

## **Liturgy and Unity<sup>1</sup>**

THERE is wide agreement to the proposition that its unity is one of the most urgent of the problems facing the Church. Some indeed suggest that other matters are more important—the missionary task, the battle with secularism and communism, and so on. But in fact many who are engaged on these great works discover that the divided thrust of the Church is a real source of weakness. Some feel that disunity does not really create a problem, except to a few enthusiasts. “We are doing very well as we are”, so it is said. Some feel little if any sense of shame at our “unhappy divisions”, and suggest that the present situation is due to historical causes and that it is an inheritance which we have to accept. Some would lay the emphasis on the spiritual unity, which they claim is all that is required. Their argument seems to be: “Let us agree that we are all one in Christ; let us work together on moral and social problems; but there is no need to come together for the central and essential duty of the Church, in the worship of God”. This argument must seem very strange to the outsider, and does indeed seem very horrid to many within the Church.

For whatever reason we may turn away from this problem, we are brought back to it again and again, sometimes by the logic of the situation, sometimes by the pressure of necessity, sometimes by a great longing in the heart for a closer, deeper, more vital fellowship. Admittedly there are great difficulties in the way, as the discussions of recent times have made clear, though it is important to remember that many of these discussions could not have taken place at all, say, sixty years ago.

We are to investigate the relation between liturgy and unity; and liturgy we take here in its wider sense, as the worship of the Church. Does the worship of the Church in any way suggest or express its unity? Can liturgy help towards unity? Let us begin with a glance at the scriptural attitude.

It is difficult to believe that our Lord ever thought of the Church except as one. His high-priestly prayer, “that they all may be one”, makes that clear. The book of

(<sup>1</sup>) A paper read at the Edinburgh Theological Club, March, 1960.

Acts pictures the essential unity of the Church. The early Christians felt themselves to be one. They had all things common; they adhered to the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking bread from house to house; they supported one another in time of need, and the multiplication of local congregations throughout the Empire made no cleavage of the unity.

St. Paul gives us a fuller exposition. He has no sympathy with any division in the Church. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment". I Cor. i. 10. Cp. Rom. xv. 5-6; Eph. iv. 1-3; Phil. ii. 2.

What is the ground for this view? There is one God, one Lord, one Spirit. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all". I Cor. xii. 4-6. He goes on to expound the working and influences of the Holy Spirit, and urges that, though there are many members, there is but one body. Again, in Eph. iv. 3-6, "There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all". This suggests that, as Cerfaux has said, "The divine unity of God, the Lord and the Spirit is necessarily continued in the unity of the whole body of Christians. It makes the multitude a unity, as a people and as a church".<sup>(1)</sup> Since God is one, his call is one, and the communication of life in Christ is one. In fact the Christian experience carries us on to the affirmation of the unity of the Church, because the Christian experience brings us into the body of Christ, which is one.

For St. Paul "there is one faith", consisting of certain fundamental subjects essential to the being of every Christian, essential to the being of the Church. The basis of this faith was what was expressed in the earliest form of the confession, "Jesus is Lord", which is perhaps not so simple as it seems, implying not only a profession of faith in Him as Master, but also a suggestion of the messianic sense of the word "Lord"; and further, a suggestion that He is Lord of all, if not in actuality, certainly in an eschatological sense.

Two symbols of unity which belong to the Body, are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. By

<sup>(1)</sup> *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, p. 235.

baptism we become members of the Body, and this ordinance which unites all Christians to the one Christ and in His one death and resurrection, manifests as well as establishes the unity. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body". I Cor. xii. 13. And in Gal. iii. 27, we read, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . ye are all one in Christ Jesus". The other sacrament is also a sign of unity. "We being many are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread". I Cor. x. 17. As the Revised Standard Version puts it, "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf". The fact that the bread is the communion of the body of Christ only emphasizes the Eucharist as a symbol of unity.

