

Liturgy and Mission

I take it as a great honour that you have invited me here this morning to address this society which has done so much in the difficult field of reformation of Church Worship. I will be speaking to you as an unworthy pupil and disciple of Fr. Gabriel Hebert, S.S.M., whose book “*Liturgy and Society*” appeared just before the early formative years of my theological training. I owe more than I can say to the orientation Fr. Hebert gave to liturgical reform in my own communion and beyond it and not least to his hold upon the implications of our worship and sacramental life on the mission of the Lord’s people to the world.

The choice of subject for this morning’s paper has been prompted by the history of liturgical reform since that book appeared. In the last thirty years we have witnessed the emergence of three main problems within our traditions. First there is ever present danger of the divorce between the reformer of worship and the missionary and evangelist, conservative and radical, who, suspecting the intentions of the liturgist, leaves liturgy for what he believes to be the proper job. Because of this divorce there can appear forms of mission and witness practically detached or detachable from the ongoing liturgical life of the Church, forms of mission which lacking the framework and critique of the Central Act of the Church fall prey to individualism and secularism, leaving the worshipping Church bereft of the worshipping presence of those whose missionary fervour and activity could bring the needs of the world into vital relation to the liturgical act.

Secondly there is the increasing number of those who are searching for a “*relevant liturgy*”. These people believe that the liturgy itself must become a missionary tool—that all that is said and done must have an eye on the man outside, must come to terms with the inability of the secular man within our pews to share in the classical form of full liturgical worship. They stand as a rebuke and a consequence of the work of mere liturgical purists and restorers of the past but they also threaten the Gospel purposes of liturgy if they take as their only norm the capacities and conventions of modern man. We can often detect behind much brave experiment a dangerous reductionism which could leave the

missionary task impaired and drive in more deeply the wedge between the Gospel and the world to which it is addressed.

Thirdly we can already see the emergence of a pattern of liturgical practice alongside of, and even outside of, the congregational-parish pattern that we have inherited. Much positive work has been done to give to new missionary forms of the Church which claim our attention a liturgical life by no means diluted and truncated. If the missionary situation of the Church is taken seriously then we seem to have no right to assume that the shape and size of our present liturgical gatherings is normative. I must confess a special interest and participation in this movement of experiment and adaptation as it appears to auger well for the strict bonds between liturgy and mission and to overcome the dangers of non liturgical—non churchly forms of missionary presence which constitute one of the dangers of contemporary Christendom.

We must return to first principles if we are rightly to assess these movements and tendencies which are not confined to any one tradition, but appear across the whole denominational spectrum and have their bearing on our own task as parish ministers to create out of our congregations a liturgical missionary people of God in every place. What then is the essence of *liturgy*? Would it be too quaint to let a fourteenth century Byzantine theologian Nicholas Cabasilas give us his answer from his Commentary on the Divine Liturgy. For him liturgy consists in this “that in the sacred rite, Christ, the deeds he accomplished, and the sufferings he endured for our sakes are represented. Indeed the whole scheme of the work of redemption is signified in the psalms and the readings as in all the actions of the minister throughout the liturgy. Thus those who are present at these sacred rites have before their eyes these divine things and the consecration of the elements commemorating the death, resurrection and ascension of the Saviour—those who follow the Act recall the promise of the Father: the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the conversion of the nations which they brought about and their divine society. The whole celebrations of the mystery is like a unique portrayal of a single body which is the work of the Saviour”. This is a quotation all the more remarkable for its hold on the central function of liturgy, for its balance of word and rite, since it comes from a time when the proliferations of sign and symbol could so easily have covered up the purpose of liturgy. An examination of this text might uncover for us some consideration germane to our subject.

First the liturgy is primarily an *objective presentation* to us of Christ. It is the repeated return to *centre*—to Christ and his saving work ; both in word and sacrament we are given once again our point of reference that by means of this we know who we are, and into whose purposes we are brought. The liturgy is consequently an acknowledgement of our need to return to be converted again and again to God's central figure—to Jesus Christ. It is the God-given way through the word and sacrament whereby we are brought to see we have only existence and activity within our history in so far as we come back to Christ represented in our time and space, overcoming the distance between Him and us. It is therefore the proper place where singly and corporately we find any commission, any presence we have in the world to be wholly signified by Christ's presence for us and the world. In other words our mission to the nations and the promise of the Father and the gift of the Spirit is strictly controlled by Christ's place in the whole scheme of the work of redemption. Liturgy then is a constant repetitive correction to our notions of mission. It guards against the inadequate enthusiasm of seeing mission on our own terms—of getting men to join our all too human escapades for the extension of Christendom, of seeing mission as *our* hold and influence on the contemporary scene. It gives the only adequate horizon for the patient enormous task of mission.

