



Restoration of Profaned Property

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the practice of consecrating land, buildings and artifacts for sacred use developed over many centuries. The Hebrew Scriptures give detailed attention to the production and dedication of artifacts for use in both the tabernacle and the temple. It also records the centralization of Jewish worship from a variety of holy places to the Temple in Jerusalem. The threat of temple desecration by enemies filled Jews with disgust and horror and was an occasion for martyrdom.

Some people in the early Church rejected such concepts as 'holy space' and sacred artifacts, but these ideas gradually came to be widely accepted. Thus Anglicans follow ancient and respected custom in setting property apart from "profane and common uses" for the worship of God. (p. 682, 1962 BCP).

Because of this long-standing practice, it is of grave pastoral concern when occult use has been made of consecrated property. It is important that the desecration be named publicly and the property 'reclaimed' for sacred use.

The Church's authority over evil is based on both Jesus' earthly ministry of exorcism and his Paschal victory. We proclaim that Christ gave up his life on the cross "that he might shatter the chains of evil and death..." (p. 196, BAS). We recall how God has "delivered us from evil..." as well as ask that God do so. (p. 198, BAS and the Lord's Prayer)

Neither the BCP nor the BAS provide rites for the restoration of profaned objects/spaces. One option is the use of "Restoring the Things Profaned" (p. 217-218, The Book of Occasional Services - 1991, Episcopal Church, U.S.A. See also, The Canadian Book of Occasional Services - 1964 for rites of blessings.) The following prayer, and adaptation from the American rite, has been used after an occult-related robbery:

Gracious and merciful God, you have called us to be your people in this place. If anything in this church building has been profaned, restore it to the use for which it has been dedicated and consecrated.

Your Son calls us to refrain from storing up for ourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Give us the grace to make you alone our treasure.

Forgive the thieves who robbed you. Bring them to a saving knowledge of your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



Recommendation:

I recommend that the rite of restoration take place at the main Sunday Eucharist following the discovery of the incident. After the Prayers of the People, the presider (with assistant(s)) may process to the site/object in question and offer a prayer of restoration. It may be desirable to include any restored item(s) in the offertory procession. The celebration of the Eucharist may then continue.

It is important to avoid elaborate aspersions, censings, anointing or other rituals unless they are already the common practice of the community. The simplicity of Jesus' exorcisms shows us that the Church's power over evil does not reside in the complexity of our ritual but in the authority of Jesus Christ.

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Historic notes:

"The essential element for the dedication or consecration of a church in the Roman Rite was to celebrate the Eucharist there." (p. 79, *Marion Hatchett's Sanctifying Life, Time and Space*)

The Gallican and Eastern rites of consecration of space were more elaborate than the Roman, including aspersions and anointings upon objects and later, the tracing of the alphabet on the floor to 'claim' it for Jesus Christ. We see the latter practice in the 1962 BCP consecration of church or chapel. (p. 689)

The American 1991 BOS rite allows for the use of aspersions and incense. The Canadian *Occasional Celebrations* does not. In the notes re: "Blessing of a Church or Chapel", the OC says, "this rite does not provide for sprinkling of water or anointing with oil" (although the congregation, rather than the building, might be sprinkled after the prayers at the font).