

The Presidential Address to the Church Service Society at its Annual Meeting, at New College, Edinburgh, 25th May, 1951, by the Rev. William D. Maxwell, T.D., B.D., Ph.D.

Some Inner Aspects of the Action at the Lord's Supper

IN all worship there is an outer and an inner action, the action of the body (which includes both ceremonial and ritual), and the action of the mind and heart and soul. The outer action is the vehicle of worship, the inner action is its content and spirit. These must be in accord. If they are not, our worship is vain and empty ; instead of honouring God, we offer Him insult. Form without spirit is dead ; spirit without form is unexpressed. Each complements and fulfils the other, and each is essential and organic to the other.

It seems to me useful this afternoon to attempt to trace the inner action of our prayers at the Lord's Supper, taking as our norm the 'First Order for the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper' in the *Book of Common Order*, 1940. I am aware, of course, that the means of achieving this accord between word and content, action and spirit, raises an ancient and difficult problem, and one not wholly solved in any communion of the Church. A whole paper might be written on its historic aspects, and the various solutions offered. To-day, I prefer to address myself to the immediate situation within our own communion. With us, for example, the problems of secret prayers, elaborate ceremonial, the use of a language no longer in common use, and so forth, do not arise. It is, of course, worth while remembering that in our Lord's day Jewish worship was conducted in Hebrew, a language out of common use for some three centuries, yet the accord was there. Much of the agitation, frequently recurring, for the replacement of archaic and dignified language in prayer by 'modern' and up-to-date speech is uninformed and frivolous. Instruction in the meaning and solemnity of prayer is the true specific. 'Familiarese', jargon, and untidy prose are easy but fatal substitutes.

The action of the Lord's Supper falls into two parts, the Liturgy of the Catechumens and the Liturgy of the Faithful.

Because of the limits I must set to this paper, I must deal only briefly with the Liturgy of the Catechumens. It consists chiefly of preparatory prayers of Approach, the hearing of the Word read and preached, with its august culmination in the holy Gospel when the voice of our Lord Himself is heard, and we may respond to this by reciting together our Belief as it is declared in the Nicene Creed. The outer action is simple, and by concentrating upon it with mind and heart and soul, responsive to the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit, we join in it inwardly and give reality to our outward worship. It then becomes common worship; in which we act together under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, receiving also God's living Word.

First, it takes place at the Lord's Table, the Holy Table, the Table of Fellowship. The minister goes there at the beginning of the service, and at it are gathered members of the family of God. It is the focal centre, and we should be aware of this significance as we offer our prayers and praise. The Holy Table is the earthly counterpart of the heavenly Mercy-Seat, it is the meeting-place of God and man. When we gather there we are conscious of our fellowship with one another in Christ.

Worship begins with a great psalm or hymn of praise, and as we sing the psalms let us remember that they were a part of our Lord's devotions in the Synagogue. On Festivals we should use psalms and hymns appropriate to the day; this aids concentration and furthers the inner action, because our minds and spirits are already set upon the great event we are commemorating. I should like to have said more about the Church's Year, and its value in building up the inner movement of worship and focusing our prayers and contemplation upon the mighty acts of redemption. It is still in process of revival amongst us, and a great deal has yet to be done before it becomes again a living reality for our Scottish people. But if we do not reclaim it, other days will usurp its place. Life is not a flat plain, but a land of hills and valleys, like the Promised Land, and 'the eyes of the Lord are upon it, from the beginning even unto the end of the year'. Loss of the propers is probably the greatest Scriptural loss of all, e.g., lections, graduals, introits, &c., with their antiphons and the collects of the day. But, to return from this diversion, except in peni-

tential seasons, the opening act of worship should be praise ; we come filled with awe and wonder at the goodness, power, and majesty of God, and our hearts should move out to Him in adoration. More commonly than we suppose, perhaps, we do not concentrate upon the psalms and hymns we sing, and ministers alas often set the people an unfortunate example—some sit down and take no part ; others let their eyes wander over the congregation to see who is present ; some fuss about with books to be ready for what follows ; and they, who are supposed to lead in worship, lead in its extermination, in the divorce between form and spirit. It is a solemn thought, to which we should give grave and constant consideration. Our people too may easily allow their minds to wander away from the words ; and we should take trouble to train them to attend and make the words they sing their prayers to God. This should be done in the Sunday School to begin with, and attention should frequently be drawn to it. Hymns and psalms are not dividing places in the service—not punctuation points ; they are vocal common prayers, and as we sing we must pray.

