

Liturgy, Laity and Architecture

THE title of this paper was chosen because, although I was asked to say something to the Society about Church Architecture, my main plea will be that you can only profitably discuss the architecture and design of church buildings in the light of the prior questions about what goes on within these buildings (i.e. worship, the liturgy) and the shape, activity and relationships of the community which the buildings house (i.e. the laos, the people of God). Our understanding of the church and of its worship must determine the buildings and their arrangement. Architecture, therefore, comes last in the title ; and this reflects also the order in which thought has been moving in the churches. There is a movement of concern about church architecture, which is still rather in its infancy in Britain ⁽¹⁾, but in which Christians from all denominations (including the Roman Catholic Church) are finding a common fundamental approach to the problems of church design. This movement is unquestionably a consequence of the progress of the Liturgical movement, and is no less clearly influenced by the movement of modern thought concerning the Church and the laity. (I am not sure that we have allowed what is happening in the practical sphere, in the life of congregations and the activity of Christians in the world, to influence our thinking enough). One thing, however, needs to be said strongly. These concerns must be held together. Whenever you take one of them—a concern for worship, or a concern for lay witness and service, or a concern for better church design, or anything else, and think of it as a thing apart, a thing on its own, out of relation to the whole life and being of the people of God in the world, you distort it. It becomes a fad, whose determining considerations tend to be one's preconceived ideas of correctness or tradition, uncriticized by the faith and unrelated to the needs of the body of Christ in the world to-day.

The metaphor of building is used in the New Testament—the word edify, edification (*oikodomeo*, *oikodome*). This is the test of Christian activity and of Christian ministry :

⁽¹⁾ See the papers of the New Churches Research Group, 16 Lanark Mansions, London, and especially the book *Liturgy and Architecture*, by the Group's Director, Peter Hammond (Barrie and Roeliff, 1958).

does it edify, does it build up the Church ? This building-up is understood both intensively, the building up of the fellowship in faith and love to its full maturity in Christ ; and extensively, for the Church is built up as converts are added as living stones to the temple. The common worship of the people of God, *and* their common life together, for mutual education in the faith, for the service of love to one another, and for simple social joy, *and* their work and witness in the world are therefore organically bound together in this concept of edifying. Where one is developed to the neglect of others you have a body that is lop-sided, a building that is a leaning Tower of Pisa ; and where any is divorced from the others, it becomes sub-Christian. When worship, whether well or badly ordered, is carried on without any relation to the building of a fellowship of whose faith and love it can be a real expression—then worship is ritual or convention. When fellowship is divorced from worship on the one hand and from responsibility to the world on the other, it becomes just a social club with a religious flavour. When evangelism is not rooted in the worship and life of the servant-people of God, it deteriorates into scalp-hunting, religious imperialism.

For this building-up of the Church, the actual buildings (which we still tend to describe as stone and lime, though to-day we must think rather of steel, glass and concrete) are the least important. They alone are not essential. The Church can get on without buildings, as it has done in the past ; and while it may be hampered by the lack, it loses nothing of its essential life, nor does its worship lose anything of its essential character. (All the material provision that you need for the highest act of the Church's worship is a space, any space, a table, any table, a cup of wine, a loaf of bread and a Bible). Where you do have buildings, however—and I am not suggesting that we should deliberately do without them—they are important, because inevitably the building, in its design and arrangement, expresses some idea of the Church and its worship. Buildings either help or hinder us ; they make easier what we are trying to realize in our coming together, or they fight against it and make it harder of attainment. Yet many of us keep in our minds an ideal conception of the church building which is in fact at variance with the ideal of the Church that we are seeking to realize in our congregational life and worship.

What then are we trying to achieve in the improvement of worship, in liturgical concern ? Let me say quite bluntly

that if we are thinking of "improvements" such as receiving the offering on an alms-dish, a robed choir, or a series of pulpit falls in the correct liturgical colours ; and even if we are thinking in terms simply of achieving a better order of service, the Creed every Sunday with the Nicene Creed at Communion, or the correct responses in the Communion service—that by itself—then we are fifty years behind the times. That is not the primary concern of liturgical renewal to-day : some of the things I have mentioned might indeed follow on liturgical renewal, others would be rejected as unnecessary and undesirable frills.

