

The Liturgical Movement in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands

To understand the Liturgical Movement in the Dutch Reformed Church we must glance at the history of its liturgy since the Reformation.

Origin.

“The Liturgy of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands”—the heading in ancient psalmbooks—originated in a time of cruel persecution. During the reign of Charles V. and his successors many adherents of the Evangelical Faith had to fly abroad, and it was in these exiled congregations that the foundation was laid for a new liturgical life. In the Netherlands themselves it was impossible to worship properly for decades. People had to meet secretly in a house or barn to listen to a sermon or to receive the sacraments. Later the field conventicles came into being, where there could be no question of liturgical wealth or fixed order. These came more or less into being only where the refugees—under the protection of protestant rulers—could think and deliberate quietly on the new order of the Church.

London.

There was first of all the congregation in London in the time of Edward VI., which consisted of a Walloon section under the leadership of Valerand Pullain and a Flemish section which called John à Lasco, the learned Polish nobleman (who had already been Superintendent at Emden), to be their minister. Here he drew up a liturgy entitled *Forma ac Ratio etc.* which, though used from 1549 onwards, was not printed until 1555, when at Mary's accession to the throne he had been driven to find refuge in Frankfort. This liturgy, which is related to the *Liturgia Sacra* of Valerand Pullain, may be called the first Dutch Reformed liturgy, but in *this* form it was never used in the Netherlands. Here a translation of an abbreviation, edited by Micron⁽¹⁾, an

⁽¹⁾ Translated title: *Christian Ordinances of the Dutch Congregations of Christ, established by the Christian prince King Edward VI. in the year 1550 at London.* . . . Printed outside London (probably Emden) by Collinus Volckwinner, anno 1554. Reprinted in Emden (1560) and in the Netherlands (1563).

elder of the Flemish congregation in London, circulated. This, however, gradually disappeared and was replaced by Peter Datheen's liturgy.

Peter Datheen.

Peter Datheen while living in London had become acquainted with à Lasco's *Forma ac Ratio* and he used it when he was minister of a congregation in Frankfort. After quarrels with the Lutherans there he and his flock went to Frankenthal near Worms, where Frederick III. of the Paltz gave them hospitality. There he also found the Church-order of the Paltz, drafted by Olevian in 1563. These two sources provided the material for the liturgy which Datheen issued in 1566 in one volume with his translation of Marot's metrical Psalms and the Heidelberg Catechism for his own congregation and all Dutchmen who were of the Reformed Faith.

Character.

What here is understood by "liturgy" differs from the meaning which catholic churches attach to this word. It gives only the barest elements of worship, consisting of a collection of prayers and formularies which were occasionally supplemented or modified until the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619. As the liturgy of the Dutch Reformed Church still consists mainly of these parts, it may be interesting to give a summary of its contents :

1. Formulary for the ministration of Baptism.
 2. Short examination of the Faith of those who wish to join the Congregation.
 3. Formulary for the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
 4. Formulary for the blessing of marriages in face of the congregation. Then follow "Christian prayers which may be used at gatherings of the faithful and elsewhere."
 5. Prayer before sermon on Sundays.
 6. A general confession of sins and a prayer for the whole Church on Sundays after sermon.
 7. A prayer before the catechetical instruction.
 8. Prayer after the catechetical instruction.
 9. A public confession of sins, and prayer before sermon.
 10. A short form of prayer after sermon.
 11. A morning prayer.
 12. An evening prayer.
 13. Grace before meals.
 14. Grace after meals.
 15. Prayer for those in sickness or temptation.
 16. Another form of the same.
- Later formularies were added for the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons, for excommunication, and for admitting repentant sinners.

There are no rubrics ; we look in vain for any indication of what the contents and order of a service should be. Occasionally one can find this in the Proceedings of the Synods, but little attention was paid to it. The formularies are

purely didactic, explaining to the congregation the nature of the action about to take place.

Sunday Morning Service.