After the opening praise, sentences from Holy Scripture help to focus our mind and spirit upon the prayers to follow, and on the whole it is better that the people should remain standing for these. To stand helps in concentration, and also avoids a double movement, that of sitting down, and then kneeling or bowing in prayer. These may seem to be little things, but they have a cumulative effect, and if they are not carefully examined, the dignity and true spirit of worship suffer alike.

The Prayers of Approach follow. Let it be said here that the minister at the Holy Table should always remain standing, except possibly for the confession of sins. This practice is traditional and universal within the whole Church, and we should not depart from it ; the minister is offering prayer and praise before God, and should stand to do so. That is the inner meaning of the outward form.

It will be noted that these prayers move through adoration to penitence and prayer for pardon,* then to

* In our confession of sins, though only general words are used, we are to remember and acknowledge before God, not only our own personal sins, grievous as they are and, when recognized, intolerable, i.e., unbearable ; but also the sin of our community and country and civilization, and not least the sin of the Church. For this act of confession is not private and individual only, it is personal and therefore corporate. From the very beginning of the service we must be aware—and how necessary it is—that we are *persons*, not individuals, and accordingly are part of a fellowship, the family of mankind, and within it the family of God.

petition and praise for redemption ; for the movement goes on into the next canticle, psalm, or hymn. In it the traditional movement of the soul is exemplified by the *Benedictus* or *Gloria in excelsis*, and if these are not used, it is important to select a singing of that scope and content. This completes the Approach, and we are now ready to hear the Word of God.

One thing, however, should first be said. Each part of the prayers concludes with the normal endings, and is followed by an *Amen*. The normal endings, however, are not formal endings ; to pray, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord' is to offer our prayer through Him who prays for us continually within the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and to pray that it may be embraced in His heavenly intercession. This momentous fact is central to Christian prayer ; from it derives its power. Thus, our people should be trained and encouraged to make their vocal response by saying the *Amen* ; this can be done with patience and tact. I think that we have been mistaken in Scotland to encourage the sung rather than the said *Amen*. When it is sung it is largely an affair of the choir, and the people hardly ever join in it. If it is said—and children should be trained to this in Sunday School—the people gradually learn to take their part ; and they should of course be taught the significance and meaning of the word. The saying of the *Amens* by the people helps to make the various parts and subjects of the prayers clear, e.g., adoration, confession, &c. Long prayers not broken into their composite parts by the *Amens* overtax the powers of concentration of average persons ; their minds wander off, and the spirit of worship is lost. Worship ceases for them to be a common action and offering. Again, if people are to make a vocal response, they must listen more carefully to do their part at the proper moment. It is no use telling people they must concentrate more closely and identify themselves with the prayers said by the minister ; we must help them to do it by a vocal, spoken *Amen*.

The remainder of this first part of the service I shall pass over quickly, not because it is unimportant but because it is obvious ; and my time is limited. The Word of God is divided into three reasonably brief and central readings, culminating in a passage from the Holy Gospel. A passage from the Gospel should *never* be omitted ; whatever else is read, the Gospel should be read, for it relates immediately to our Lord. We have lost the ancient tradition of standing for

the Gospel, as we would stand to hear a royal proclamation ; and this is a real loss, for the outward mark of honour expresses what should certainly be the inward attitude of mind and soul. We may, of course, have it without the outward form, but it is more difficult, and instruction is all the more necessary.

Next follow the Intercessions and Remembrance of the Departed (for we are one fellowship) where, in such detail as common prayer permits, we hold up before God through Christ the needs of all men, uniting in our corporate priestly office on behalf of the world, joining our prayers in the communion of the saints of every place and time with the eternal mediation of our Lord. Let me add, too, that we in the Western Church, and particularly in Scotland, require to learn something of the rhapsody of intercession. In the East, intercession is a notable feature of the Liturgy, as it was in the early Church : ' Again and again let us make our common intercessions unto the Lord ' was the deacon's recurring bidding, and again and again he led the people in a simple litany in which they vocally shared. Again and again the same words were rehearsed—but this is not *vain* repetition but *meaningful* repetition, as the whole family are caught up in the ardour of prayer, lifting their hearts and voices in the eternal prayer of the Church in heaven and on earth. We require to teach and help our people to understand and share in this most glorious mystery, and to give heart and soul and mind and strength to it. ' Seeing that we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession ' of prayer.