There can be no doubt that the New Testament thinks of the Church as one and undivided, and that in more than a spiritual sense. To say that the unity belongs to the invisible church only, as some allege, would suggest that it is possible to be united in the invisible church but divided in the historic churches. Surely there is something wrong if we can believe that in the Church Triumphant we may find ourselves at the Messianic Table beside those whom we cannot join at the Eucharistic Table. The Scriptures intend to speak of and portray an organic unity in the Church.

The Fathers of the Church witness to the same truth. There was the same insistence on unity as a note of the Church, and the same tests and symbols were used. The Faith was still a test of unity. The Creed was the canon, the *regula fidei*, the standard by which orthodoxy and heresy were distinguished. Thus Tertullian says, "There is one rule of faith alone which is entirely unchangeable, irreformable, namely, to believe in one God Almighty, Founder of the world, and in His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary . . ." (*De Virgin. veland.* i.) To that most of the Fathers would subscribe. In particular we must note the views on questions of worship. There was for long no insistence on uniformity in worship, in rites and ceremonies, as a sign of unity. There is the saying ascribed to Irenaeus by Eusebius (*HE*. Bk. V. ch. 24), "We all keep peace with one another, and the divergence of our ways of fasting only commends our agreement in the faith". Similarly Augustine <sup>(1)</sup>: "In those things about which there is no prescription in the divine scriptures, the customs of

(1) *Ep.* 86 *ad Casulanum*.

God's people or the institution of our forefathers are to be regarded as laws. For if we dispute about such matters and condemn the custom of one church by that of another, there will arise interminable contention". And it may be added that the two Sacraments were everywhere regarded as essential to the life of the Church and as symbols of its unity.

If we look at the period which has often seemed so disastrous to the unity of the Church, namely the Reformation, it is important to remember that schism was not at all the intention of the reformers, who sought a radical reformation of the Church from within. Even when we reflect on the political and social influences which added their weight to the demand for reform, the fact remains that the movement was chiefly religious in its inspiration. It is curious, no doubt, that all this seething demand should run into separate and different channels which became more and more stereotyped, and more and more emphasized the differences ; so much so that to-day the tremendous task before us is to bring these channels nearer to each other and at last into one great stream whose strength will suffice to sweep away all that keeps the Church from the success of its mission.

But the important thing is that the leading reformers all abhorred the idea of schism and adhered to the doctrine of the unity of the Church. They continued, for example, to use the Apostles' Creed as an expression of the Faith, though it was expanded into confessions of varying length and detail. Thus Calvin in his Catechism says that the creed is " the formula of confession which all Christians have in common " ; and again<sup>(1)</sup>, he says that where the Word is purely preached and reverently heard, and the Sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ, we are to recognize the church and not to contend against it or separate ourselves from it. To depart from the Church is to deny God and Christ. All the reformers would agree on that position.

Time forbids us to go into detail about the many movements towards closer fellowship between the churches, or the various attempts towards accommodation which have taken place in the centuries since the Reformation. Nor can we spend time on the splits and secessions which have disrupted the Church in the same period, only giving thanks that many of them have already been healed. But it is clear that the Church has never been satisfied with less

<sup>(1)</sup> *Institutes*, IV., i. 10.

than true unity; has never recognized a state of schism as Christian; has never forgotten the deep meaning or the serious challenge of our Lord's words—*ut omnes unum sint*.

We turn now to the examination of the relation between liturgy and unity. It seems that this relation has been somewhat neglected and that it should be studied more widely and more deeply. Its importance lies in this, that worship is the chief function of the Church. The Church has other functions, evangelism and ministry, for example. But the worship of God is the source of power and of inspiration for all other functions. Moreover, while the Church has various functions in this age, the only function remaining in the Church Triumphant will, it seems, be worship. That is why this relationship between worship and unity seems so important. Now the various traditions of worship are from many points of view very different, and the emphasis within each part of the Church is laid upon the tradition within that part. But it seems that the differences should receive less emphasis, and the things in worship common to all should be underlined. Of course, as Langmead Casserley says<sup>(1)</sup> "True unity is never the unity of identicals; true unity is always the unity of things that differ and which, precisely because they differ in the way they do, harmoniously compose a single pattern". These differences have been emphasized sufficiently in the past, and it is time to seek for the harmony of the patterns.

