

CHAPTER 4

The Affinity shown in the Use of Traditional Language, in Liturgical Practice, and in Architectural Style

In spite of the liberal character of much of their thinking neither the Unitarians nor the Broad Churchmen were entirely radical. Both exhibited conservative tendencies, which, particularly on the Unitarian side, had the effect of increasing the similarity between them.

The conservatism of the Broad Churchmen expressed itself in their employment of the traditional forms of worship, as prescribed in the *Book of Common Prayer*. This, of course, along with the use of traditional Church buildings, as opposed to buildings of the “meeting-house” or “chapel” style, was the inevitable result of the fact that the Broad Churchmen were Anglicans and as such committed to the use of these patterns and components of worship. But it must not be assumed from this that the Broad Churchmen were reluctant Anglicans; and there is no evidence of any desire on their part to change the essential style or framework of their worship: even Charles Voysey, who when forced to leave the Anglican fold, retained, after his founding of the “Theistic Church”,¹ the clerical garb of an Anglican Clergyman,² and based his own liturgy on the *Book of Common Prayer*.³ The Broad Churchmen were uneasy, however, about the Athanasian Creed;⁴ and the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds and the Thirty-Nine Articles were often understood in a sophisticated sense, which to many Unitarians seemed not entirely ingenuous. To the latter, in fact, this public profession of the ancient formularies by men of known theological radicalism was something of a scandal. And though the Unitarians could not but admire the liberalizing tendency of the presence

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of such men as Jowett and Stanley in the Anglican church they were yet worried about their moral position. Thus *The Inquirer*, in reference to certain conclusions of Jowett and other Broad Churchmen found it “difficult to reconcile these conclusions with the ecclesiastical position of the Broad Church theologians and their retention of emoluments held on the condition of assenting to formularies which it is the whole tendency of their writings to disprove”;⁵ and James Martineau “thought that men like Dean Stanley ought to have seceded from the Established Church”.⁶ This, moreover, was not inconsistent with Martineau’s desire to broaden the church, for while “he considered it eminently desirable to alter the formularies, so as to admit many who are now excluded . . . until they have been altered, he reckoned it wrong and almost dishonest for those to remain in the church who question many of the doctrines expressed in its rather narrow and rigid creeds and other documents”.⁷

The practice of the Broad Churchmen, then, involved the use of terminology which had to be understood in a refined and somewhat unnatural sense, and to the Unitarian conscience this seemed insincere. But an examination of Unitarian writings shows that Unitarians also were not guiltless in this respect. Thus, for example, James Martineau, during the course of some correspondence with Dr. Sadler regarding the *Common Prayer for Christian Worship*,⁸ in the production of which he took part, wrote in 1861: “My scruple about the terms ‘Mediator’, ‘Redeemer’, and ‘Saviour’ applied to Christ, has always lingered and hung about my mind from boyhood, though I am ashamed to say I have never till now had the courage and simplicity to look it fairly in the face. And now that I do so, and try the hearts of others on the matter, I find that they too suffer from the same feeling of misleading profession and infirm sincerity in the use of these words which has secretly troubled me all my life”;⁹ and regarding such interpretations to which he and other Unitarians subjected the above-mentioned terms, he admitted that while they “provide an intelligible meaning” for them “it is . . . indubitably an *invented* meaning, devised in order to save

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the phrases,—and *not* by any means the sense they bear either in scripture whence they come, or in the Church which has fixed their permanent significance”.¹⁰ Yet only about twenty years before this he had included in his *Hymns for the Christian Church and Home* (1840), in the section allotted to “Christ and Christianity”, which comprised seventy-three hymns, no less than eighteen hymns employing the terms “Saviour” or “Redeemer” in respect of Jesus—about 25 per cent of the whole.¹¹ Nor did the term “Saviour”, with the same reference, disappear from his *Hymns of Praise and Prayer* published in 1874.¹² Indeed, in spite of Martineau’s protestation that for this soteriological language with its implicit idea of “a transference from a prior lost or enslaved to a subsequent rescued condition”¹³ he could “see nothing for it but rejection”,¹⁴ he included in his contribution to *Common Prayer for Christian Worship*—about which the previously mentioned correspondence took place—the following passage, which clearly expresses the very concept he rejected:

“The Son of God hath dwelt among us: full of grace and truth;
The Son of Man hath gone up on high: made perfect through
suffering for the holy of holies.
He is our peace: giving us access by one spirit to the Father
No more strangers and exiles: but fellow-citizens with the saints,
and of the household of God”.¹⁵

However Martineau might interpret this passage he was certainly laying himself open to the charge of making a “misleading profession”.

