

## LITURGICAL REFORM BY LAY PEOPLE

This paper describes how proposals for the revision of the order of Sunday service were considered by a small group of lay men and women at the Episcopal Church of St. Columba, Edinburgh, and how discussions by the congregation at large were begun and are continuing.

It is necessary first to sketch the historical background. The people who subscribed to the building of St. Columba's in the late 1840's had two main objectives. One was missionary effort towards the very numerous and very poor inhabitants of the streets and wynds under the Castle. The church provided services and meetings for various age groups of both sexes throughout the week and its staff included nuns who especially devoted themselves to women and children. The church did notable work for some sixty years; it seems to have been a congregation where the few had provided the means for the many who had not. The founders' second purpose was to establish an altar which would be served only by the Scottish Liturgy, as a bulwark against the pressure to conform with the Church of England which had become fashionable among episcopalians after the lifting of their penal disabilities. This pressure is still with us. In the nineteenth century it was just another feature of the movement to treat Scotland as 'North Britain', backed apparently by the even more deplorable feeling that Canterbury would be a powerful support in the struggle against presbyterian enemies.

The Scottish Liturgy (or order of service for Holy Communion) received its distinctive character at the hands of eighteenth-century bishops who had studied the rites of the Eastern churches. It differs from the communion service in the English prayer book in two respects. In the first place, the order is similar to that of the Roman mass, and indeed to that of the Book of Common Order, 1940, and to the Second Order published by the Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion in 1973. Secondly, the prayer of consecration includes an epiclesis or invocation of the Holy Spirit. The recent reforms in the Church of England have produced in Series 3 an order which to the casual observer is much the same as the Scottish Liturgy, but I believe that no other Western rite uses the epiclesis in exactly the same way. This is the crux of my story, and I return to it later.

Although the Scottish Liturgy was built into the foundations of St. Columba's to the exclusion of the English office, the pattern of

Sunday worship came to conform with that usual in Anglo-Catholic churches south of the border, viz., Holy Communion said at 8 a.m., Sung Eucharist with few or no communicants at 11 a.m. and Evensong at 6.30 p.m. From the time of the Great War the congregational life declined, as in so many other places. Social changes made many of the activities of the church irrelevant, and by 1949 only a handful of members remained. The bishop then combined the incumbency with a new post of industrial chaplain, to which he appointed the Rev. E. N. Kemp (always known as 'Mark').

Mark Kemp at once set about reviving the liturgical life of St. Columba's. He replaced the three services by one at 10 a.m., attendance at which became a matter of obligation; he removed the chancel screen so that the altar should be visible; he pulled the altar away from the east wall and celebrated facing the people; he introduced scripture reading by laymen – anyone, not just office-bearers; he had the elements presented at the altar by a procession of lay men, women and children; he litanised the prayer for the church, inserting congregational responses. Mostly, he did things first and persuaded people to like them afterwards. He described what he had done and explained his reasons in an article in *Theology* in November 1958. Whether you agreed with him at all points or not, in his hands the worship of God became immensely vital. Apart from the responses in the intercessions, he made no changes in the order of service or in its language.

Mark was a pioneer; he did not hide his light under a bushel; and most of what he did single-handed in an obscure congregation twenty-five years ago the committee machinery of Rome and Canterbury has followed since. Meanwhile, St. Columba's has appeared to stagnate liturgically speaking. About ten years ago the bishops authorized a modest revision of the Scottish Liturgy, known as the 'grey bookie', and we adopted it. Otherwise we have had a fallow period, letting other people catch up with what we did in the 1950's.