Consider three types of worship, Roman, Anglican and Presbyterian, each of which has certain very definite and distinctive characteristics. In the Roman service we have the use of Latin, which seems to impart a certain indefinable tone which is not found elsewhere. The service is almost entirely priestly, the share of the people being very small, though the liturgical movement is making a difference. The service which the great majority of the people attend is the Mass, though some extra-liturgical services such as Benediction are popular. Secondly, the Anglican service is wedded to the *Book of Common Prayer*, which is meant to be in the hands of each worshipper, and the form of the service in which the people can so largely share expresses perhaps better than elsewhere the corporate nature of worship. The Prayer Book contains two kinds of service, in addition to the Occasional Offices, the Daily Offices and the Holy Communion, and it does seem to be richer than the Roman forms. Thirdly, in the

(1) *Christian Community*, p. 43.

Presbyterian forms of worship, no service-book is appointed for use, with a consequent freedom of action on the part of the minister and a resultant great variety in form of service. This is indeed rather less nowadays than was the case in the past, thanks largely to the influence of the *Book of Common Order*, 1940. But this freedom and variety are still possible, and indeed signify something that is of value. Again, there are two types of service here, the ordinary preaching service and the Lord's Supper. Another feature here is the small part taken by the people. In many places, apart from the items of praise in psalm and hymn, the people are silent.

So we have three types of service which appear to have not only different traditions behind them, but also real differences in idea and in practice, and it looks as if any kind of collaboration would be difficult to achieve. But in spite of this there is much that is common to all, and this we must now investigate. For convenience, we refer only to the Anglican and the Presbyterian forms.

First of all, the *subjects* in the forms of worship are the same. All the services are founded on Holy Scripture, lessons from which are of central importance, for everywhere the proclamation of the Word of God must be regarded as of first concern. The principle by which the lessons are chosen varies; in one case a lectionary may be used, either by ecclesiastical prescription or by ministerial choice; while in another the lessons are chosen in relation perhaps to the Church Calendar or to the text of the sermon. But that matters little. The important thing is that the same Scripture is read and the same Gospel proclaimed.

The subjects of prayer are the same—adoration, confession, supplication, thanksgiving and intercession. The shape of the prayers may differ, some sections of the Church preferring the brief collect form which is so easily followed by the hearer, others preferring the longer, more discursive prayer which makes heavy demands on the attention. But wherever men turn to God, the great themes already mentioned are found. In particular, there are few places nowadays where the Lord's Prayer is not used in worship. The prayer which He gave to His disciples at their request, must always fill an important place in the approach of the children to the Heavenly Father.

The materials used for praise in the services are also a common possession of the whole Church. A hymn-book may indeed be issued by a particular denomination, but the

contents are never confined to compositions written by members of that denomination. Every hymn-book is ecumenical in its choice of material, and many hymns appear in books of very different nature. Thus the *Revised Church Hymnary* does not exclude plainsong music or hymns from medieval and Roman Catholic sources; while the *English Hymnal* includes hymns by calvinistic evangelical writers like Isaac Watts and John Newton. Why should not the day come soon when a new hymn-book will be prepared by a joint committee of the Churches for general use by all?

Another item which has long been used in worship is the Creed. The Apostles' Creed is recited as a statement or proclamation of the Church's belief, and in the Communion service the Nicene Creed similarly finds a place. These forms provide the worshipper, and indeed also the outsider, with a summary of the faith. Principal W. A. Curtis wrote <sup>(1)</sup> that the Apostles' Creed "to the common mind of Christendom stands as next to Holy Writ the most venerable bond of unity and the symbol of harmonious faith". And finally the two sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper must be noticed, both of which are regarded as of dominical institution and therefore as essential to the life of the Church.

