its use and abuse (two papers) and a response.
- (g) The purpose of Christians meeting together and what they ought to do when they meet.
- (h) God forbids images and pictures for use in our relationship with Him.

5. The committee investigated the current regulations, guidelines and considerations relating to the internal furnishings (fixed and unfixed) and the internal layout and arrangements currently found in Anglican churches, chapels and other licensed places within the Diocese. The findings were as follows.

- (a) The Archbishop, though one of his Architectural Panels, approves all building plans and furnishings of the church and their placements.
- (b) Approval of plans will only be given when the furnishing of the church, including chancel furniture have been approved by the Archbishop.
- (c) Specific details of regulations are described in sections of the "Fifth Handbook" namely -
  - (i) Sydney Church Ordinance, Section 21 pages 229-230
  - (ii) Regulations relating to Section 21 on page 263 which include exceptions to Section 21 which require the approval of the Archdeacon and the need of a faculty for memorials.
- (d) The table at the time of Holy Communion is to stand in the body of the church or the chancel (Canon 82 of the Canons of 1603) .

"..... when the said Holy Communion is to be administered: at which time the same shall be placed in so good sort within the church or chancel, as thereby the Minister may be more conveniently heard of the communicants in his Prayer and Ministracion,

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and the communicants also more conveniently, and in more number, communicate with the said Minister ....."

It was further noted that in the Prayer Book and other church formularies the table is always referred to as the "table" or "Lord's Table".

6. The committee made specific reference to the theological factors relating to church furnishings and their arrangement and came to the following conclusions.
  - (a) There are no theological factors controlling the actual arrangements of church furniture apart from the arrangement which facilitates the purpose for which the furniture is being used (appendices A1 and A2). All of the committee agreed with most of what is contained in these two appendices but at certain points in each appendix there are differing and equally held points of view.
  - (b) Scripture, as made explicit in the second commandment, forbids the use of objects of adoration. Therefore crucifixes, statutes, crosses, paintings, ornaments and anything else that is made an object of worship must not be revered (appendix B).
7. The committee noted that practices of the Church of England in England and in Australia have seen a variety of styles of layouts and arrangements of internal furnishings throughout their history. This is illustrated by the following examples: Tables for Holy Communion have been placed in prominent positions or what has been called "relatively insignificant" positions (see page 53 "Sydney Anglicans"); rails surrounding the table became general only after many years; pulpits have sometimes been centrally placed.
8. The committee concludes that there has never been a normative pattern of church furnishings and their arrangement for all church buildings at all times.
9. The committee investigated the nature and value of symbolism in churches. Two equally held views were expressed.
  - (a) Opinion 1: Symbols are not aides to devotion since true devotion is friendship with God. A symbol coming between God and his people is a distraction.
  - (b) Opinion 2: Symbols can be helpful but it is important that a Symbol clearly represents what it is intended to convey. If it does not do this it may well lead to error. The teaching that goes with the symbol is an important factor in the use of symbols.
10. Having completed its investigations and the reporting of its findings the committee did not consider that the Synod resolution called on it to express specific recommendations based on those findings.

For and on behalf of the Committee

**J. RAMSAY**  
*Convenor*

19 June 1989

## Appendix A1

1. What is the purpose of the congregation meeting together?
  - (1) Christ is present with his people through his Holy Spirit in each person and addresses his people through his word in the scriptures. The hearing of the scriptures read and explained will be an essential feature of any gathering of Christians. The word of Christ is demonstrated in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper when they are administered but the acted word will always depend on the scripture for its proper use. The spiritual realities of the sacraments are the realities of which the sacraments are a symbol. The celebration of a sacrament does not make Christ "more present"; it symbolises Christ present with his people.
  - (2) The mutual encouragement, exhortation, comfort and joy that believers are to minister to one another is expressed in their meeting together by prayer, through the singing of hymns, psalms and songs and by appropriate opportunities to speak together. Much of the ministry of believers to one another will take place outside their times of meeting but ought to be expressed in their meetings together.
2. What furniture and arrangement is recommended to facilitate the congregation in its meeting?
  - (1) Since the essential element in a congregational meeting is the hearing of the word of God then the furniture that facilitates the reading and exposition of the scripture should be the focal point. Normally a pulpit is provided for the exposition of God's word and a lectern for its reading. A lectern could also be used as a pulpit provided that it is able to hold both the Bible and the preacher's sermon notes. Another item of furniture that may be needed is a prayer desk for the clergyman or others to lead the service. It could perhaps be incorporated into the lectern and/or pulpit but could be a separate item.
  - (2) When the sacraments are administered the font and holy table must be capable of being placed so that the congregation are able to see, hear and participate in the administration.
  - (3) The arrangements relating to seating, lighting, sound system, creche facilities etc should be such as to facilitate the hearing of God's word.