There are, in fact, some¹⁶ who see in the troubled face of Martineau’s later years¹⁷ a reflection of the conflict in the mind of a man whose devotional expression was not entirely in harmony with his rationalistic theology—a man who, in spite of his Broad Church theological sympathy, could yet confess in respect of his capacity as an editor of a hymn book “offered to a Nonconformist Broad Church” that his “prevailing feeling carries him less to Broad Church sources than to other springs,—Catholic, Mystical, semi-Puritan, Lutheran, Wesleyan,—and gives him therefore what he most loves, and what speaks most

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truly for him, mingled with much that neither he nor his readers can believe".¹⁸

More significant, however, from the specifically Anglican aspect of the Unitarian and Broad Church affinity than this attempt to re-interpret traditional phraseology was the not unrelated fact that to quite a remarkable extent Unitarian liturgies were based upon the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The use of a liturgy at all was something of a novelty, for the Nonconformist churches in England have never been particularly attracted to set prayers,¹⁹ and perhaps naturally so as it was largely through refusal to accept the Prayer Book of 1662, with the resultant Toleration Act of 1689,²⁰ that Nonconformity came to be established in this country. No English Nonconformist liturgy can be traced before 1753,²¹ and from then on, till the end of the eighteenth century, all the liturgies that can be found were either Arian or Unitarian in their theology.²² The influence of Dr. Samuel Clarke's revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* in this connection has already been noted in the first chapter.

In the nineteenth century this general pattern continued. Unitarians were almost the only English Nonconformists to use liturgies as a normal pattern of worship,²³ which in itself is indicative of "a very real yearning for a degree of order and ritual more usually associated with the Church of England".²⁴ But what is more important is the fact that the majority of the liturgies employed were modelled on the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Between 1801 and 1900 Unitarians in England produced about fifty-six liturgies,²⁵ of which only six were not based on the *Book of Common Prayer*.²⁶ None of the latter, moreover, went into a second edition, whereas more than a quarter of those based on the *Book of Common Prayer* went into second, and some into many, editions.²⁷ Three nineteenth-century editions of eighteenth-century liturgies, all based, or containing services based, on the *Book of Common Prayer* were also produced.²⁸ Thus the *Book of Common Prayer* affected roughly 90 per cent of the liturgies in use by Unitarians in the nineteenth century.

A detailed examination is not called for, but it will be of

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interest to make a brief analysis of the contents of the first service in *Common Prayer for Christian Worship*, which latter was probably the most influential and widely used Unitarian prayer book of the nineteenth century.²⁹ The service begins with Sentences, only one of which is not in the *Book of Common Prayer*. These are followed by the Exhortation and General Confession—the latter slightly modified by the omission of the phrases “and there is no health in us” and “miserable offenders”. There being no Absolution, the Lord’s Prayer comes next, along with an attenuated form of the Versicles and Responses. The *Gloria Patri* is omitted *passim*. Then follow a shortened form of the *Venite*, the First Lesson, and an abbreviated version of the *Te Deum* from which a number of orthodox phrases have been cut, though there are references to the Son and the Holy Spirit. As in the *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Benedicite* is given as an alternative, but is here shortened. Then follows the Second Lesson, along with the *Benedictus*, and the *Jubilate Deo* as an alternative. Both are abbreviated. The Apostles’ Creed, which appears at this point in the Anglican Service, is omitted, along with the Suffrages, the Lord’s Prayer, and Versicles. Then follow the Collect for the Day, an abridged form of the Collect for Peace, and the Collect for Grace. The Prayer for the King’s Majesty follows, minus the reference to the vanquishing of enemies, along with the Prayer for the Royal Family and the Prayer for Clergy and people, both of the latter being also slightly amended. Then follow the Prayer for the High Court of Parliament, the Prayer for all Conditions of men, and the General Thanksgiving—all of which are subjected to only a minimum of alteration. Then follows a prayer in commemoration of the faithful departed, which is not found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The service ends with a revised form of the Prayer of St. Chrysostom, and the Benediction from 2 Corinthians 13, with that in Philippians 4 as an alternative.

As may be seen from the foregoing, the service is but a revised form of the order for Morning Prayer in the Anglican Prayer Book. The second service stands in a similar relationship to the Anglican order for Evening Prayer, and though the

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subsequent services are not so closely based on the *Book of Common Prayer*, the influence of the latter is clearly discernible, as also in the fact that the book contains such features as services for the Baptism of Infants, the Baptism of those of Riper Years, Confirmation, and Prayers to be used at Sea. Quite clearly many Unitarians could say, as stated in the preface of one of their liturgies, that they took “a sincere pleasure in adopting a mode of worship” which lessened “the distance between them and their brethren of the ‘establishment’ ”.³⁰

But an Anglican style of worship needs an Anglican type of setting for worship, and this leads naturally to a consideration of another, though rather less important, point of similarity between Unitarianism and the Anglican Broad Church, viz., the ready manner in which Unitarians adopted Gothic architecture as the appropriate style for their church buildings.