Secondly, there is much that is common in the *form* of the services as well as in the subjects. It has often been thought that the ordinary morning and evening services of the Presbyterian Church are related to Matins and Evensong of the Prayer Book. Both contain psalmody and hymnody, prayers and scripture lessons, and the sermon is frequently added to Mattins and Evensong before the service is ended, which is not unlike the position of the sermon in Presbyterian worship. But the relationship if it exists is slight. The sermon in the *Book of Common Prayer* really belongs to the Eucharist, and, as W. D. Maxwell has shown, the ordinary preaching service of the Presbyterians is really a truncated Communion service. The weekly morning service ought to be, what Calvin wanted it to be, a Communion service, where the Eucharist is celebrated after the proclamation of the Word by lesson and sermon.

Further, in both churches Holy Communion derives from the medieval Mass. The *Book of Common Order* of the Scottish reformers was the descendant of the *Genevan Service Book* of 1556, which came from Calvin's *La Forme*

<sup>(1)</sup> *History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith*, p. 63.

*des Prières*, which in turn was founded on the French Strasburg service. It was translated from the German Strasburg service which finally was derived through the German Mass of Schwartz from the Roman Mass. The Communion service in the *Book of Common Prayer* is directly derived from the medieval Sarum Missal, which was only a slight variation from the Roman Missal.

It must be added that there are clear traces of the influence of the *Book of Common Prayer* on the *Book of Common Order*. A comparison between Knox's Liturgy and the Prayer Book shows that some parts of the Exhortation in the Communion Service of the former have been taken from that of the latter, while there are resemblances in some of the pre-communion prayers and in the prayers for the King. Much of the Marriage Service too has identical wording. There is thus a cousinly relation between the two forms of the Eucharist, and if the two modern books are compared, the *Book of Common Order*, 1940 and the *Book of Common Prayer*, or the Scottish Liturgy, it is seen that, though the order and the significance differ at many points, we have the same important elements—the Great Prayer, and Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Words of Institution, the Consecration, the Fraction, the Communion and the Post-communion Prayer. Certain formulas, such as the *Sursum Corda*, the *Sanctus*, and so on, appear in both, as they have appeared for centuries in the Eucharist. Every Eucharist is based upon our Lord's four actions: "He took; He gave thanks; He brake; He distributed".

The same thing is true of the Baptismal service. There are differences both in word and in doctrine, but the salient features appear in both Presbyterian and Anglican as also in the Roman forms. There are the prayer for the blessing of the water; the brief address with the scriptural warrant; the profession of faith; the administration of the sacrament by pouring on or sprinkling with water; and the uttering of the formula of baptism, the service concluding with a post-baptismal prayer.

Finally one may suggest that in the services the intention is the same. The Council of Trent taught that for the valid conferring of the sacraments the minister must have the intention of doing at least what the Church does, while to-day there is required a real internal intention to act as a minister of Christ, or to do what Christ instituted the sacraments to effect. <sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, VIII., p. 69.

Now one may suggest that in the various forms of service in both Anglican and Presbyterian churches, as indeed elsewhere, the intention is always the same, namely, to do what Christ commanded us to do, to proclaim His Gospel, to evangelize the world for Him, to teach whatsoever He taught, to baptize in the Triune Name, to celebrate the Holy Supper which He "did institute and in His Holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memorial of that His precious death and sacrifice until His coming again".<sup>(1)</sup> The intention is simply to obey the Lord and Master. There may be different interpretations of what obedience requires, and different methods of obedience; but it seems to be of some importance that the intention is the same, to obey Him. And it is of interest that in the Sacrament of Baptism that intention is recognized throughout the Church.

These considerations seem to make it clear that in spite of differences, some of which are minor, as in word or order, and some of which are more serious as touching on doctrine, there are many likenesses, which might very well act as an inspiration to a fuller understanding between the denominations. One must accept the fact that each branch of the Church has developed its own traditions over the centuries, and one must acknowledge that these are of great value. They bind each generation to its predecessors, forming an historical unity between past and present, a continuity in time. But an insistence on the common elements should bring the traditions closer together to form a continuity across space. A. C. Outler has put the same point in a slightly different way. We must recognize a common Christian history. "The history which separates us from the Event of Christ is also the indispensable nexus which *connects* us with that Event—and thus connects us with each other".<sup>(2)</sup>

Let us now consider some suggestions that have been made for unity through worship. One idea is the holding of selective or eclectic services, where people come together to share in a form which consists of various items chosen from different traditions. These indeed bring worshippers together, but however much they may enjoy the experience, the trouble is that behind the service there is no living tradition. Too often there is no vital connection between the parts, and though they may be useful enough for inter-

<sup>(1)</sup> *The Scottish Liturgy*.