## Appendix A2

### Meeting Together

According to the New Testament, worship is a characteristic activity of both individual believer and the Church as a whole. Worship in the New Testament is in fact seen as the essential activity of the people of God. What makes worship Christian is the acceptance of God as Lord through His Son Jesus Christ. Christians are those who belong to the body of Christ because they are "in Christ", and who in that corporate context offer their worship to God *through* Christ (Heb. 13:15) *by* the Spirit (Rom. 8:26f.)

There are, of course, many different aspects of corporate worship. The summary of primitive Christian worship which we are given in Acts mentions two basic elements, teaching (*didache*), and fellowship (*koinona*). The second of the two is further characterized as consisting of "the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42); and to these may be added praise (Acts 2:46f.) and thanksgiving (Eph. 5:19f.). Praise and prayer, instruction and participation in the sacraments, are central ingredients of any pattern of worship.

The unique and distinctive essential of a Christian meeting is that it is a coming together unto the Lord who is in the midst. The first and pre-eminent awareness of a Christian meeting should therefore be this sense of the Lord in the midst. Consequently the primary and most important activity when Christians meet together, should be their acknowledgement of the Lord, and the outward corporate expression of their relation and response to Him.

The ministry of God's Word in the reading of, and in the preaching from, Holy Scripture forms therefore an indispensable part of worship. It demands to be approached and heeded with readiness to hear, and to submit to, the present word of the living God. There is no more practical way in which we can show our love to Christ and do Him honour, than by thus reverently and obediently listening to His voice.

It is equally an essential part of full worship for the Sacraments of the Gospel to be properly administered and received. So all Church members should be baptized, and should become regular communicants.

Any building for reformed worship, therefore, Anglican as much as any other, should still provide a clear statement of the togetherness of the body of Christ, and of the balance between the ministries of Word and sacrament.

The community assembles for worship not only round a table, but also around a pulpit and a font. Careful consideration of the placing of pulpit, table and font is therefore required. These must be properly related to one another, and exist together without confusion.

What then is the liturgical centre of an Anglican church building to be? Around what are we to build? What are we doing in church? If the community is assembling to hear the Word preached as well as to share in the

administration of the Lord's Supper, should not these two focal points, table and pulpit, form the centre? We take pulpit and *table* together, rather than pulpit, table and *font*, because the service of holy communion is in fact more central than that of baptism to the ongoing life of the Church. All these three focal points are in any case functional symbols which gather together the Church's worship just as worship itself gathers together the whole of life.

To summarize: a correct theology of the clergy should result in a proper positioning not only of table and pulpit, font and reading-desk, but also of the minister himself in relation to the congregation.

The theological and liturgical principle of building for worship, to conclude, maintains that Anglican architecture should harmonize with and express Anglican belief. It should be properly suited to its function, which is to shelter a Christian community, with certain convictions about the God who is being worshipped and about the nature of that worship; a community whose doctrine of Church, Word and sacraments is a reformed doctrine.

(Extracts from

- i) Building for worship - Stephen Smalley
- ii) The Church - Universal and Local - Alan Stubbs)

## Appendix B

### Worship (based on an article by Dr D.B. Knox)

Worship is a natural activity; it is not only a religious duty by a felt human need; it is world-wide and there is no nation or tribe known to history that does not worship. However the worship offered differs from place to place, because worship takes its character and its expression from the concept of God that the worshipper has. The way a person worships is a key to the way he or she thinks about God. Thus christian worship takes its character from the christian concept of God. For worship is the acknowledgement of God, the honouring of God, the giving worth to God, so that our ideas of God control our ways of worship.

A knowledge of God's character comes through His word and thus the Bible is the underlying rock on which all christian worship must be based .... God is worshipped through His word. It is understood, then, why the Bible is so emphatic that God's people are not to worship Him through images and idols. Condemnation of idolatry runs through the Bible from beginning to end. For example, the second of the Ten Commandments says "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath .... you shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Exodus 20:4, 5) (see also Deuteronomy 4:15, 16:22).

The clear teaching of scripture ought to be sufficient to banish images and likeness (whether crucifixes, statues, crosses, paintings, ornaments or anything else that is made an object of worship) but in addition it may be asked why scripture is so adamant against such material objects in worship. Three things may be said:

- (1) Pictures and images are inadequate to portray the Divine. This can only be conveyed through His word.
- (2) The temptation to worship the image with divine honour is strong when it is set up in front of us for our attention.
- (3) God is above all a loving God and the true response and worship that is offered to such a God is faith and trust but sacred pictures and statues are dumb and do not speak. They do not evoke faith for faith goes out to a promise from God.

On the contrary they may direct the mind to the external object and so hinder the heart from rising, through the word of God, to God himself in faith, trust, love and adoration. It is God's word which elicits the true response of faith and thus it is the God who has revealed Himself through his word that is worshipped.

Christian worship has a characteristic about it that makes it profoundly different from all other human worship. The christian stands moment by moment in the presence of God. Our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now seated at God's right hand through His victory on the cross and is crowned with glory and honour introduces us into God's presence. Indeed He seats us with Himself at God's right hand so that the christian is in the presence of God and direct fellowship with the true and only God.