Considering the fact of their Puritan heritage of box-like chapels, on the one hand, and the radical nature of their theological thinking on the other it is surprising that the Unitarians adopted such a traditional style. But it was the Anglican style, and it suited their Anglican mode of worship.

The revival of Gothic architecture in the nineteenth century for church buildings in England was, of course, part of a much wider movement, the discussion of which falls outside the scope of this book,³¹ but its popularity owed something not only to its economic³² advantages, but also to its romantic, theological, and “ecclesiological”³³ associations and significance. But whatever its associations on the Continent, or in books on ecclesiology, for most people in England in the nineteenth century, as probably even for most people today, the Gothic style of architecture was, and is, particularly “Anglican”. It is the style in which so many of the older Anglican churches are built, and just as the box-like structures of a Nonconformist chapel signifies “Congregationalist”, “Baptist”, etc., so, for most people, the Gothic style signifies “Anglican”, and it comes as something of a surprise to find that a church constructed in such a style is not Anglican.

When Gothic revival in church building began about 1818

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it was naturally the Anglicans who were the first to take it up;³⁴ and a third of a century was to pass before Nonconformity in general came to adopt it, and this is not surprising as it did not suit their non-liturgical form of service. But for Unitarians this was not the case, and thus they came to build churches in the Gothic style rather earlier than most Nonconformists.³⁵ As early as 1839 a church designed by Sir Charles Barry, the architect of the Houses of Parliament, was built for the congregation of J. J. Tayler at Upper Brook Street, Manchester; and it was fully Gothic, except for the fact that, in accordance with the Nonconformist emphasis on preaching, the pulpit stood in the middle of the end wall, instead of an altar. Others quickly followed, such as Dukinfield (1840) and St. Petersgate, Stockport (1842). But the first Nonconformist church known to have an altar in the chancel, so emphasizing the devotional aspect of worship, and a closer association with Anglicanism, was at Gee Cross, Hyde (1848),³⁶ followed by Mill Hill, Leeds, in the same year, Hope Street Church, Liverpool (1849), Christ Church, Banbury (1850) and Bank Street, Bury (1852),— in all of which cases the influence of the finally more dominant wing of Unitarianism, which emphasized its breadth, and its affinity with the National Church, is to be seen. Thereafter a flood of Unitarian Gothic followed, and it is not for nothing that in A. L. Drummond's *The Church Architecture of Protestantism* it is a Unitarian church, viz., the Old Meeting, Birmingham (1885), that is described as "a landmark in Nonconformist Church Architecture".³⁷ Some idea of the Unitarian predilection for this style may be gathered from the fact that in the Unitarian booklet, *The Churches and Chapels of the East Cheshire Christian Union*,³⁸ of the thirteen churches listed as having been built between 1840 and 1879, only three, and one of these a Sunday school and mission, do not show the influence of Gothic, and some, as, for example, Gee Cross, and Flowery Field, Hyde, can only be described as fully Gothic;³⁹ and around the middle of the century, in a number of places, as, for example, Kingswood, Leicester, and Warwick, even ancient meeting houses were altered, by the provision of a chancel and altar, in accordance

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with the move towards Gothic, and more Anglican ways of worship.

For some High Church Anglicans, with their interest in ecclesiology, the use of such symbolic architecture by any “congregation of Socinians” involved the prostitution of “the speaking architecture of the Church” in “the service of her bitterest enemies”.⁴⁰ But it must not be thought from this that the High Churchmen were the only Anglicans who were interested in Gothic. That interest, though not in the narrow ecclesiological sense, belonged to the Anglican Church as a whole, and not least to the Broad Churchmen, whose great spokesman, Dean Stanley, saw in “the recovery, the second birth, of Gothic architecture” a striking proof that “the human mind is not dead, nor the power of our Maker slackened”.⁴¹ For him, as for the Unitarians, Gothic made its religious appeal because of “its sobriety, its grandeur, its breadth, its sublimity”;⁴² and for them, as for Dr. Arnold, there was a persistent hope that the influence of Anglican ideals would rescue their church buildings from the “utter coarseness and deformity”⁴³ that the great Broad Churchman saw in the church architecture of Nonconformity.