

## **The Liturgical Movement and Mission**

ONE of the most moving accounts of an act of Christian worship ever written comes from one of the darkest memories of the late World War. The Germans were conscripting young Frenchmen for forced labour in Germany. Several young Roman Catholic priests assumed lay attire, and deliberately got themselves conscripted. They had a pastoral concern and a missionary zeal. One of them found himself in a labour camp in the depths of forest country. Things were made very tough for these workers in every way. The young priest found at first neither Christian sympathies nor knowledge amongst his parishioners. He knew that if his identity as a priest was discovered, he would be shot ; yet slowly he made progress, and eventually converts.

He had, to strengthen his soul, few of the helps to which his whole training and habit of life had accustomed him. He was cut off from the sacraments, around which his devotional life had previously revolved. Prayer and meditation remained, amidst the ardours of a working schedule which began about 6 a.m., though he had to work chiefly upon memory of office book and Bible.

Then, a few drops of wine were smuggled in to him. They saved a little of the coarse and scanty prison bread. They washed carefully a prison mug. They took themselves furtively by ones and twos into the depths of the forest. The battered remains of an attaché case were held by two men in front of the priest to form a Holy Table. The rest formed up in a little circle on the other side of the Table, and the Mass was celebrated. He had no Missal. He used the native language of his fellow prisoners throughout, translating from his memory of the Latin liturgy which had once been his daily portion., Most of the rest had never been at Mass before, but he had instructed them in the responses which linked them in the Action. Most of them he had baptized—whether he had been given authority also to confirm, I do not recall. Rome, however, can be imaginative in providing for exceptional circumstances, so I fancy he must have been.

I think I have a reasonably Reformed cast of mind and conviction, but I confess that when I first read of this, in a borrowed book whose very title now eludes me, I was very

deeply shaken. I rejoiced that God's Word is not bound, and was deepened in understanding of that involvement with Christ which the Sacrament ever focusses anew.

That incident stands for me as symbol of what the modern Liturgical Movement is all about. The general image of "Liturgics" amongst many is still that it is the concern of antiquarians, precisians, whose concern for forms can endanger the substance. We know quite well that this is not a just verdict, and are aware of the dangers which it warns us against. Many of us are also aware that one of the distinct contributions which Presbyterians may make to liturgical thought in general arises from the fact that our whole theological tradition emphasizes that sound theological principle, faithfulness to the Word of God, is always much more important than the mere pleading of past historical precedents. We can justly claim that Reformed Churchmen have been men of principle; though we may do well to confess that historically this very virtue has often been a weakness, as it has been accompanied by a singular ability to exaggerate the importance of very trivial issues without any sense of proportion.

The modern Liturgical Movement, which has sprung up spontaneously in widely different Communion, has a different impulse from the old Liturgics. It springs up from pastoral and evangelical involvement, and is very sensitive to the pressures of our times. It gives little stress to merely aesthetic considerations, and a great deal of stress to enabling people to share the Church's life in Christ. Aesthetic dabbling gave us the florid prayers of the earlier Orchard, and was usually the liturgical expression of a liberal theology. The new Liturgical Movement has a post-liberal theology, and rises from the ashes left by two great wars and a world wide depression. It confronts modern paganism far more effectively than the old Liturgics had any thought of doing, because it has the will to convert.

Perhaps an illustration from within the life of the Roman Church will fix the contrast. One of the fine products of the older Liturgics was a revival of Psalmody. The glories of plainsong chanting were rediscovered. Learned research took place as to "correct," i.e. historically authoritative, ways of rendering Gregorian music. The end product was the wonderful standards of performance set by the monks at Sol mnes and Maria Laach. That perfection in these forms was almost unachievable except by experts did not trouble the Liturgists as much as it might have done. In

the same Church the Liturgical Movement has also made a notable contribution to psalmody. It took the form, first of making a very modern vernacular translation of the Psalter (the Bible of Jerusalem), and then of popularizing it as widely as possible amongst ordinary lay people by providing settings which, while of good musical quality, were fresh, modern and catchy, so that they could be picked up quickly by a crowd. Gelineau's settings do not seem to have had nearly as much attention from non-Romans as they deserve. They are as important an instrument for leading lay folk into sharing the treasures of faith as Wesley's hymns were in the 18th century. A recital of them filled Auckland Town Hall last year, and the folk who gathered went home singing them. I do not know how they are catching on in Scotland, but they are certainly a cut above Billy Graham choruses.