From the outset the service of the Lord's Supper and the service of the Word were separated. The articles 27-31 of the Convent of Wesel (1568) show that the main service of the week consisted of Scripture reading, sermon, confession of sins, intercession and singing. But as liturgical freedom has always been one of the cherished principles of the Dutch Reformed Church—the structure of the liturgy belonged to the things indifferent—a fixed order could not be imposed. The Synod of Dordrecht (1574), the first one on Dutch territory, gives, however, some details from which we can construct the following order :

1. Scripture reading and the singing of a Psalm. 2. Votum : Psalm 124, 8. 3. Prayer (no objection to a set form ; actual needs may be inserted). 4. Singing. 5. Sermon. 6. Prayer (set form allowed). 7. Reading of the Creed. 8. Singing ? 9. Blessing : Num. 6, 24.

This order has remained almost the same up to the present day, save that the Creed was superseded by the Ten Commandments and moved to the afternoon service.

The Celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The Eucharistic service was and is still celebrated commonly only four times a year and according to this formulary :

1. Words of Institution : I. Cor. xi. 23-29. 2. Self-examination. 3. (a) Absolution, (b) Fencing of the Table. 4. Remembrance of the Lord's Passion and Institution. 5. Exhortation. 6. Prayer for the Holy Spirit and the Lord's coming again ; the Lord's Prayer. 7. Apostles' Creed. 8. Sursum Corda. 9. Communion ; the congregation come forward and sit down at the Table ; the minister saying : " The bread which we break is the Communion of the Body of Christ " and " The Cup of blessing which we bless is the Communion of the Blood of Christ ". After each Table a part of Scripture is read. Between two Tables the congregation sings a Psalm. 10. Post-communion : (a) some verses of Psalm 103 ; (b) Prayer of Thanksgiving ; (c) The Lord's Prayer.

Up to and after the Communion the whole formulary is read by the minister from the pulpit. All liturgical elements (Confession, Anamnesis, Sursum Corda) have taken the form of an exhortation, and Prayers, Creed and Post-communion are said by the minister alone.

Daily Services.

In the earliest days all the churches remained open, and daily services were held. In 1574, however, the Synod of Dordrecht decided to abolish the Evening Prayers, as they did not promote the attendance at the Sunday "Sermons", and prevented people from taking part in the family prayers which every head of the house was obliged to conduct. But in practice they do not seem to have wholly disappeared, and in later years proved to be so fruitful that the Synod of Dordrecht (1618) had no option but to restore them. Unfortunately, however, the spirit of the following centuries was not in favour of them, so that they dropped out of use altogether and were replaced by weekly Bible readings and catechism.

Development.

We shall now see what happened to the formularies and set forms of prayer which were bound up with the Psalm books and Bibles.

(a) There has never been an official edition of them. Sometimes revisers examined the text and provided a new edition which, however, has not been approved and authorized by any General Synod.

(b) Nor were the publishers and printers under the control of the Church. They got hold of the "liturgy" and it remained *their* affair throughout all the centuries. No wonder, therefore, that much variety arose, although the main substance passed year by year from one book into the other.

(c) Theologians were so much taken up by all sorts of dogmatical questions, that there was no interest in liturgy. The consequence was that the Church never got above the original datum.

(d) Worse still, Rationalism and Pietism did much to reduce even the use of this to a minimum. At first the formularies were rather more closely followed, but in the eighteenth and first part of the nineteenth century so many dogmatical and devotional shortcomings were discovered in them, that a commission in 1863, for example, which had to report on this subject, proposed to make the use of the formularies no longer obligatory, as they caused so much division in the congregations. The result was an Article in the *Algemeen Reglement* (General Regulations), which states that every minister is free to act at his own discretion in liturgical matters.

Thus set forms of prayer came to be considered as a sign of weakness. Whoever used them would show that he was not inspired by the Holy Ghost. So extreme did these views become that a minister who did not extemporize in his prayers would not be called by a congregation.

The Liturgical Movement.