After the sermon (where Christ speaks through his minister, and as we listen to the sermon we should seek to hear His voice) we pass to the second part of the service, the Liturgy of the Faithful ; and here our Lord's own words and acts form the pattern of our devotions, as we unite with Him, the Holy Spirit assisting and empowering us, in His eternal action before the Father. ' For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God ' ; and we ' have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father '. ' We know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered '. It is not we who pray, but God within us ; prayer is God's gift to us, and the work is His, not ours alone. This basal fact about Christian prayer needs constant and emphatic reiteration ;

and at no point is it more evident, as we should expect, than in the central action of the holy Eucharist.

The first action of our Lord was the taking of bread and wine: 'He took'. This we now call the Offertory, a word that describes the whole action. It is not, however, synonymous with 'offering' or 'offerings' and should not be naively or carelessly used as if it were. The 'offering' is the eucharist itself; and the 'offerings' are the gifts we bring.

First, we invite all who are members of any branch of Christ's Church to unite with us in the action. For we know this is the Lord's Table and not ours; and we do not conceive that any difference in local organization should bar men from 'God's Board'.

Before or after this the offerings themselves are collected and presented at the Holy Table. For convenience's sake it may be that they are collected at the church door, but, if so, they should be brought at this point to the Lord's Table. Otherwise, by ignoring or omitting the outward action, we fail to preserve a vehicle for the inward devotion. For we should be conscious here that as our Lord 'took bread and wine', so we now bring and present our gifts which we yield back out of the life He has given us, not in kind (as formerly) but in token that He may take them and use them in the offering. They are then carried to the vestry, and while the solemn words 'My broken body thus I give' or 'Ye gates lift up your heads on high, that so the King of glory enter may' (or other appropriate words) are sung, the elements of bread and wine (mingled with water) previously prepared are brought in. All this provides a vehicle for the worship of the inner spirit, and the full significance of what is being done should be taught to our people, so that they in heart and mind may so share in the full action as to make it a *common* action.

Related to this in some ancient branches of the Church is the confession of our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed, and this should certainly be encouraged. My own preference is to use the Creed at this point in the service as an action of the Faithful and a part of the offertory; but good reasons can also be adduced for using it as a response to the Gospel or to the whole Word of God after sermon; this point is not vital, and reasonable choice may surely be allowed. But the action itself is valuable, as the Church proclaims its Belief and by confession of it joins with the confessing Church in heaven and on earth in the unity of the faith.

Now the elements are unveiled, symbolic of the veil of our Lord's flesh, when He became man incarnate, to open the way into the Holiest of all; and as this prayer of the veil is said we enter with our High Priest and Advocate into the Holy of Holies, and together offer with Him the gifts to be used in the oblation. This is not the oblation itself, but the preparation for it. After which the warrant is read, by which we recognize that what we now do has been 'received from the Lord' and statement is made that the gifts are set apart from all common uses to this holy use and mystery—and when we say this we should mean it. The elements should not thereafter be used for any other purpose, but should be reverently consumed or destroyed at the end of the service.

Next we engage with Him in the second great action of this part of the service, the Prayer of Thanksgiving: 'He gave thanks and blessed' (and we are to observe that these words, as the Greek shows, were directed to God); so by blessing and praising God, consecration is accomplished. Thus, we have no moment of consecration, as some rites claim to have; our consecration, following our Lord, is in the whole action. It is important, therefore, that we should understand and join in it fully.

The Prayer of Consecration is introduced by the ancient call 'Lift up your hearts, and let us give thanks unto our Lord God'. Here again, the people should be encouraged to respond vocally, and in mind and heart, to this summons, for it calls us not only to thanksgiving, but, as Calvin reminds us, to lift up our hearts into the heavenly places where Christ is.

