

INCENSE AND THE EPIDEMIC

To the Editor of The Living Church:

THE communication in your paper of October 26th, under the heading of *The Church and the Epidemic*, from William H. Higgins, gives food for reflection; for surely in an epidemic we are specially moved to prayer, and in God's house.

We may trustfully accept as a message to us that which was given to the Israelites:

"If thou wilt diligently harken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee." (Exodus 15: 26.)

Now we are told by doctors that the churches and schools are hotbeds for the spread of diseases like the prevailing influenza. That this is so is our own fault, and, so far as churches are concerned, because we are neglecting God's direct command.

There is but one thing in connection with our meeting together to pray to and worship our great Creator—the Maker of the universe, whom we are permitted to call "our Father which art in heaven"—that is directly commanded by Him, and that is this: "In every place incense shall be offered unto My name" (Malachi 1:11). Whether our services are long or short, can we find any other part of them directly commanded by God?

In the 16th chapter of Numbers, 47th and 48th verses, we are told how Aaron "put on incense, and made an atonement for the people . . . and the plague was stayed".

Like other things commanded by God, incense has its physical as well as its spiritual uses; and there need be no fear of the spread of such diseases in churches where it is freely used; as it is a powerful disinfectant.

Though it may not be used otherwise than in worship (Exodus 30:38), yet there are other well-known disinfectants which can be and should be regularly used in all schoolrooms at such a time.

Many of us were brought up with strong prejudices against incense in church services; but are we to allow our prejudices to prevail and set aside a direct commandment of God? Can His blessing be expected where His command is not obeyed? Is there any reason, other than our prejudices, why we should not have incense regularly used in all our services?

Can we show any authority why we should not, or do not, obey God's command?

Would Naaman have been cured of his leprosy if there had not been strict obedience on his part to the command of Elisha, which seemed to Naaman so unreasonable?

Faithfully yours, H. F. RUSSELL-HOWLAND.

Richmond Hill, Long Island, October 26th.