The first Liturgical movement of modern times was concerned with the enrichment of worship by drawing on neglected traditions, on the riches of the past. If one is constrained to add that this sometimes involved an uncritical admiration for whatever claimed to be "Catholic", this criticism would apply more, I think, to the Oxford movement in England than to the movement which was marked by the foundation of the Church Service Society in 1865. The remarkable critical and scholarly work which was done by the founders of this Society was, in spite of the slanders levelled against it at the time, firmly based on Reformed principles. Yet their concern was, rightly and of necessity, for the enrichment of worship from the treasures of the past ; and there is no doubt that on the fringes of the movement (for every movement has its lunatic fringe) there were those whose reaction against barrenness in worship led them to an uncritical acceptance of anything that laid claim to be an ancient tradition, though it might only be late medieval. It is sad that so often a movement is judged by the excesses on its borders rather than by the responsible achievement at its heart.

If the first Liturgical movement was concerned with enrichment, the second Liturgical movement—the modern movement—is concerned rather with simplification. More accurately, it is concerned to see the essentials ; to achieve a new theological understanding of the meaning of what we do when we assemble together for the worship of God ; so to order what we do and the way we do it that the meaning shines out unmistakeably, and without unnecessary distractions. In doing this it is finding that a new understanding of liturgy and a new understanding of the Church—of the life and mission of the laity—are bound up together.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is to be found in the modern liturgical movement in the Church of Rome.

This movement has a voluminous and scholarly literature, with much of which members of this Society will already be familiar. I quote here, as an example, some passages from a small book by the Revd. Charles Davis, entitled "*Liturgy and Doctrine*" (1).

"The Mass is the family meal of the Christian community. By all means let there be as much dignity and beauty as possible—a lively sense of the sacred must never be absent—but it is better for things to be carried out in an externally untidy way with everyone taking a real part, than to have a faultless performance with the congregation looking on passively." (2)

"We should banish without reprieve any idea that the liturgy is a private hobby, of interest to some but not to others. It is not the preserve of those who have a liking for ceremonies. To be liturgically minded has nothing to do with aestheticism or affected refinement. With the liturgy we are dealing with the ordinary, everyday life of the present-day Church. Unless we turn from the subject of ancient chasubles and grapple with the raw material of the Christian community as it is here and now with its needs and capabilities, we remain in the field of antiquarian studies and outside that of liturgy." (3)

"... it is not an awakening of interest in certain features of ancient ritual, a movement akin to, say, the Gothic revival. It is a down-to earth pastoral movement, working for the renewal of the Christian life of ordinary people at its centre and source." (4)

"As long as our Sunday congregations are as amorphous and passive as cinema audiences and our communicants as indifferent to each other as solitary eaters in a restaurant, the doctrine of the Mystical Body has not been understood." (5)

One is tempted to go on quoting from this most stimulating book; but I would simply ask you to note the stress, again and again, on "the mystery of the assembly", on the active participation of the people, on the existence of a real community of human beings which comes together and finds the source and renewal of its life in the communal celebration of the Eucharist.

This Liturgical movement is no academic or clerical interest. It is a pastoral activity, closely linked with the

(1) Sheed and Ward (Stagbooks), 1960.

(2) *op. cit.* p. 10.

(3) *ibid.* p. 10.

(4) *ibid.* p. 11.

(5) *ibid.* p. 50.

encouragement of Bible study, with the lay apostolate, with the work of mission. It is not for us to speculate as to its future or its influence ; nor need we be surprised if, like other movements, it has supporters who imitate its externals without understanding what is at its heart. At its heart, however, there lies a theological understanding of the Church and of its worship, and a pastoral activity towards the realization of the Christian community. There is also the most rigorous historical study. (I think it is true, generally, that where historical study stands alone it tends to become antiquarian and traditionalist ; where it is linked with a theological and pastoral interest, then it has a forward-looking function, to illumine and control, but never to inhibit, change and experiment).