The liturgical group set up in 1975 followed discussion of a 'purple paper' issued by central authority in the church which invited congregations to reassess all aspects of their life. The group examined systematically every part of the church service, and invited members of the congregation to offer comment on any part of the worship which they would like either altered or left alone. Before discussing some of the more important of the issues that arose from the group's deliberations, it may be as well to record that the order of service in use, in non-technical language, is as follows:

Introduction

Gloria in excelsis on high days

Readings and psalmody  
 Sermon  
 Creed  
 Intercession  
 Offertory  
 The Great Prayer; Lord's Prayer;  
     Peace of the Lord  
 Breaking of Bread  
 Communion  
 Thanksgiving and Dismissal

Hymns are sung at the introduction, offertory and dismissal and a psalm between O.T. and epistle. The choir sings 'Blessed is He that cometh' before the gospel, 'O Lamb of God' while the celebrant makes his communion, the other music during the communion of the people.

The principal subjects that engaged the group's attention were (a) the confession and absolution, (b) the scripture readings, (c) the intercessions and (d) the Great Prayer. A common feature of all these at St. Columba's is the vocal participation of the congregation. The question posed by the confession and absolution was, at what point of the service does it come most naturally? The Scottish Liturgy makes it a preparation for receiving communion; Series 3 places it before the offertory; the 'grey bookie' starts the service with it. There is a respectable body of opinion that beating the breast (if only metaphorically) is out of place in the joy of Christian worship. But the group thought that without formal provision for penitence and contrition we might fall into the easy error of taking the unspeakable mercy of God for granted. They did, however, consider that it is inappropriate to confess our sins (as in the Scottish Liturgy) immediately after our acceptance by God in Christ has been clinched in the singing of the Lord's prayer; and that the Series 3 position appears to imply that the service is divided into two parts, the second holier than the first. If we followed the primitive custom of turning out persons under instruction or discipline before proceeding to the Great Prayer, it might be suitable for those who remain after the doors are shut to begin again with confession; but we are not likely to go back to that practice. Logic thus drove the group to endorse St. Columba's present arrangement of making our confession as we first approach God in worship.

Mark Kemp made a great innovation as regards the scripture readings, but it has since become fossilized. Rather than replace worn-out prayer books he had the readings for each Sunday typed on a card, with a variety of translations. Any member of the congregation may offer to read either O.T. or epistle. The gospel is

read by the celebrant, or his assistant if there is one. The difficulty we now feel is that we want a *bigger selection of passages than a single year's cycle provides*, and the cards do not include more recent translations such as the New English and Jerusalem Bibles. It has been agreed that a two-year cycle should be introduced, that the cards should be replaced by a monthly list on the notice board of the passages to be read and that the readers should be free to use whatever translations they choose. It is also intended that the cycle of Sunday readings should be varied by the commemoration, when thought appropriate, of saints whose days fall near each Sunday. The selection of passages on these principles, and their posting on the board, will call for continuous effort. It is hoped to make a start this autumn.

The thorniest subject discussed by the liturgy group was the intercessions. Mark Kemp began the attack on the formality of the set 'prayer for the church' when he separated its paragraphs by a congregational response. From this we have gradually moved in two opposite directions. In Advent and Lent we have become very formal, and sing, as dialogue between celebrant and congregation, a litany derived from Orthodox use, for which the Scottish prayer book provides. At other times the intercessions are led by members of the congregation, who follow forms provided by the prayer book, by Series 3 or of their own devising, as they think best. A litanized pattern is, however, adopted by common consent. We thus follow to the letter the admonition in the Didache: 'But suffer the prophets to give thanks as they desire'. Unfortunately, not all God's people are prophets. The content or manner of one member's praying may be unhelpful, even offensive, to another. The liturgy group thought that informality and variety in the substance of the intercessions was to be encouraged, but that it would help to focus the congregation's attention if the opening and concluding biddings were more formalized. This seems to be a matter on which discussion will continue. Comparatively few members of the congregation offer for the responsible duty of leading the prayers, and those who do often give the impression of carrying burdens of concern for particular aspects of the world's need which they wish the rest of us to share. In short, the intercessions are the least comfortable part of our worship; perhaps it is right that they should be.

