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SMALL STEPS – BIG LEAPS

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There are a number of apparently small changes between the First and Second Prayer Books issued in the reign of King Edward VI (1549 and 1552). Though small some of these actually represent major steps in the reformation of the doctrine and liturgy of the Church of England.

At the Burial service whereas there had been a commendation of the soul of the dead person to God, in the new services there was simply a committal of the body to the ground (pending the general resurrection) and a declaration of the gospel promises with the expectation that those dying in faith would be with Christ. There is also no prayer for the forgiveness of sin, nor the provision for Holy Communion. Thus the errors of the medieval liturgy were finally removed (though they have crept back gradually over the years). What matters is whether a person dies in faith, our prayers for their future, requiem masses, and the invented sufferings of purgatory make no difference whatsoever.

'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.'

In the old book the Bishop was to wear a rochette (surplice with fancy cuffs), a surplice or alb, and a cope or vestment (ie. Chasuble) – for all services. A Priest leading Priests were to wear just a surplice except for the Holy Communion when they were to wear a plain white alb with a vestment or cope. In the new book the sacrificial garments were finally disposed of so that a Minister was forbidden to wear either alb, vestment or cope. Instead at all public services, including Communion the Bishop would wear a rochette and the priest a surplice. (The English word Priest derives from the Greek and biblical word *presbuteros*. In the Bible the word used for pagan and Israelite priests is *hiereus*, all Christians are priests in this latter sense, but presbyter/priest is a particular non-sacramental office within the Church.)

In the old book when a sick person was to receive holy communion the sacrament was to be reserved at the end of a public service and then taken to the sick person. In the new book there was to be a separate service in the sick person's house with as many others as possible (unless the sick person had a contagious disease in which case only the minister need attend). It should be noted that in both books it is stressed that a person can receive the benefits of the sacrament without receiving the sacrament itself. Therefore the distinction was properly made that what matters supremely is not the bread and wine but the faith of the recipient and that what is taking place is not a sacrifice but a meal for the people of God. It is a sign of a confused and erroneous church that today this change has been reversed.

In both books Priests are given the ordination charge to preach the word and administer the sacraments. In the old book a Bible, chalice and bread were handed to the candidate as a symbol of this. In the new book only a Bible was to be used. The right administration of the sacrament is important but the primary role of ministers is to *'preach the word'*