Professor Otto's Liturgical Suggestions.

THERE is nothing surprising in the fact that it should have been from Professor Rudolf Otto, of Marburg, that the best known and the most promising recent proposals for liturgical reform in the Lutheran Church have come. He is the author of 'The Idea of the Holy,' that original and provocative book, with its arresting conception of the numinous, a mystery that both daunts and fascinates. The numinous is an abiding element in the Holy, and before the Holy we are both awed and exalted, abased and yet allured, convinced of our own worthlessness, yet through contact and communion filled with a new sense of worthiness. "By each new obeisance of spirit I mount to His feet." It is here, as he explains, that the basis of his suggestions lies. His aim is so to order Divine Worship that the transcendent mystery revealed in Christ may be owned and adored, may be so felt as to elicit the true obedient service of heart and mind—a service that is all the more 'edifying' that edification is not its final end.

Otto is clear that this is a time not for legislation in the liturgical field, but for experiment. Nothing must be made compulsory; groups should be formed in particular congregations, where a feeling for new ways of worship may be fostered, and a company of people carefully prepared to lead and encourage the great congregation when in Church some of these newer ways are put in practice. Naturally there is much room for Christian common-sense and considerateness. As he puts it in a passage that betrays wisdom and good feeling:—

> "Suddenly to introduce 'silent prayer' in one of our average city congregations, where minds are distracted and long unfamiliar with any kind of liturgical habit, is perfectly absurd. But in serious and quiet circles, say those which gather for the devotions of Passion Week, such prayer is nothing strange; on the contrary, it often takes place and is not without its own blessing. It would be wholly unreasonable to glorify, as the ideal for Protestantism, the state of things at which we have now arrived, owing to the

> gradual fading out of old liturgical custom and the shrinking of public worship to a sermon garnished with a certain amount of liturgical accompaniment; not to speak of our simply handing over the congregation to the mere good pleasure of the pastor in respect of the choice of text, the sermon and the selection of hymns and prayers, as if this were consonant with the 'universal priesthood' of all believers."

Otto is not primarily keen to make Church services interesting or attractive, though he pleads for more living variety, urging, for example, that longer and shorter forms of Creed might be used on different occasions, and that now and then Luther's 'Explanations' of the clauses of the Creed in his Shorter Catechism might be introduced. He holds firmly that Protestant worship must have its centre in 'The Word,' and that the minister is first and foremost a preacher. The Lord's Prayer, in his view, ought to be regarded as the climax of every service. He suggests that when it is being said, the Church bell should be sounded, so that members who are absent unavoidably, and most of all the sick, may hear it and in spirit take their part. With his supreme desire for inwardness and recollectedness, it is natural to have him urge that immediately after the sermon there should come not a hymn but a pause for meditation, during which, the organ playing quietly the while, the hearers may reflect upon and inwardly digest the truth to which they have listened. Again, he puts in a plea for fresh and quite modern hymns, quoting the Psalmist's words, "O sing unto the Lord a *new* song." If they were looked for and welcomed, new hymns would be written directly out of contemporary experience and feeling, and more spontaneous expression would be given to the faith and aspiration of to-day. Let us not suffer the tradition of great hymn-writing to lapse by ignoring the poets of the Church or treating their work with dishonour.

Enough, however, of minor detail. It is best that we should now turn to one or two of the dominant proposals which Otto has put forward. First, his sketch of what the ordinary Sunday morning service might be made. He has been struck by the fact, already referred to, that the devotional parts of the worship tend to form a rather scanty appendage to the sermon. In constructing his

revised form of Common Order, he has been considerably influenced by the Swedish writer Linderholm.