It is true, of course, that the Liturgical Movement draws heavily at times from the scholarship of the older Liturgics, but there is a world of difference; and it is a difference altogether in directions we can approve. When we find the emergence of such a trend as this, closely linked with the new understanding opened up by Biblical Theology and also with the Ecumenical Movement, we sense that it is genuinely of the Holy Spirit. Now what are some of the further things it has to say to us?

Having already noted its origin in pastoral and evangelical involvement, the next thing to grasp about this Movement is that it integrates the different aspects of Church Life. One of the first important books in English along these lines was the late Dr Gabriel Hebert's *Liturgy and Society*. A very able reviewer of that book in New Zealand, himself an accomplished Calvin scholar, said of it when it appeared, that, allowing for mere differences of theological "lingo," such as the use of the word "Mass" (which is apt to grate on our ears), the fundamental plea of that very impassioned argument was a twentieth century statement of all the principles about the life of the Church and its worship which Calvin held. He added that this agreement was all the more impressive in that Dr Hebert appeared to be quite unconscious of it. He had drawn much of his theological inspiration from F. D. Maurice, and even more from Scripture itself, and from a lifetime of worship and meditation. The basic contention of Hebert's book was that Christian truth is embodied in three main "forms." These are (1) *Dogma*: the truth wrestled with in rigour and honesty of

thought, as an activity within the Church ; (2) *Liturgy* : in which the same truth informs the Church's corporate worship ; and (3) the totality of the Church's *Life* in the world. Furthermore, these three belong together, each requiring the others.

Now, that these three belong together, others have said also, but in nothing like the depth which Hebert developed. Over against individualism, which he traced back as a prime corrupting factor in the pre-Reformation era, he stressed the corporate nature of the Church and its worship. He claimed—and he had edited parts of the *Summa*—that Aquinas's doctrine of the Church was the most meagrely developed part of his system, and that this was already affecting worship adversely in his age. I think it could be maintained that one of Calvin's most important emphases, far more important than predestination (the point which his scholastic successors over-developed), was his stress on the nature of the Church and the corresponding nature of its worship. Few theologians have been so corporate-minded as Calvin. He very strongly repudiated the right of anyone to depart from the Church's corporate norms as to that content. The content of worship arises from the Revelation which it celebrates, and is given of God.

The Liturgical Movement makes the same stress, on corporicity, and on integration. That is part of the impressiveness of the illustration with which this article began. Those were men who had learned Christ, who risked their lives to join in Christian worship, and found Him relevant in the midst of the appalling circumstances in which they lived.

Just after the War, we had in New Zealand a certain Church, in a new housing area, where these insights were more impressively realized than I have ever experienced them elsewhere. Their worship rose out of their growing understanding of the Faith, and it was integrated with what they were as a fellowship in the community around them. One of their most useful developments was their parish garden. It had been waste land, part of their property. Their place of worship was an adapted Army Hut. As an act of witness they decided to make a beauty spot of that dump, which was hard by a major bus stop. A gang was at work there nearly every Saturday, taming the wilderness. They had a meal together, and their children played around them, and the work programme always included a period of Bible Study of an unconventional kind, to which they came

with zest, because they were being discovered of God. Their Communion Seasons began with a thorough scrubbing of every inch of their Church Hall, and a special cleaning up of the garden, a meal, and then the Preparatory Service. They ended on the Monday with an extremely uninhibited social evening and family prayers. And the Gospel spread like fire. I knew a man in that setting who passed from frosty outsider into Communicant within four months, thence to eldership within the year, and to study for the Ministry within about another year. The normal parish setting does not achieve this. We are too much tied down by use and wont. The Liturgical Movement knows how to take risks, being secure as to the central truth, yet eager to discover.

Some of the passionate integration of life and worship in that place was of Iona inspiration—and incidentally, whatever we may think of Dr George MacLeod, isn't he dead right when he lambastes Billy Graham with his insistent, "What about the Bomb?" It is no answer to that insistence for Graham to reply that he sticks to "What think ye of Christ?" That is the evasion of individualism. I don't know how far MacLeod would put it that way; but Catholic truth and worship are at stake in his insistence that facing the second question demands an answer to the first; some answer, not necessarily MacLeod's.