<sup>(2)</sup> *The Christian Tradition and the Unity we Seek*, p. 39.

denominational conferences or meetings, they do not really enlarge the view, nor do they give fuller mutual understanding. Someone has said on this point: "What is needed is not a medley but a melodic line, not a patchwork but a pattern".<sup>(1)</sup> Actually it is better, as a rule, to let one denomination have the responsibility for the act of worship, perhaps with some explanation of its point of view, tradition and customs.

Another method is to seek for a lowest common denominator. Here is an attempt to bring worshippers together from many different traditions on the basis of a very simple doctrinal declaration. The Creed should be dropped, for example, and perhaps the single phrase, "Jesus is Lord," substituted. Let people accept that as the only necessary confession of belief, and let them use their judgment about everything else. It is to be feared that a minimal creed of that nature would not hold people together very long. Besides, we have already said, the words mean much more than they say.

One specific instance of this is the proposal of Von Ogden Vogt in his recent book.<sup>(2)</sup> He holds, rightly, that worship is the primary concern of the Church and claims that it alone can have any unitive value. He criticizes all kinds of dogmatism. "Dogmas become dogmatism when they are held to be authenticated by revelation, to be definitive and final, and to be required for religious fellowship" (p. 63). That, he holds, keeps people apart. This position, which suggests a church without any creed or confession, is surely an anomaly, for the Church has belief as its foundation. Attempts at corporate church life which rejects the credal, the sacramental and the evangelical, will certainly not answer the problems of unity.

Another suggestion has been made by the late Father Raymond Raynes.<sup>(3)</sup> He proposed not only that in every congregation there should be corporate, silent prayer for the restoration of Christian unity; not only that Christians of various denominations should meet together in their own houses for the same purpose; but at regular times, say, once a month, the bishop of every diocese should himself celebrate the Holy Communion in his cathedral or some central parish church, and all baptized people be invited to attend. At this service the celebrant alone would com-

(1) Roger Hazelton, *Religion in Life*, Vol. xix., p. 41.

(2) *The Primacy of Worship*.

(3) *Thoughts of a Religious* (Faith Press, 1959).

municate, or perhaps a few with him to satisfy the theological implication of the rubrics. All other members of the church would abstain from receiving, as an act of sorrow and reparation for the sins which have contributed to the disunity of the church, and in common with their brethren of "separated denomination" who cannot communicate. One may rejoice in the desire for unity that lies behind this suggestion, but it does seem to emphasize the difficulties about intercommunion, and it is unlikely to prove acceptable to either side.

Another suggestion has come from the Bishop of Woolwich, in favour of a form of concelebration. <sup>(1)</sup> This touches both the questions of ministerial order and of intercommunion, but the interesting thing is the attempt to get over these on an interim plan. He says that in many places "we can, and indeed must, spiritually speaking, break one loaf, but . . . we cannot at present do it through a single, mutually acknowledged ministry. Then should we not do it through our divided ministries together? Concelebration with two (or more) ministers presiding at the table on behalf of the congregations they represent, meets those Anglicans who conscientiously believe that it is not a valid Eucharist unless celebrated by a priest; and at the same time it accepts as joint celebrant one who is in no way asked to deny the fulness of the ministry he has received," (p. 406). The suggestion has been welcomed by some, for example, by the Bishop of Rochester, and criticized by others. It is difficult to say what the wider reaction to this will be, but it seems to be a plan worthy of consideration and even of experiment.

But we must draw towards a conclusion of these notes. What practical steps can be taken at present, not perhaps for achieving unity, but at least for preparing the road towards it? The time does not seem to have yet come for laying down conditions for reunion. Recent sad experiences have made it clear that much preparatory work still remains to be done. Let each rebuff, however, only strengthen our determination to make progress towards the desire of our hearts. For we have *got* to find a way together. At this point, however, our worship-values should be recognized as having a place in this movement.