The Christian Year, made richer by new associations to be given to the Sundays after Trinity, is taken as the basis of an elastic scheme of order. Hymns and prayers will vary with the special character of the day. Similarly, that aspect of the faith which is most cognate to the day may be expressed by the special form given to the Creed. Room must be left for 'free' prayer, in the sense that prayers may be said not contained in the official service book. In particular, like many in Scotland, he longs to rescue the congregation from the state of total silence into which—apart from the worship of song—it has fallen. Divine service is more than a gathering for Christian instruction; it is a *common* action, in which at each possible point all should engage. All these things have been in his mind as he drew out new plans for the observance of the Christian Year. The people are to participate in hymns and prayers and united repetition of the Creed in such wise as to express the religious message and meaning of the day for them, in their place and with their local tradition.

This sounds a good deal more radical than it is. The general conception under which for him the Christian Year stands is "The Kingdom of God: Its Coming in Time and Eternity." Up to Trinity Sunday the general order and the special 'titles' of Sundays is very much that which tradition has rendered familiar. Thereafter an attempt is made to give a specific character to each of the twenty-five Sundays after Trinity. Thus the second is 'Martyr Sunday,' the fourth 'St Paul's Day,' the ninth 'Bible Day,' the fifteenth 'Mary and Martha Day,' the seventeenth 'Samaritans' Day.' All these points are carefully explained in the Introduction to a book entitled 'The Church Year in Lessons and Prayers' (1927). Based on Linderholm's earlier volume (1920), it is a substantial work of 377 pages, and contains full services for each Sunday of the Christian Year, as also for certain movable festivals. Three successive years are provided for. The book represents a vast amount of careful and understanding work, a deep sympathy with the noblest ideals of Protestant worship, and what cannot but strike the reader as an unusually successful effort to enrich the worshippers' mind with the inexhaustible wealth of Scripture, in something like the chronological unfolding

of God's redemptive purpose. Let me single out one feature of the book, to which Otto ascribes particular importance. His name for this item in the service is 'Chorgebet.' We may render it 'Alternating' or 'Responsive Prayer.' He points out that it can be traced back to Zwingli.

Nothing, he argues convincingly, would do more to enrich and vivify Protestant worship than the reintroduction of this antiphonal devotional use of great Scripture passages—the minister and congregation answering each other in alternate verses. Here, at last, is true common prayer. Naturally the Psalms form a large part of the material; not quite as they stand, but with suitable omissions. He quotes, indeed, the words of John Wesley, written as early as 1784: "Many Psalms are left out, and many parts of others, as being highly improper in the mouths of a Christian congregation." But in addition Otto and Mensching, in a special brochure (1928) entitled 'Antiphonal Prayers' (Chorgebete), have included psalm-like passages from the prophets and great rhythmical pieces from the New Testament, such as the close of St Matthew xi., the final verses of Romans viii., 1 Corinthians xiii., the opening paragraph of Ephesians, and the vision of the glorified saints in Revelation vii. These and other Biblical selections may, of course, be sung, but they are even more impressive when spoken. "And the speaking ought to be a real speaking, not a muttering or indistinct murmur. With vigour and heart let each worshipper lift up his voice." The necessary practice may at first be had in the catechumens' class. A delightful testimony is quoted from one who had tried this method. "We pastors," says this writer, "are always grumbling about the difficulty we find in getting catechumens to learn great Scripture passages by heart. Without exaggeration I can say that the difficulty vanishes at once when we make these antiphonies a part of catechumenical instruction—the pastor and the catechumens taking the two parts. My confirmation class took to the practice with sheer pleasure, with attentive interest, and an all but astonishing degree of sympathetic feeling." Here is something that we in Scotland might well learn from others. No feature in the worship of American churches, for example, seemed to me so enviable as this. Frequently the hymn-book there has an Appendix with just such great Biblical selections

marked for this very purpose, or there may be a separate book. And in using them, led by a true minister, the people were manifestly lifting up their hearts. The same method may obviously be found useful in simple litanies and at various points in services for special occasions.[1]

All this, as Otto more than once points out, is perfectly Protestant in type, for the priest as official intermediary is gone, and the congregation have taken the worship of God as *their* glad work. That fact ought from time to time to be marked still more emphatically, he argues, by the substitution of an elder or layman (suitably prepared and trained) for the minister in sustaining one part of such antiphonal prayer and praise.