Let us note further how characteristically the Liturgical Movement gets to work in the focussing of some particular pastoral problem. How difficult this question of Baptism is, amidst a paganized community. The problem concerns every branch of the Church, in direct proportion to the seriousness with which it reckons with Baptism as an act of God. It is a theological and disciplinary problem; but surely also it is needful that our liturgical carrying through of Baptism must follow through the insights of our theology; dramatize them, proclaim them, thrust them home. It is not merely a matter of instructing the parents and exhorting them. Many of them will take any vows we put to them, with light-hearted acquiescence, because "Granny" has insisted that they must "have the baby done." There is an obligation which the Church itself takes in daring to administer this Sacrament, and sometimes carries out as irresponsibly as the most exasperating of parents. It calls for a kind of pastoral and corporate concern in the Church itself, and this needs to be supplied. Otherwise, we would be more honest to decline to give Baptism. Whatever

discipline may dictate must surely be applied with most rigour within the active core of the congregation itself. There has been some useful pioneer work on this at Halton in Leeds ; but it is a typically Liturgical Movement sort of reaction, and began with the moving of the Font from a back corner of the building into a position of prominence in the midst of the people.

In the actual ordering of our buildings the Liturgical Movement has shown its power to do some very radical thinking. It has a distaste for expressing itself in the architectural idioms of merely traditional types of plan and structure, which runs parallel to its tendency to express worship in the common language of the people. In both of these particulars, of course, the Roman tradition has staggered us all by the readiness it is beginning to show for rapid change. None of us could have believed it of them, but now that the time for change has come they put us all to shame.

I wonder if Church people realize how little most architectural opinion of the best quality respects our yearning for " a church which looks like a church " ; for traditional structures and general sentimentality all round. Yet the artistic principles behind " functionalism " are just the moral principles of puritanism applied in a different setting. It is at bottom a simple issue of truthfulness. We should have more respect for the artistic integrity of an architect than to ask him to build in reinforced concrete in a Gothic spirit ; yet we do it.

It is, however, more than a matter of style in structure. The plan is even more the vital thing ; for the plan depends upon the use to which the building is to be put. The type of plan expresses the nature of the community which is to use the building. The long vistas of a Gothic plan were partly dictated by Gothic structure, which had no ready means of roofing over a wide span. It also expressed a theological idea and a certain type of devotional emphasis. It stressed mystery, and is the most sacerdotal of all architectural plans. Here were the lay folk down below, and there far away were the clergy doing something with God for them. But each century discovers the particular emphases in the Sacrament which mean most to it. The Liturgical Movement on the whole is working by theological insights which have been very strongly influenced by the Biblical Theology, and the resulting buildings express the fellowship of God's family gathered about the Holy

Table. Thus the rediscovery of the primitive position for the Minister, behind the Table, facing the gathered people. And it is found by those who did not know it before to be a very exciting discovery, full of significance. Using the full skills available today, the planning of a Church is a matter of setting down a Table, deciding where the people shall be placed around it, usually as close as possible, often right round it, or at least on three sides; and then putting in the walls to enclose the people and a roof to shelter them.

Reduced to its basic elements like that, it soon becomes apparent that the plan of the building proclaims the Gospel, because it rises immediately from the activities of a fellowship whose whole action is consciously determined by its Faith. When the formative concept of worship is broadened to include both Word and Sacrament, as we would think essential, with full visibility and audibility as a further implied necessity, the architect's problem may be a little more difficult, but is certainly not insuperable. Once these first things have been put first, the mere details about where to put choir and organ can more easily be determined.

These lively, functional ideas are interacting with the purely technical ideas of modern architects as to the handling of space and mass and so forth, and the use of ever increasing resources of fresh materials with which to build. This movement on its architectural side will go a long way further, and challenges us to clear our minds in our understanding of what we are as Christian people.

All this that has been said concerns the Church's task of witness and of Mission. These words can easily be cheapened by glibness, yet we know the central importance of what they stand for. How far have we allowed our Liturgical Movements to instruct us in our overseas Missions, and in the young Churches? It is a very pertinent question. How can we justify causing converts in Pacific Islands to worship God in Scottish metrical Psalms, translated into a native dialect? How far do we need to cling to every jot and tittle of our denominational heritage, so that there were Chinese Churches of the Dutch Reformed Church in America, and for all I know still are? It is time to call in question the unconscious arrogance of our Western self-centredness, and to do it in the name of the Gospel. In the re-thinking of many things in foreign mission practice the Liturgical Movement is along sound lines.

This has been a discursive paper, because that was the treatment which seemed most natural. Its main contentions can be summed up in words from our Lord Himself. "Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which brings forth out of his treasure things *new* and *old*."

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