The external expressions of this movement are not its essence, but they are interesting enough. The altar begins to come forward from the wall, and the priest celebrates from behind it, in the Basilican or reformed position. This entails the removal of the tabernacle for the reserved sacrament to a side chapel. The altar begins to stand bare ; the overlaid symbolism of embroidered frontals and so on is taken away because the altar itself, and the bread and the wine, are the symbols of the Eucharist, and their symbolic quality is weakened, not strengthened, by elaborate decoration. In the architecture of new churches there has been considerable freedom of design. One or two churches were, I believe, actually built with the altar in the geographical centre of the building, and the people all round. This solution has been officially rejected, not because of the practical difficulties of such an arrangement, but because it expresses only one aspect of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Church. The Superior Directives for Church Building insist that the hierarchical character of the Church must not be overlooked ; the differentiation of function between priest and people must be expressed in the way the building is arranged ; and this a central altar fails to do. They stress equally, however, that the unity of the Church, the corporate unity of the whole Church, is not to be obscured in the way the building is arranged. If these aims have not often found satisfactory expression in architecture, it may be because architects find it hard to resist the temptation to be dramatic or impressive when designing churches, so that even simplicity can become starkness. Some churches have been built which in their poverty and humility have been truly impressive. It certainly gives one to think when one

finds a design for a Roman Catholic church in which the faithful sit on three sides of the altar, exactly as the people do at Communion in a typical Scottish T-shaped building.

Elsewhere the modern Liturgical movement is not so tidily organized as in the Church of Rome, but the tendencies are unmistakeable. In England the beginning was perhaps A. G. Hebert's book *Liturgy and Society*. Liturgical concern is no longer a concern for correctness of ritual and the use by the minister of traditional forms, but—with a full awareness of tradition—concentrates rather on the rooting of worship in the life of the Christian community, and the impact of the worship of the community on the life of society. Theological and pastoral insights give freedom from mere traditionalism; freedom for intelligent experiment. The "Parish and People" movement is a well-known example of this; the Bishop of Woolwich's "Liturgy Coming to Life" another.

Now it is easy for us to look at some of the things which the modern liturgical movement is doing, and to feel very superior. I felt this when I first read Canon Southcott's book *The Parish Comes Alive*. He gets very excited about bringing the communion table down to the nave, and celebrating behind a simple table in the midst of the people; he gets excited about the re-discovery of the corporate nature of Baptism, by having Baptism in the presence of the congregation at public worship, instead of privately, in the afternoon; and so on. These are things that we have known in Scotland for the last four hundred years. "Is that all?", we say. If we say that, I think we have missed the point. The point is that he is discovering the significance of these things, and we have lost it.

What are the marks of the worship which the Reformers introduced in place of the Mass? I would suggest three. First, it was *corporate* worship. In opposition to the individualism of late medieval devotion, you have the re-discovery of the Church as the people of God; the enfranchisement of the laity—or, as someone has put it, the abolition of the laity, for the old horizontal division is done away and the whole Church is seen as a royal priesthood, Kings and Priests unto God; the people are given their worth and dignity by the Gospel, the adoption of sons. So you have corporate worship; common order and common prayer; vernacular services; service-books in the hands of the people; and not least the people's praise.

Second, there is the centrality of the Word of God. The whole Church is not present without its King and Head. He declares his presence, he is active towards us in the preaching. *Praedicatio verbi dei est verbum dei*. Those—and there are some in our church to-day—who set worship in opposition to preaching do not understand what preaching is, nor do they understand the essence of Reformed worship. The Church is created by the word of the Gospel, and by the word of the Gospel it is built up and renewed. The living God is the God who speaks. In the reading and the preaching of the Word we listen for what God the Lord has to say to us; not reading only, because this is a living word to our situation; and not any preaching, but the preaching of the Word of God. Luther in a sermon at a church dedication asked that “nothing else should take place therein than that our dear Lord himself should speak with us through his holy word and we again speak with him through prayer and praise” ⁽¹⁾.