For the rest, I can most effectively convey an impression of the ideals of worship present to Otto's mind by translating one longer passage from his religious essays, and thereafter saying a few words about his suggestions with regard to the Order for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Here is the translated passage :—

> " To me, as a Lutheran, the outward movement of the Sunday morning service takes shape as follows : The *first* part of the service ought without circuitous delays to come quickly to the Sermon ; it will close with Sermon, brief hymn following, and organ postlude. Then the intimations, made from the reading desk, afford a pause that relieves strain and makes a clear break before the second part. This *second* part of the service must be of a concentrated kind, in no sense a mere addendum or echo of the first, but a second peak of worship, rising still higher than the other. The form it ought to take is that of an act of profound adoration, and its climax should be the ' sacramental ' celebration, in silence, of the nearness of God. The soul does not approach this climax by the direct line of uniformly growing tension, but by way of depths and heights, by rising and falling, by a stronger and then again a more peaceful flux of feeling. Further, the prayers of this devotion ought not to be set collects ; they should take a special form for every service, they should leave room for free as well as for prescribed prayer, and be divided

[1] Under the joint-editorship of Otto, Mensching and Wallau, a series of 'Liturgische Blätter' has been issued, containing a large and welcome variety of special services. The publisher is Leopold Klotz of Gotha. The series has had a wide circulation.

between the minister, deacon and responding congregation; they should be spaced out, with breaks, and ought to vary between prayers that designate God as 'He' and as 'Thou,' between singing and speaking; they ought not to be one long officially dictated address to God, but a wreath of spiritual sacrifice. They mark the highest point in charismatic gift. And when the individual lacks this gift, let the work of those who have been masters in prayer be used.

The Devotion begins in a marked spiritual tension: with the sung Preface and the Sanctus. In harmony with ancient feeling, the Preface is to be given a clear relation to the special character of the particular service, and this character should make itself felt in all the ensuing acts of prayer. There the worship takes a quieter and gentler tone. The soul expands and for a time relaxes again. Sung prayer now gives way to spoken prayer; petition, intercession, thanksgiving and other elements for a time predominate. Then the line, to put it so, rises upwards sharply: variety is put aside, and the prayer ends in pure adoration, and the soul gathers itself together with all its powers for the 'earnest cry,' for the sacramental epiklesis, or the consecrating orison that, appealing to His promise, longs for the coming and nearness of the Eternal in this very place and hour. For the promise has been given, 'The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon Him in truth' (Ps. cxlv., 18). Thus, therefore, let us pray:

> Minister: O Lord, our God, Who art nigh unto all those who call upon Thee in truth, come Thyself into our midst, that our soul may have healing in the light of Thy countenance.
>
> Or: Draw nigh to Me, so will I draw nigh unto you.

and the Declaration:

> The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.

Here the congregation kneels, and perfect silence lasts till the Church bell has sounded three strokes thrice.

This silence means the cessation of all outward

speech, all attention to outward things, while for the more practised it is filled by the use of inward speech, taking the form of a prayer of self-dedication to the felt Presence. It is only by degrees that the power to use silence can be acquired. Outward silence then comes to be accompanied by inward, the complete Sabbath and stillness of the soul and all its powers, the quiet sinking down upon the ground of all, the wondrous fact of the mystic union itself.

When the Church bell has struck for the last time, the congregation rises, and now in the full presence of God offers with one accord its holiest sacrifice: the Lord's Prayer. It is sung by the Minister, and the congregation terminates it with the Doxology, and with the hymn, 'From afar, O Lord, I have seen Thy throne.'