At the close of the nineteenth century the first symptoms of a Liturgical Movement appeared. In 1890 Dr. J. H. Gunning published a book entitled: *Our Worship: Remarks on the liturgical element in the Reformed cult*. In 1911 the well-known Dr. A. Kuyper collected and published a series of his own articles under the title: *Our Worship*. Most important, and the classic of the Liturgical Movement, was a booklet (a collection of three articles) entitled *Liturgy*, published by Dr. J. H. Gerretsen in the same year. He was the first who dared to hold "liturgical" services in The Hague, in which Confession of sins, Absolution, and the Creed were used, with responses sung by the congregation. The booklet, which is meant to explain and justify his practice, stressed the need for adoration in church services. The Rev. H. W. Creutzberg followed his lead. Impressed by the Anglican way of worship, he had a church built in his parish according to these principles; the Lord's Table was placed centrally in the apse, with the pulpit forward of it and to the right, while a lectern was provided for the reading of Holy Scripture. In 1920, with a number of ministers he formed a "Liturgical Circle", which has been working until recently under the chairmanship of Professor Dr. G. van der Leeuw of Groningen. The purpose of this group was to study the liturgical problem in the Dutch Reformed Church and to put the results into practice. Later a musician was added to the theologians. In 1923 a series of liturgical booklets was initiated by a concrete proposal basing the Sunday morning service upon Ante-communion. This was followed in 1925 by a *Communion Service*, in 1927 by an order for *Holy Baptism and Confirmation*, in 1930 by one for the *Blessing of a Marriage*, etc. It was hoped that those who were in favour of the Liturgical Movement would make use of their *jus liturgicum* (see page 14) and rearrange their services according to these examples, until the time would come when the Dutch Reformed Church itself would take in hand the study and reformation of the liturgy. At first the principle was to adhere as closely as possible to the traditional formularies, reshaping them into

a real service as that could best be done. The ecumenical spirit, which had never been completely lacking, was growing in the years after 1930. At that time the Liturgical Movement became part of a general movement aiming at the reorganization of the whole Dutch Reformed Church. In 1931 an *Evening Prayer for use in Church* came from the press, in the composition of which breviaries of other Churches were used. In a report on *The Essence of the Liturgy* (1933) the sacramental principle became clearer. In the same year the first volume of the periodical *The Year of our Lord* appeared, in which members of the Church were taught to live a liturgical life in accordance with the Ecclesiastical Year. Each volume contains a short article on the season of the Christian Year, a prayer for each week, lessons and psalms for morning and evening, hymns, etc. A calendar mentions the saints who might be commemorated. An important result of the common studies of the Liturgical Circle was published in 1934 under the title *Manual for the Liturgy*, in which all sorts of aspects were treated. About this time a growing desire among church people to take a more active part in the work of the Liturgical Circle led to the formation of a "Liturgical Society", members of which met once a year. The chief point of the programme was the daily services, alternated with lectures and discussions. This Society has now branches in some congregations, which by services and lectures try to propagate the principles of the Liturgical Movement. In most cases they had to start the work independently of the Church courts, but as time went on contact was established and some measure of approval achieved. This approval is not yet general. First, many opponents tried to prove that all this would lead to Rome (one of the members of the Liturgical Circle indeed went over to the Roman Church); others were afraid of Anglican and Orthodox influences. A sharp puritan protest came from Dr. O. Noordmans, one of Holland's outstanding theologians, in his book *Liturgy* (1939), but the answer was equally sharp (*Liturgy in the Crisis*, 1939). In that year the Movement came into the centre of interest. There had always been many people who did not take it seriously, but now it became clear that fundamental principles were involved. These principles were systematically set forth in Professor Van der Leeuw's book *Liturgics*, written while the Germans invaded and occupied Holland. This very valuable book, reprinted in 1947, will render service to theologians and lay people for many years to come.

Main Principles.

The scope of this article does not allow a full discussion of the principles of the Liturgical Movement. The following points may suffice :

(a) *Word and Sacrament*.—It is contended that the main Sunday morning service, historically and dogmatically, is a Eucharistic service, in which the sermon ought to take an important place. Preaching is more than a preface to the Sacrament, more than instruction too ; it is the proclamation of divine grace. In this sense it is a sacramental act. But on the other hand the Sacrament is more than an " appendix " to the Sermon ; it is a real means of grace, in which Christ is present, not less than in the preaching of the Word. Stress is laid on a biblical (semitic) way of thinking, as contrasted with the Greek mode of thought.