Third, however, we must add, the centrality of the Sacraments. This is not the place to discuss the relation of Word and Sacrament, save to say that we need a re-examination of this to-day, to clear our minds, if nothing else. It certainly is implicit in Reformed practice that the Word can stand without the Sacrament, but never the Sacrament without the Word. Yet Professor W. D. Maxwell did well to remind us that the aim of the Reformers was not only to give the Bible back to the people, but also to give the Sacraments back to the people. Indeed, we may see the very infrequency of celebration of Communion as a sign of the importance attached to the Sacrament. I think it was not, as has been suggested, a medieval hang-over, but the necessity and difficulty of discipline in the national situation of the time that led the Scottish Reformers to advocate a much less frequent celebration than Calvin had advocated in Geneva. ⁽²⁾ The sacraments are corporate acts; Baptism is in face of the people, because it is a seal annexed to the promises of the Word, a sacrament of the gospel and of the Church; the Lord's Supper is received seated round a table. The practice of reception has varied in other Reformed churches, but the Scots held tenaciously to the practice of sitting round a table, and rejected kneeling because it obscured the joyful signification of this holy mystery.

⁽¹⁾ Quoted by Karl Barth, *Dogmatics, I, i*: E.T., *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 54.

⁽²⁾ This is no argument, of course, for maintaining infrequency to-day.

In these principles one sees the origin with us of some of the practices which Southcott finds so new to-day. But our situation is not that of the Reformers. For them community was a given thing, because the whole neighbourhood was there in the house of God. The building-up of the Church, therefore, both in the sense of evangelism and in the sense of the building-up of the Christian community, could be accomplished through the ordinances of public worship and through Discipline—using that word in its widest sense, to include education as well as moral discipline. The intellectual and moral rigorism into which this in time developed had its fine fruits but also its bitter ones—the loss of the basic pattern of worship and of the humanity of the Community. Later still, for reasons for which the Church is not entirely responsible, individualism came to be a basic feature of religion; a man's religion is conceived as a private affair between his soul and God. When this happens the church, or rather, the congregation, becomes the religious institution, the club, which through its services and activities meets the religious needs of the individual members, and to which these members give in return, in varying degrees and manners, their support, their service and their loyalty. The criterion of worship then becomes its helpfulness to *me* in living *my* individual Christian life. A tremendous burden now rests upon the minister, for it is he who by his gifts and his eloquence, in prayer and preaching, must provide the comfort, uplift and inspiration which are demanded. The congregation is now largely passive, for this is hardly any longer a corporate activity.

I think it should be recognized that the most widespread changes in public worship that have taken place in the last hundred years—and the most readily accepted—have not been those advocated by this Society. They have been those dictated by this criterion of helpfulness. (I would not deny that worship should be helpful to the worshipper; it is when this becomes the sole end and criterion that there is danger). Music has particularly been used in this way—"mood-moulding" music to create "atmosphere", introits, vespers, even anthems as commonly used, and the sacred solo at the evening service; flowers appear on the communion table, and flowery language in the prayers; the children's address, so beloved of the adults. The *individual* cup is not an unfitting symbol of this concept of worship.

These innovations are welcomed; but the efforts of more serious liturgical reformers, including those in our day

who wish to recover the Reformed pattern of worship, tend to meet with opposition, or, at best, an unenthusiastic acquiescence. We must recognize, sadly, the failure of the Liturgical movement to become what its founders hoped, a genuinely popular movement among the laity of the Church. It is disturbing to observe, not once but many times, a parish where one had thought a tradition had been built up by a man whose understanding of worship has been both high and deep: he goes, and within six months the congregation has called a Gallio who cares for none of these things, and they have done it with their eyes open, because they "wanted a change". It is easy to blame the congregations, but does that end our responsibility? Must we not re-examine our methods?