Then the Preface begins in the ancient and stately words always reserved for some high action of thanksgiving and praise to God, as we give thanks for His bountiful work of creation, acknowledging that all we have and are come from Him, that He created man most wonderfully in His own image and after His own likeness, and that His compassionate care is over all His works. If it be a special season the Preface is interrupted by the proper—for it is an interruption, but a natural and right one. At the very beginning of the Thanksgiving the mind and heart instinctively leap ahead of the prayer and desire to give God thanks for the special act that is remembered that day—the birth, the death, or the Resurrection of our Lord. Our hearts are full, and we long to give eager and grateful expression to it. Then the prayer moves on, taking up

again the theme of the *Sursum corda*, as we unite with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven in the Hymn of the Cherubim before God's throne. And here, once more, the people should unite audibly together, making this thanksgiving their own and taking their part in this priestly prayer offered by minister and people. The *Sanctus* completes and summarizes the thanksgiving for creation and providence.

Now the thanksgiving commemorates our Lord Himself, and is introduced by the words of praise, salutation, and welcome which the multitudes sang before Him when He came into Jerusalem as King to die, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord'; and here again all join in these words. And we go on to thank God for our Lord's whole saving work from His birth to His sending of the Holy Spirit; for we remember not merely His death but His whole work and Person, including His glorious resurrection, and His eternal intercession and rule at God's right hand.

This becomes specific as the prayer proceeds; 'pleading His eternal sacrifice . . . we set forth the memorial' which he commanded us to make. Here we enter upon a profound and awful mystery, the mystery of sacrifice, and our eucharist is joined to the eternal eucharist. For as our Lord and His sacrifice took place in time once and for all, and His Supper was instituted on Maundy Thursday, yet these are not only in time but in eternity, for we worship a Risen living Lord to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth. Our eucharist is no repetition of the sacrifice of Christ—for that is impossible—but it is an offering up with it, a uniting with it in a holy unity and mystery. We plead His sacrifice; we offer with it by setting forth the memorial he commanded us to make. We use the concrete noun 'memorial' and not 'memory', to signify that we do more than remember in the psychological sense as we make *anamnesis*. Our Lord when He said 'Do this in remembrance of me' was using the word as it was then understood—not in a psychological sense, but objectively and concretely. We do not merely recollect Him, but we set forth, represent our memorial, before Him, and it is joined by Him in His eternal oblation. He takes it up and offers it in His heavenly oblation; and our action, our memorial, is joined in that eternal sacrifice in which He is both victim and priest: 'for by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified', He, 'the forerunner' who 'is for us entered within the veil, even Jesus, made an high priest

for ever'. Thus we are conscious that as we offer our oblation before Him it is united with the eternal oblation and made present again for us. The Sacrifice offered once for all and unrepeatable is yet universal and eternal, open to all believers in every generation, and at the Lord's Supper continually renewed and become newly present. How perfectly is this expressed in our familiar paraphrase :

' And oft the sacred rite renew,
That brings my wondrous love to view,
In this the covenant is sealed,
And Heaven's eternal grace revealed '.

As John Calvin wrote in his Institutes iv., ' When I say Christ is received by faith, *I do not mean that He is conceived merely by understanding and imagination, . . . but that we enjoy a vera communicatio, a real participation of Him* '. In our inner devotion we must be deeply conscious of this, and truly enter with Christ into the heavenly places, as He also mercifully gives Himself to us in the bread and the wine. And this we now pray that He will do in the Invocation or *Epiclesis*, that by the operation of the Holy Spirit in us and in His gifts, they may be, in the words of Holy Scripture, the ' Communion of the body of Christ ' and the ' Communion of the blood of Christ '. that, as the *Shorter Catechism* teaches, ' we may be made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits '. And this is real, not ' imaginary '. As our first *Scots Confession* declared : ' We confess and undoubtedly believe that the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's Table, do eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus, that He remaineth in them and they in Him ; yea, they are so made flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone, that as the eternal Godhead hath given to the flesh of Christ Jesus, life and immortality, so doth Christ Jesus by His flesh and blood, eaten and drunken by us, give unto us the same pre-rogative '. As Calvin has written : ' It is too high a mystery either for my mind to comprehend or my words to express. The truth of God declares that His flesh is the meat, His blood the drink, of my soul. I give my soul to be fed with such food '.