The eucharistic prayer is the only part of the service at St. Columba's which is the primary responsibility of the celebrant, and the congregation joins in two paragraphs even of this. The Great Prayer in the Scottish Liturgy is notable both for its length and for the weight of its content. For some years members of the congregation have been thinking that it is too long and that its language is archaic. Do we need nowadays to say 'a full, perfect and sufficient

sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction . . .'? Is this piling up of words not just a survival of ancient controversy, as superfluous in its own way as the string of adjectives' – 'benedictam, adscriptam, ratam, rationabilem, acceptabilemque' – in the Latin mass? The liturgy group agreed with criticisms of the length and language of the prayer. But as for its content, I quote from the group's report –

. . . those who prize the Scottish Liturgy consider that it is the richest form of worship in the English language. Those who hold this view point out that the eucharistic prayer is the most sublime activity in which human beings can engage; that to take part in it is the central reason why we go to church; and that we are entering here into both Christ's eternal intercession for mankind in the heavenly places and the prayer with which he instituted the eucharist, as recorded in John 17. The prayer cannot be short, because there is the whole gamut of Christian experience to be covered; neither can the language be trivial or colloquial because here if anywhere our religion should give 'free scope to the feelings of awe, mystery, tenderness, devotedness'. This quotation is from John Henry Newman, who thought that the qualities were especially Catholic – but of course Luther and the Wesleys also exhibit them among many others. But the claim for the Scottish eucharistic prayer is that alone among the prayers authorized for British churches to-day (now that the traditional Roman missal is discouraged) it approximates to giving 'free scope' to these characteristically religious attitudes.

The group considered that it should be possible to revise the Great Prayer in the Scottish Liturgy in such a way as to preserve and even enhance its characteristic qualities while making it a more suitable vehicle for modern worship. They appended to their report an attempt at such a revise, which is printed below. It was later suggested that congregational participation in such a prayer might consist of 'Amen' after the first word of institution and three Amens after the second. The parish meeting which considered the report was disposed to accept this general approach, but whether authority will be sought to use this particular revision of the prayer experimentally is uncertain. Confronted with an alternative, some members have found that they are more attached to the prayer-book than they had supposed.

I come now to what I have noted as the crux of my story, the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Great Prayer. In our discussions at St. Columba's we have understood this to be something more precise, more critical, than the generalized prayer for the Spirit's help contained in, say, the collect for purity at the beginning of the service or in the opening phrase of the eucharistic prayer in Series 3

and some other forms. In the Scottish Liturgy, as in the Eastern rite, the prayer for the Spirit is a culminating petition on which the whole action of the eucharist depends. Its wording is unequivocal in asking that the bread and wine, being blessed and hallowed by the Spirit's life-giving power, *may become* the Body and Blood of Christ. In this it is (I think) unique among Western rites and follows St. John Chrysostom, whose prayer says: 'Send down the Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts here set forth and make this bread the precious body of thy Christ and what is in this cup the precious blood of thy Christ, thou by thy Holy Spirit having wrought the change.'

An heir of the reformation who hears prayer being offered in these terms finds two lions in his path, whose dread names are Transubstantiation and *Ex Opere Operato*. The *ex opere operato* idea is indeed very insidious. For instance, I suspect its presence in two modern attitudes to public worship, the one that is concerned with its relevance to daily life and the one that finds an inherent spiritual value in good music and other arts. Both points of view are commendable. But where there is a strong emphasis on the corporate action of the people of God, offering to Him in the bread and wine the unity of worship with daily life and the needs of His creatures, it is easy to believe that our offering will indubitably, perhaps automatically, be given back to us as our spiritual food and drink: God has ordered things in this way. Similarly, if one emphasizes, perhaps to help musicians who are weak in dogmatic faith, the God-given spiritual value of great art, one is very near to believing that a eucharist may be 'successful' on the same terms as a concert is successful, because the beauty of the music, ceremonial, windows and architecture carry conviction to the artistic soul. The epiclesis stands as a corrective of such errors. It is not a formula, the correct use of which by a duly accredited representative ensures the effectiveness of the sacrament. It is the opposite of that, an acknowledgment that (in J. E. Rattenbury's phrase) 'the chief fact in all worship of God, is God'. Our worship may be as pure in its intention, as closely directed to the need of the world around us, as faultless in artistic execution, as human fallibility can allow, but when we reach the heart of the mystery, we can only throw ourselves completely on God's mercy – 'cast us not away; give us the comfort of your help, here again as in the past; make this service perfect by the free gift of your Spirit'.