If our aim is the recovery of worship as the corporate activity of the people of God, then the imposition from above of a "correct" order is ultimately self-defeating. The protests of people against innovations may be nearer to a corporate conception of worship than the determination of a minister to do what he thinks is right. For they at least are saying "This is *our* worship, this is *our* service", which is right; and he is saying "This is none of your business", which may have some legal basis but is spiritually entirely wrong. Even acquiescence is insufficient. If they like their minister they may say "Let the laddie have what he wants"; and if the laddie is wise he will say, "Not yet; not until *you* want it too."

It is in fact impossible to graft a pattern of corporate worship on to an individualistic conception of religion. The forms are foreign to the reality. But there are signs to-day of a break-down of individualism, and a break-through to a new understanding of the Church. There is a new openness of mind—not least in Kirk Sessions; a new willingness to study the Bible together; a new yearning for, and experience of, fellowship in groups; and in the layman's movements and the Stewardship movement a new willingness to accept responsibility for the Church's work and witness. There is an emerging understanding of what it means, not just to belong to the Church, but to be the Church. It is in this context that an opportunity exists—and an urgent need—for responsible liturgical renewal and experiment. To use the words of my title, the Liturgy must become the business of the Laity.

What is the appropriate architectural setting for corporate worship in the Reformed manner? Certain

things are needing to be said clearly and strongly. First, there is no such thing as Church Architecture in the sense of an ecclesiastical style of architecture. In all ages of the past until last century churches were built in the domestic style of the period. Gothic was not an ecclesiastical style only ; and when Gothic passed, no one thought it should be retained for churches in place of the Baroque or Classical which became popular. The church building houses a contemporary community and therefore should be built, without aggression or pretensions, as a contemporary building. If it be objected—and it always is—that the Church has continuity with its past, its tradition in the communion of saints, the answer is quite simple : in the first place, as with secular buildings, the architectural heritage of the past must continue to be preserved and used (but one does not *build* ancient monuments) : and, in the second place the essential continuity is not in the building itself, but in its use, in what happens within it—in Word and Sacrament, in the faith and the worship of the Church. New buildings dominated by the visual images of the past—even if they fall short of the full horror of Gothic arches in ferro-concrete—are like the electric-fire with the flickering coals, they are “ phoney ”. The fact that churches like the “ phoney ”, and that architects feel bound to produce it for them, is a sign of our uncertainty about the place of the Church in the modern world. A Church which is engaged on the service of its living Lord is not the place in which to express a sentimental nostalgia for the past.

Second, the church building is there to house a community, to make possible the functions of that community in public worship and Christian fellowship. Therefore it must be as functional as any modern building. This is quite basic. It is relatively clear that the complex of church buildings—halls, rooms, etc.—must be designed to meet the functional needs of the congregation : for Christian education, youth organizations, social activity and so on. (Even so, it is surprising how little thought is often given to what these needs are). It is important to see that it is no different in the case of the church—the space set apart for worship. That space must be defined, enclosed, arranged in such a way as to facilitate that which we meet to do together, and to express the relationships of the participants to one another. Here all are participants. The fact that this is not an audience but a *congregation* must be clearly expressed. Some prison chapels, I believe, were so arranged that while each

prisoner could see the minister, he was isolated and prevented from seeing or communicating in any way with his fellow-prisoners. It would hardly be held that this was an ideal arrangement for a church; yet it is not far removed from the prevalent individualistic conception of worship; and some of the narrow long-axis churches which are still being built seem to try to approximate to this. The sight of our fellow-worshippers is thought by some to be distracting. Yet a personal awareness of others is what distinguishes a fellowship from the facelessness of a crowd.

Let me illustrate from three contrasting types of building. Consider the simple rectangular or T-shaped parish church. With the pulpit on the long wall, the communion-table (formerly, the space for the long tables) out in front of it, and the congregation gathered on three sides: such a church (apart from the galleries, about which one might raise a question) seems to be designed to house a community gathered under the Word and round the Table, in fellowship with one another. Consider again the vast nineteenth century auditorium, with the pulpit, like a box-stage, occupying one complete wall and dominating everything. This also is basically functional, but not for corporate worship—rather for a great preaching performance and a mighty audience. Or consider one of our restored medieval cathedrals. Recently I worshipped in one. I had visited it during the week and been captivated by the beauty of the empty building; but from a seat near the back of the long narrow nave on Sunday morning everything seemed different. The vista remained glorious; but I was not there to admire the vista. Away in the distance behind a carved screen I could see the communion table. I became aware that the choir was up there also. The pulpit, from which the service was conducted, was scarcely less remote ⁽¹⁾. By no stretch of the imagination could such a building be called functional. The word was a distant word, and we were isolated hearers, aware of our fellows only by the backs of the heads of the people in front. When we rose to sing our voices frightened us and we fell silent and listened to the choir.