Thus the sacrament of Devotion ends. And the whole service is concluded at once and briefly with post-communion, *Benedicamus* and the Blessing, followed by a congregational dismission hymn." [1]

As regards the Lord's Supper,[2] Otto insists that the eucharistic rite is properly congregational, not clerical merely. It is a sacramental meal, uniting the partakers as a 'mystical body' indwelt by the Spirit, and expressing its unity in brotherly love and concord of life and work. It is, moreover, an eschatological rite, celebrated with an outlook towards the eternal fulfilment. Very strikingly he urges that in the Eucharist our Lord identifies not two substances, but two *events*. The event of Golgotha—the breaking of Christ's body was the sacrifice of the New Covenant—with its terror and bliss, is present in this event of 'breaking the bread.' Once more, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, as being a communion with the Lord, "is at the same time a mutual communion of all His people on earth and in heaven." We should there be aware of our abiding fellowship with the departed, and this is the real meaning of "the commemoration of the dead" as Protestantism should make, or keep, a place for it.

The Communion Service, in Otto's view, ought not too much to resemble an ordinary service. Let it retain some of the impressive forms of the *Missa Fidelium*. To us of

[1] 'Aufsätze das Numinose betreffend' (1923), pp. 176-8.

[2] See Otto's article in the American 'Anglican Theological Review,' for January of this year, pp. 1 ff.

the Scottish Church this dictum is of interest: "Christ's Eucharist was a *meal*, and the forms and accompaniments of its celebration ought to remind us of this fact." Less convincingly, perhaps, he adds: "The right time for it is not morning, but evening, as was the custom in apostolic days."

A marked feature of Otto's form of celebration, as might be anticipated, is the fairly numerous responses of the congregation, to be said or chanted. But at the 'Confession of Sins,' it is suggested these responses may be omitted, and short pauses left for self-examination.

The service, speaking broadly, is divided into five parts. (1) An introit from Ps. 42 is sung, followed by a brief prayer. Then is read the Gospel of the Day, and a short Sermon ensues; thereafter is made the Confession of Sins, which passes into mingled exhortation and prayer, composed for the most part of Scriptural and liturgical verses, such as the Trishagion in Luther's rendering. At the close comes "silence, followed by a fixed or spontaneous form of Absolution." (2) The Proskomidia and Philema opens with a short hymn of Zinzendorf, during which the bread and wine are placed on the altar. The prayer of Oblation is partly drawn from the 'Didache.' At this point the ancient 'kiss of peace' is represented by the minister and assistants, and thereafter the congregation, laying a hand each on his neighbour's shoulder, bowing, and saying, "Peace be with thee." After another brief hymn intercessions are offered, in responsive form, commemoration being made here by name of those who have departed since the last celebration. (3) The Eucharist and Anamnesis begins with the Gradual, the Preface (in a shortened and modified form), Sanctus, and Lord's Prayer. When the actual Observance is reached, it is noteworthy that minister and congregation chant together the Words of Institution, the minister taking and breaking the Bread at the fit moment, and so with the Cup. The Epiklesis is uttered in the words:—

> "O eternal Lord God, who art unapproachable by any creature in Thine endless majesty, unattainable by sinful hearts in Thine everlasting holiness: rend the heavens and come down, and Thyself distribute at Thy holy table the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation, the pledges of eternal redemption in the sacrifice of Thy Son. Amen."

(4) In the Communion, we need only note that the words of Distribution are, in giving the Bread: "Christ hath died for us, that we might live with Him"; in giving the Cup: "I will drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." During the Distribution, the choir sings the 'Agnus Dei.' Thereafter is sung a Communion Hymn, composed by Otto himself (the suggestion that this *may* be a solo hardly commends itself). The hymn is a devout and moving expression of Christian faith and feeling. (5) The Post-Communion is for the most part made up of the first words of the 'Nunc Dimittis,' a brief prayer, and the Aaronic Benediction. All concludes with the verse of a hymn eschatological in tone.

Whatever the view we take of certain elements in the foregoing sketch—unfair by its brevity, as will be understood, to Professor Otto's designs—it will at all events be acknowledged that his reforming work in the liturgical domain has been done by one who knows his field and loves true worship. With the ideas and language of Catholic tradition he has mingled—and this is not the least attractive feature of his impressive outlines—not a few elements that go back to the Primitive Church.

H. R. Mackintosh.