There must, of course, be a continuation and an extension of trans-denominational discussion, and that must not be confined to the clergy or to the leaders of the de-

<sup>(1)</sup> *Theology*, Vol. LXII. Oct., 1959.

nominations. The discussion must get down to every class, to the office-bearers, to the organizations, to the youth, on both sides. There should be far more occasions too when the clergy of one denomination will go to meetings of young and of old in another denomination, and there explain their kinds of government, their methods of working, and their ways of worship. There has been some of this, but there must be much more, even in the form of organized campaign.

Again, there must continue united acts of witness where ministers and leaders of various denominations join together and stand by one another in evangelism and on the moral and social issues of the day. This is already taking place—the Kirk weeks are an example—but there is need for more of it. And equally important is the need for publicity for these united efforts, drawing the attention of church members, as well as those outside the church, to what is happening.

But the questions of worship are also of importance. We have seen how much there is in common in this matter, and the suggestion has been made that that fact should be emphasized. There should be services of worship in which members of different denominations will come together; joint services of intercession would prove particularly valuable. This attendance at church services to which they are not accustomed must be preceded by explanations, and, if properly prepared for, this would certainly enrich the spiritual experience, and help to break down prejudice. The Presbyterian would perhaps be surprised to find that, though he has thought the repetition of Matins and Evensong week by week (if not day by day) must make the worship cold and formal, in fact there are millions who find in Prayer Book services deep spiritual refreshment and enrichment. And the Anglican might also be surprised at the possibility of spiritual refreshment and enrichment in Presbyterian services, though they depend so much on the mood, the quality and the spiritual attainments of the minister.

A further suggestion is this, that where a service is to be broadcast, or better still televised, arrangements should be made for groups to hear the service together, or to gather together after hearing it, for discussion. A minister of the denomination responsible for the service should be present to give explanations and answer questions, and generally to help towards the understanding of the service. It might be a good thing for the group to meet before hearing the service, so that its members would be better able to understand what was to be done in the service itself.

There should, moreover, be far more frequent invitations to preach given to clergy of the other denominations, and this not only on special occasions, but on ordinary occasions, so that such exchanges might become a natural and normal thing. In such ways we would get to know each other far better, to understand one another's ideas, and to discover that the really important thing is not the shape of the service, but the worship of the heart offered to Almighty God.

And that brings us back to what must be regarded as the main bond of unity. Our unity is grounded in the unity of God and in the uniqueness of His redeeming act in Jesus Christ. The Church is one Church, whatever the appearances may suggest, because Christ is one, because He is one for the Church, and because the only true life of the Church is that which it has in Him. It is therefore, as von Allmen says, <sup>(1)</sup> "not by contrivance or adjustment that we can unite the Church of God. It is only by coming closer to Him that we can come nearer to one another. And we cannot by ourselves come closer to Him . . . . It will not be by our effort but by His constraining power". Nevertheless, self-satisfaction, contentment with things as they are, prejudice and complacency, which are only too common in our church life, can put the brake on that constraining power; whereas by attempts at a common worship and understanding such as have been suggested, we put ourselves in such a position that His power can the more readily and fully act upon us. When we come together in prayer and praise before the eternal throne of God, we are, to use the words of L. V. Powles <sup>(2)</sup> "caught up into a stream of thanksgiving, the response of the redeemed creature to his Maker, and in the metaphor, so dear to the ancient celebrants, of the crumbs and the loaf, we lose our isolation in assembling and closing in to form the one Bread in Christ". Without Him there is no worship, no sacrament, no Church. We must plan and continue to plan, though indeed it is not our planning and our diplomatic approaches that will make one body, for in our planning we must recognize His Spirit and His work who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace.

JOHN A. LAMB

<sup>(1)</sup> *Verbum Caro* (1959), p. 158.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Introduction to the Liturgies of the Anglican Communion* (London S.A.), p. 30.