Unfortunately most people who concern themselves with churches are mesmerized by ecclesiological terminology

(1) One wonders why, in such restorations, the pulpit was not restored to what was its customary medieval position half-way down the nave. This has been done in Greyfriars, Edinburgh (a post-Reformation church which continued this sensible arrangement) with remarkable effect. The building comes to life. But it means re-arranging the seating, so that not everyone is admiring the view.

—apses, chancels, naves, transepts, aisles and the rest. All this implies a fixed conception of what a church looks like—a visual image—which has no relation to the actual use of the building. We must get it out of our minds. The Reformers were radically functional in their treatment of existing buildings, and in the buildings which were produced after the Reformation. Many later buildings lost balance when the individualistic conception of preaching led to the pulpit being given a dominance of form which dwarfed everything else. Very many of the earlier buildings have been ruined, first by the abandonment of the long tables and the introduction of the fixed communion table; and more radically by the introduction of organs in the worst possible place and taste, and of choirs as a band of holy performers facing the congregation. Some have been ruined by well-meaning “improvers”. Recently I visited an early nineteenth century building, undistinguished, but pleasant enough in its structure. It all came to an end in a tiny chancel, into which were crowded pulpit, communion-table, font and lectern. There would have been a prayer-desk, I am sure, but there wasn’t room. I looked at the two tall, slender windows in the long south wall, and at the space between them. “But surely,” I said, “the pulpit used to be here.” “Yes,” said the minister, “but one of my predecessors built this apse and turned the church round.” He had turned a simple, uncluttered, functional building into an oppressive space, neither beautiful nor adapted to its function. ⁽¹⁾

Finally, the time has come to say to ourselves quite firmly “The church building is not the house of God.” It is the house of the people of God. The temple in which God dwells is not made with hands. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the spirit of God dwelleth in you” ⁽²⁾. It is because we have lost confidence in this that we want our church buildings to be autonomous expressions of religious feeling. It is because we have lost confidence in what is said and done that we try to make the building say

⁽¹⁾ It is not to be thought that I am advocating simply a return to classical Presbyterian styles—rectangular, T-shaped or any other. In fact, when one considers the designs of the past one is struck by the great variety of ways in which men have solved the problem of enclosing space for worship, in contrast to the conventionalism of our approach to-day, dominated as it is by the long-axis rectangle, and the apse or chancel. This timidity is surely a sign of spiritual disease. What I am advocating is boldness and originality: and all that I am trying to suggest are some of the fundamental principles on which we and our architects must work together, and a few of the problems which we must solve.

⁽²⁾ I Cor. iii. 16.

something independently, and have what someone called "wool-gatherers' churches". It is because we are still in an age of individualism that we are so anxious to create an "atmosphere" of awe or reverence or such like. The mystery of the divine presence, the sense of the numinous, is not an aesthetic or religious feeling to be derived from looking at an empty building; it is to be found in what happens when the building is used, in "the mystery of the assembly", in the word of the Gospel and the silence of the Sacrament. The appropriate housing of this community will not be oblivious of its divine origin or its sacred purpose, but it will be primarily concerned to make possible a human activity (albeit the highest) and to express the human relationships involved. We must dare to be human, if we are not to be merely pretentious or precious. The Eternal Word of the Father took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men, and in that frail human flesh was manifested—mystery of mysteries—the divine majesty and love. It is not for us then to try to build monuments to the Divine Majesty, but to be content to build in human terms, for the New Humanity, the Body of Christ.

JAMES A. WHYTE