So do we, as we enter into this great mystery of the eucharist, make *anamnesis*, and pray for the operation of the Holy Spirit. And the oblation moves on, as with His gifts we offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, i.e., the whole of life, and our sacrifice of praise, this our whole worship and action, in the fellowship of the Body of Christ, His Church, offering up all to Him, in Him, and with Him, and making

not an act of private or interior devotion, but joining in His continual and heavenly prayer that in us and in all men the purpose of His redeeming love may be fulfilled. It is a wonderful and awesome experience as we, with the whole fellowship of Christ's people in heaven and in earth, remember all the children of men of all generations that they may be redeemed in Him. And this is not merely a loving remembrance of our brethren in Christ of this and all ages, but an organic unity with them in Him, not an emotional but a real and mystical unity. For when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we do not do it as a separate and local fellowship, but as a part of the whole family of God, in conscious communion with the whole Church, universal and catholic, the Body of Christ. In our action the whole Church takes a real part, even though it be invisible; this is accomplished as the work of the Holy Spirit, who prays in and with us and joins us with Christ our living and interceding Lord. Then we praise Him in the great concluding doxology, and pray in the words which He Himself taught us, offering His perfect prayer as the crown of all prayer.

In all this, we see the full pattern of Christian prayer, and enter into it. All other prayer grows out of and is comprehended in this great action; it gives Christian prayer, week by week, day by day, public and private, its pattern and power. All intercession is through this intercession, organic with our Lord's heavenly intercession:

'Where high the heavenly temple stands,
The house of God not made with hands,
A great High Priest our nature wears,
The guardian of mankind appears.
He who for men their surety stood,
And poured on earth His precious blood,
Pursues in heaven His mighty plan
The Saviour and the friend of man'.

Next, we come to the Fraction: our Lord's third action 'when He brake the bread . . . and took the cup'. In some rites the Fraction is obscured, but it stands clear and stark in our Scottish rite; and at once we confront that broken body upon the Cross and are brought face to face with the mystery and the cost of redemption, as we break the bread before Him. For this action is performed not only before man, but before God; and in our inner devotion we must remember that. In it we see what sin did to our Lord: it broke His body on the Cross. It is not only the cost of redemption that confronts us, but the devastating, brutal,

destroying fact of sin. Sin breaks, divides, alienates. It breaks the Church, also the Body of Christ. It separates men, and sets them against each other, in envy, pride, and hatred. Love—divine Love—alone can unite.

This we see and realize in the final act of Communion : ' He gave '. The minister humbly receives first to set the example that, though unworthy, we dare to receive as Christ taught and commanded us. The minister is not the host but like all others, a guest ; he does not behave then like a host, as he would at his own table, and receive last, but receives first, accepting the gift, so that all may understand that they receive from Christ and not from him. And as the Bread and the Cup are passed from hand to hand, we are bound anew into the fellowship of the family of God. We do not come forward one by one to make an individual communion, but we receive *together* as a family does ; and as we receive we are conscious of that family and of Christ as its Head, who is giving Himself, and is with us and in us, as we are in Him. So we begin to recognize what it is that binds this family, so that its unity cannot be broken : it is the risen Lord indwelling within His own body. At the Eucharist this unity in Christ is sealed. For the Lord's Supper is not just an expression of human brotherhood (like a loving cup), it is the divine mystery of redemption made present and active ; our unity is in the Living Lord by the Spirit with the Father. It is theocentric. As we receive the bread and the wine, we receive Christ ; ' we utterly condemn them that conceive the sacraments to be bare and naked signs and symbols ', our *Scots Confession* declares. The bread and the wine, as Calvin taught us, are signs and symbols of things not absent, but of things present ; they are effectual symbols.

The solemn action is now completed, and the service marches swiftly to its conclusion, in a thanksgiving for Communion and a lingering recollection of the saints in heaven with whom we are joined and with whom we pray. And then we sing a hymn or psalm of thanksgiving, and, receiving the blessing solemnly given by His minister from God, go out into the world fortified by this heavenly experience and heavenly food, to live there as members of the family of God and as heirs of Christ.