(b) *Prayers*.—There is a difference between liturgical prayer and private prayer. The former is public, *i.e.*, all ought to be able to take part in it. It is the whole Church which is praying in worship, not the minister alone. The actual liturgy of the Dutch Reformed Church does not take sufficient account of this. The prayers are long and extempore, one is never sure that the " whole state of Christ's Church " will be prayed for, that the needs of the congregation will be brought before God ; neither is one sure that the essential elements of worship will find their proper place in every service : confession of sins, thanksgiving, etc. The liturgical style is lost. Therefore set forms of prayer are introduced again, partly the classically Reformed prayers and partly prayers borrowed from other Churches : collects, litanies, etc.

(c) *Universal Priesthood*.—The rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers finds its expression in the liturgy. The congregation takes an active part in the whole service proposed by the Liturgical Circle : singing of psalms and hymns, reciting of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the saying of " Amen " after the prayers, the singing of responses, the offering. The congregation has to be aware of the reality of worship as the meeting of the Lord and his Church.

(d) *The Ecclesiastical Year* is being revived. Although the Dutch Reformed Church never did away with the main festivals of the Church, it did not understand the full meaning of the Christian Year, in which each day and each week has its own character. This puts its stamp on Sunday morning and week-day services as well : Call to

worship, Scripture Sentences, Preface and hymns are variable elements, and a table of lessons (Epistle and Gospel) for the whole year has been compiled.

(e) *Daily Services*.—There is a tendency to restore the use of a Breviary. For the time being, however, the Liturgical Movement will be satisfied if churches are open again for daily Morning and Evening prayer. These are still the exception; in some towns and villages one week-day service is held, mostly on Saturday or Wednesday evening, and often the order proposed by the Liturgical Circle is followed.

(f) *Church Architecture and Church Music*.—The principles of the Liturgical Movement are increasingly penetrating into the circles of architects and musicians. An important book has recently come from the press; *Protestant Church Building* by Prof. Dr. J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, in which the thesis is defended, that the liturgy determines what the design and arrangement of the church is to be. Architects and theologians are now collaborating, which is of particular importance now that hundreds of churches have to be restored and rebuilt after the devastation of the war. A special society has also been formed for the study of Protestant church music, of which Professor van der Leeuw is chairman. Here, too, theologians and Church musicians are co-operating, and many congregations are already profiting from their work.

Recent Results.

It is matter for rejoicing that the life of the Church matured during the war, so that it was possible soon after the Liberation to issue a Liturgical Magazine (*Kerk en Eredienst*, i.e., *Church and Liturgy*), on the Editorial Board of which people of different theological background were and are serving. But the most important event was the setting up of a Council on Church and Liturgy by the General Synod, whereby the Movement has achieved one of its aims, viz., that the Church itself should take in hand the reformation of its liturgy. This Council has several Commissions, one of which has to prepare a *Book of Common Order*. This Prayer Book will probably contain various orders of service, so that choice remains possible. It is hoped, however, that one of the orders for the Sunday morning service will more or less agree with that proposed by the Liturgical Circle of 1941, which has already been referred to. It may be summarized as follows:—

Organ prelude ; Votum ; Salutation ; Call to worship ; Psalm or hymn ; Confession of sins ; Kyries ; Absolution with response ; Ten Commandments or Summary of the Law ; Hymn of praise after versicle and response ; Psalm with *Gloria Patri* ; Epistle and Gospel, with responses ; Creed (said or sung by the whole congregation) ; Offerings after short Prayer by the minister, who puts the gifts on the Table after the collection during which a hymn is sung ; Salutation and Prayer for Illumination ; Sermon ; Hymn. Then follows the " Service of the Upper Room " : The Lord be with you ; R. And with thy Spirit. Lift up your hearts ; R. We lift them up unto the Lord . Let us give thanks to our Lord God ; R. It is meet and right so to do. It is truly meet, right, etc. Therefore with angels and archangels, etc. ; *Sanctus* ; Intercessions ; The Lord's Prayer ; Prayer for the Holy Spirit ; Words of Institution ; *Agnus Dei* ; Hymn ; Communion ; Post-communion (Psalm and Prayer of Thanksgiving) ; *Nunc Dimittis* ; Blessing ; Postlude.

W. Vos.