There is an all or nothing hazard about such a prayer. We are not content that our attempt to present the world to God or to produce an artistic service should be 'successful' in any normal sense. We want something that transcends that. We are asking for a transformation of the whole action of our worship into a realization of the

Kingdom of God here and now. If that is what we receive, we need not be bothered about the use of words which could imply a magical or material transubstantiation of the elements.

Some readers of this note may think that such ideas about the meaning of being in the Spirit on the Lord's day may be applied more readily to the preaching of the word. There also a transformation must be prayed for, and that with importunity, so that what might otherwise be an exposition of opinions may become a realization of the presence of the incarnate Christ. The liturgy group at St. Columba's evaded discussion of the sermon, and so did the parish meeting. But at least we rejected an order of service which would exclude a pentecostal view of preaching. For – to return to a point made earlier – an order which provides for confession and absolution after the sermon implies a very scanty expectation that the Holy Ghost will fall on them that hear the word.

Towards the end of 'The Shape of the Liturgy' Dom Gregory Dix observed that there are two steps in liturgical reform, first to consider what the liturgical action is and then to decide how that action is to be done. This is what, in our narrow sphere and with our limited abilities, we have been trying to do at St. Columba's. I hope that a lay approach is characterized by plain sense. We start with the idea that the words we utter mean what they say and do what they mean; and if we do not like the meaning or believe in what is apparently done, the knot must be unravelled before we pass on. Another characteristic of a lay approach is that we can give it up at any time. When points arise which are difficult to understand or to agree upon, the meeting can break up without reaching a decision and the next congregational meeting can be about something quite different. Anyone who reads this note and thinks we have made a good start is asked to remember us in his prayers, that we may be given strength to return to the difficult points and to think them out, and live them out, to an edifying solution.

The terms of the draft eucharistic prayer suggested by the liturgy group are as follows. It has the same pattern as the Great Prayer in the Scottish Liturgy, but three-quarters of the number of words. It would be preceded by the dialogue ('Lift up your hearts') and Sanctus and would be followed by the Lord's Prayer.

WE do indeed hold you in the highest honour, God almighty, and we give you thanks –

because you are the creator of the world and all it contains,  
 because you are the Father of all mankind,  
 because you have given us your Son Jesus Christ to  
 rescue us and all the human race from the power of evil.

But especially we praise you because it is through your Son's death on the cross that life and immortality have been revealed to men; and because he gave us this holy rite to recall his life-giving sacrifice, and told us to repeat it until he comes again.

For on the night that he was betrayed, he took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me'. *Amen*. In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.' *Amen, Amen, Amen*.

And so, Father in heaven, we now obey your Son's last and kindest bidding. With this bread and this wine we make, and we offer to you, the memorial he told us to make. And we remember with wonder and adoration—

how he came from heaven and was made man for our sake;  
 how he suffered the bitter pangs of death;  
 how he rose from the dead and returned to his place in heaven;  
 how he has promised to come again to vindicate the right  
 and judge the evil.

We pray you then, since you are good and love mankind, to accept with these gifts our praise and thanks, and to send your Holy Spirit upon us and them, so that the bread and wine we here receive may be a sharing of your Son's body and blood, uniting us and your whole church to Him and to each other. And so may this, and everything we do, be part of your holy service.

Dear God, we are not fit to serve you. But here we stand; take us, body, mind and soul; use us wherever and however you wish; if it be possible, let the world see Jesus Christ in us and believe.

And so, through this same Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit, may every creature give everlasting honour, praise and thanks to you, our God and almighty Father, till the end of time. AMEN.

RONALD JOHNSON, Edinburgh

*(Sir Ronald has been organist of St. Columba's since 1952)*