Secondly the liturgy is addressed primarily to the ' faithful ' and those who through *faith acknowledge* Jesus as born, suffering, dying, risen and glorified who themselves know themselves to be " between the time "—the time for the conversion of the nations. It celebrates not only the mystery of Christ incarnate for us but the mystery of our divine frailty—the mystical body of Christ. Therefore liturgy on the one hand is meaningless without the presentation and effectual reminder of the whole scheme of our redemption—it can never be just for the fillip given to individual or corporate faith and what has been done for *us* but must be a presentation of what he had done *for us men*. On the other hand it is not the tool and instrument of mission in the sense of those who seek for a liturgy to speak to the world. Certainly the word goes forth to meet our worldliness and unbelief, certainly Christ is as much present in Kerugma to his disobedient Church as he is in his sacrament but the primary object in liturgy is to correct and reinvigorate our faulty, deformed, failing, fickle Kerugmata to the world. Liturgy takes up the *kat' idian* of S. Mark and the withdrawal to the

Upper Room, before the public display of the Cross and the preaching of the Church in the world. It is the necessary starting point, the prelude to the mission. It would lose its function of presentation if it became merely a tool of the evangelist. Can the Church in any age leave the missionary task to those who find it hard to see the relevance of this Christological correction given by liturgy ; to those whose interpretation of the word of God never receives the corporate corrective from Christ who again and again pulls us back to Himself and his mission to the world ? Can the Church allow preoccupation with mission to reduce this central act to the status of an instrument of mission in our own hands ? Can the Church itself continue in its vocation unless it sees that before its missionary task it needs to receive again and again the mission of the Christ to itself in word and sacrament ? For S. Paul at least his liturgy to the world followed on this proclamation to the Church of the death of Christ. What was signified by word and sacrament to the Church was lived out. The pouring out of himself was a libation upon the sacrificial offering of the Church's faith by offering a living and reasonable service in his body. (Phil. 2 : 17, Rom. 12 : 1)

On the other hand liturgy will not let us rest in a complacent receiving of the benefits of Christ as if Christ and the scheme of salvation was for the *Church* and not for the *world*. Any idea that we can be satisfied by the preaching of the Word in the pulpit, in the liturgical presentation of Christ is rebuked by the very Christ we meet in the liturgy. The Kerugma would not be proclamation if it were confined to our Church Assemblies and the present plight of our Churches is that the liturgy is so truncated. It is no wonder that evangelistic and missionary tasks are either wrongfully seen as the mere packing of the enquirer and worldly man into our assemblies or as the exercise of a few detached from the judgement and corrective of liturgy and operating *outside* the represented mystery. The Word of the Lord has the double function to recall again and again the believer from his unbelief and to call the man who has never come to a knowledge of God and his salvation. To identify or to divorce these functions is to fail to see the true place of liturgy and the life of the missionary church.

The liturgy is for the baptised—and the baptised are for the world. It is for this reason that we may have grave doubts about the wisdom of the movements which, away from the liturgy, pursue evangelism apart from the central act of the Church's life of praise and repentance and equally

about movements that seek to accommodate to the missionary task the preaching and rite which in liturgy are primarily set before the baptised believer. Nevertheless we can surely agree with Bishop Leslie Browne who in his Zabriskie Lectures 1964, says "we ought never to forget the vast majority of mankind for whom what we do and enjoy in our worship is meaningless. One of the factors that ought to influence our worship is the evangelistic *motive*—so that we all think, say, and do, can commend the truth and love of God to those who do not know him." This, I take it, is the missionary purpose of the liturgy.

Professor Jean Jacques von Allmen of Neuchâtel has recently put us all in his debt by spelling out the missionary significance of the liturgy in his book "Worship: its theology and practice". It may be as well to remind ourselves here, before we revert to practicalia of the main points of his thesis in this regard. "In the liturgy" he says "the Christian Church learns the effect of her true mission and evangelisation on the world, for the liturgy is both threat and promise to the world". It is a threat to its self-understanding and to its self-adequacy and justification. This is the proper function of our affirmative praise to God in the Gloria in excelsis Deo where Christ is addressed as "Thou only art Holy, Thou only art the Lord". And this is the proper function of the Credo affirming the condemnation and failure of human self-understanding after we have listened to the word. This is the proper function of Gloria Patri et Filio, not just a devout ascription of praise, but a removal of all human pretensions to claim praise from us. As von Allmen puts it in "The Participation of Worship", "They compromise themselves in the liturgy politically".

In the liturgy the Christian learns to face the world as a world who with the Church is judged already. Just as the word read and preached divides the hearers so does the sacrament invite and admit by grace into the messianic kingdom after judgement. Each liturgy is then a last day proleptically celebrated and the mission to the world is thus qualified and strengthened by this celebration.

Equally in the liturgy the Christian learns the nature of the promise which the evangel has for the world, we are in the world as the first fruits of the new man—the *homo eucharisticus*. The holy priesthood which Adam was meant to exercise for the created order is now restored through the new Adam—the High Priest of the new order by whom we are enabled to articulate the praises of creator. The promise

is not for us only but for the human race. In the liturgy we celebrate the world's future as the first fruits of creation. We are signs of the life lived to the praise of His glory.

In relation to the world the liturgy manifests the queuing up as it were of all things to share in this worship, so that its sighs and groans can be turned into singing. Colour, sound art and music which are able, as it were, to be seen to die and rise again and have their rightful place in the Lord's service.

But in all this the cult is addressed to God *not* to man—it is the primary place where the *Church* is evangelised whence it will be able to confront the world with an evangel. Nevertheless the very presence of a liturgical community has its effect on the world in the joy, freedom and peace which can be seen and recognised in those who so worship in spirit and truth. The liturgy is not justified by its evangelisation of the world but is the *Opus Dei* the Work commanded by God through Christ to his people “Let them hear what the Spirit says to the Churches” and “Do this in remembrance of me”.

But the plain fact remains that, when we have related liturgy to mission in terms of the former's function in a missionary Church, liturgy is *not* producing missionaries—or what is more important in present day society—missionary *congregations*. It can sustain, correct, invigorate, re-commission but liturgy itself needs a congregation of apostolic men to celebrate it. The impatience of much evangelistic work with the liturgical act of the Church of Christ comes from the fear that liturgy can be a substitute for mission; that even if liturgy is meant by its nature to bear so critically on mission in practice it does not do this for many congregations. Accommodation of liturgy to the capacity of the unconverted—or concentration on liturgy as *addressed* to man rather than to God comes from this same awareness that, at present, “Liturgical” congregations are not necessarily missionary. Nothing is more urgent in our nation (to go no further than Scotland) than an attention to this gap between the essential function of liturgy and the actual concrete obedience of the congregation to its apostolic work. We seem as yet for the most part to get no further than a *pastoral* ministry to the congregation and here and there *by* the congregation. How can we best overcome our inabilities to move into the missionary situations and yet hold fast to this liturgical centre? There are not lacking examples among us where this has already happened, and one must say that liturgical reform that does not issue in this renewed apostolicity of the congregation is not worth its name. Wor-

ship that has become a cul-de-sac for the grace of God, a siding for the word which reaches us but no further, is clearly inimical to the task of the people of God, and in this our speaking, our praying, our sacramental acts have to overcome so much in our hymn books of the "Glory for me" theme which imply that the word and sacrament reach their resting place when I have received them.

In view of this present predicament we must ask what we make of that third movement which in the face of the mobile disintegrated society into which we are moving breaks down the large settled parochial liturgical gathering into small gathered missionary groups whether of professions, special concerns or neighbourhood. There is no reduction of the liturgy, no wish to avoid anything not designed to sustain the praise prayer, penitence and gratitude of small committed groups of missionary orientated people. I am thinking of the students in Bonhoeffer's community for whom "Life Together" was written—of the groups at Mainz Castel with Horst Symenovski—of the little monasteries of two or three open to the local church, down a back street of the large cities of the world, the fraternity of the Little Brothers of Jesus, and the similar houses of Brothers of Taizé—of my own fraternity at Roslin. Here is an attempt to place the liturgical corrective and inspiration in the closest possible connection with the daily mission of the Christian community. Here then is a chance for the liturgy to bear daily on the concerns of the missioner for an utter simplicity of style and manner to prompt the right questions from the enquiring visitor who without formality finds himself sharing the prayers as well as the food and company of the group. No longer does he say "Why does the minister wear those funny clothes" or "Who invented pews?" but "What do you mean when you say "This is my body?"", Here the liturgy can renew itself by being again the Twelve together. Here one is near enough to another and to the word and table that there is no escape into anonymity—no escape from the consequences for mission. Here is a movement I believe which has not yet worked itself out which has much to teach us who have inherited only parish structures—which has recovered rather than lost the genuine purposes of liturgy and has therefore initiated and sustained forms of mission which have already borne fruit. It may well be that our newly admitted full Church members will need more and more some such form of liturgy before the parish Communion Sundays are seen to be what they are.

Bishop John A. T. Robinson has left on record in his "Liturgy come to Life" the account of what happened in Cambridge in the 1950's when some of us were privileged to take part in a resurgence of missionary zeal among undergraduates and senior members of the University. He describes how the shape of the liturgical community varied from the Chapel Worship to the Stair-case Churches where daily liturgy and frequent communion provided the resources for a sustained corporate mission in the College. Is it possible that both from our parishes and perhaps, and more important, from the factory, school and hospital there may be liturgical missionary groups who both in word and sacrament orientate themselves frequently towards the Christ who sends them on mission to his world? One thing is clear from my own experience of life, so lived, that the relation between liturgy and mission is seen to be the daily going and returning of a group whose fields of mission may be very diverse but whose responsibilities for one another and whose common commitment to Christ has a *churchly* foundation, a Catholic base and is not left to the whims and enthusiasm of the group. For my part I believe we shall both see and require more and more of such paraparochial groups which are not therefore *para churches*. Whatever may be our view of such a movement there is little doubt that we are in need of some fortifying of both the worship and mission of the Church, of some sort of preparation for and consequence of liturgy by means of Bible reading Groups with missionary commitment.

In order that our parish worship may gain in missionary perspective we need something that will prepare the people to hear the word; to see and receive the sacrament in its missionary dimensions, as a community in the world into which we are sent. Such groups inevitably give rise to embryonic liturgical worship *after* study and may even at a later date become fully 'liturgical' and yet still for that reason remain sharers of the parish Church Sunday liturgical life.

Some of us might find it hard to think of anything but the received pattern of parish church liturgy and may wish to ask in what way the parish Church itself may recover the awareness of the links between Christ the Church and the neighbourhood so that the grace of God is not shunted into a Church siding—so that the Word of God is not imprisoned in the pulpit or in the heart of a believer. I believe if you will bear with my naiveté that one of the most Christian symbols of our time is a map of the world. Not so central need

it be as it is in our fraternity Chapel where the sacrament house is a globe but somewhere in the Church porch there might well be such a map and even some figures—however misleading, of the numbers who have yet not come to faith in Christ. I think of the board outside the Taizé Church with its demand for *universal* reconciliation, of the map of the Mission de France in the refectory at Pontigny.

Is it of some use to try and overcome for our parishes the dominance of the concept of the Church gathered for worship by a *local* map which plots the homes and work of the congregations so that they see, on leaving the building, the shape and sign of the Church in the world, on mission as it were? If there is to be a return to the evangelical bond between worship and mission then we shall need a much more pointed dismissal than the conventional benedictions. The Western liturgy with its 'ite missa est' now said after the blessing by the priest is more adequate than our present custom of a blessing divorced from the ascension of Christ and his promise of the Spirit. Bishop Leslie Browne has appended to his lectures already mentioned above, a series of liturgical dismissals which are geared to the liturgical year. It is at this point that our customs in both our traditions need reforming.

Such reflections about possibilities that are open to us would not be complete without some reference to the need to review our use of *Sunday* as the day of the Lord. Scotland's tradition in jealously guarding this day is in grave need of reform—not I hope in abandoning the whole notion but in a positive reappraisal of *how* we commend it to the congregation. An hour's liturgy without the framework of articulate reflection on what we have heard and received, said and done in the concrete actuality of our present mission is, I believe, totally inadequate and is untrue to the best practice of the Christian Church. Those congregations that can provide time to preface and conclude the act of worship with an attempt to break down anonymity and incomprehension have the best chance of restoring the liturgy its missionary momentum. Is it possible to continue to think of liturgy as a block of listening and praying begun cold as it were and ending with the paralysing shock of the lonely family and individual returning to the world again after the service? It may well be that in order to achieve this we need to consider whether the conventional length of worship could be revived as it is being done in the Livingston experiment where the liturgy takes its place *between* two reflective and social gath-

erings of the congregation. In some parishes the use of the Sunday evening might be available for such prolongation of liturgy. In others it might be found that a quarterly weekend non residential local conference produced as much as weekly reordering of Sunday. What seems imperative is that the local Church acquires a time and place where the implications of liturgy are faced together.

Another positive contribution to this problem of keeping liturgy and mission together is the practice of setting up of lay panels meeting throughout the winter months to consider the practical implications of worship in the healing, oecumenical, missionary and diaconal work of the church in the immediate local, urban and national context of the congregation. These panels must have the regular opportunity of reporting to the whole assembly their findings and recommendations, and such plenary sessions need the strictest liturgical framework so that what is reflected on and planned emerges from and is fed-back in intercession and praise of the whole congregation.

Whatever practical aids we may introduce to inculcate a missionary perspective to liturgy nothing can take the place in my view of the steady proclaiming, in the ministry of the word, of the meaning of the forms and rites we inherit. The first need of contemporary Christendom is as always a gift of the Holy Spirit to see what responsibility the liturgy of word and sacrament lays upon us. If we are to avoid the two reductions of the Gospel to religion or to secularism we need to give heed to the word "And ye are witnesses to these things". "The source and beginning of all Christian mission", says Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in his "World as Sacrament" (p. 141) "is the oneness of the Church in Christ, in the joy of the world to come—the gift—the beginning, the presence, the promise, the reality, the anticipation of the kingdom". This is liturgy and the beginning of mission for "it is today that I am sent back into the world in joy and peace having seen the true light, having commemorated Christ's holy and glorious resurrection".

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