

Our Standards and Traditions in Worship ⁽¹⁾

ONE is naturally grateful for the charitable extension of the subject offered in the title for the day. Had the organizers of the Conference stuck strictly to their remit "The Westminster Confession and the Reunion of the Church," they might have assigned to the speaker for today the title, "The Directory of Public Worship and an Ecumenical Liturgy," which title, they must have felt, would have been a bit of a strain. The Directory is not exactly the happiest of hunting grounds for any student of liturgy. Yet even when the field of study is very properly extended to embrace the whole of our Church of Scotland tradition of worship it is, in a sense, not extended enough. As I understand it, the purpose of this paper is to look at our standards and our tradition of worship and consider what we feel we might have a right to offer to the ultimate fulness and unity of the Church's worship, what has to be commended or safeguarded in any rapprochement with other Churches, say, the Anglicans—in the foreseeable future; what likewise we might expect to be asked to sacrifice. But in the contemporary situation this also and above all is the question we must ask: by what standard shall we measure our own standards, and by what standard shall we determine what might eventually be the liturgy of a reunited Church, or even of some united parts of it? An ecumenical liturgy will certainly not be a creation *de novo* and we are right therefore in linking it with the idea of tradition. It would be ludicrous to suppose that the ecumenical debate in liturgics was going to be carried on in a vacuum, or at least in terms only of what is required in the ecumenical situation at any particular time. But equally the ecumenical liturgy will not be found in any mechanical way, say, by finding an arithmetic mean of all the traditions, or a highest common factor or whatever the appropriate mathematical manipulation happens to be. It is not sufficient therefore to be able knowledgeably and loyally to champion one's own tradition. Understanding our difficulties the ecumenically eager may then point to the "fathers" and claim that of course here

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we become brothers. Is antiquity then the measure of what is liturgically proper for an ecumenical situation, and has the experience of the Holy Spirit not been enjoyed by separate Churches in their developing liturgy? Indeed, dare we not hope that the Holy Spirit will lead us also into new liturgical truth in a reunited Church, experiencing the action of God upon us in our togetherness in worship, and will save us from the barrenness of mere traditionalism? All of these difficulties preclude any superficial study of this subject and drive us to find a reliable starting-point.

In seeking as we are now doing for some kind of theological understanding of worship we are, of course, exploring a fast developing area of study in which perhaps only general directions are beginning to become perceptible, but we must take courage and enter it. Then let us take this for starting-point: that in the Church Service God acts upon us. That is the primary thing we have to say about any worship; it is an *opus Dei* through the Holy Spirit. In Word and Sacrament Jesus Christ is present with His people. Of course there is a human side to it; there is human action as well as divine action, but human action only in response and as a derivative from the divine action; and therefore the appropriate action of the liturgy viewed as the form of the human action is obedience to the will of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, present and active in her midst, an obedience which takes precedence over all other considerations, be they aesthetic, psychological, ecumenical, educational or mystical. And, leaving aside the institution of the Sacrament of Baptism, this is the will of our Lord concerning worship, more or less specifically—that the Word of God be preached, that the Lord's Supper be celebrated according to His institution and that both of these things happen in the context of a congregation, a gathering of His people in His name, or more precisely, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. In giving His instructions to His disciples to preach (Matt. xxviii. 20a) Jesus does not stipulate how this preaching is to be done, only that it is to be done. He is thinking, of course, not only of evangelical preaching in a missionary context but also of expository preaching and homiletic preaching in a worship context; for when we have made all nations His disciples we still have to teach them to observe all that He has commanded us. He gives no directives about reading the Scriptures, nor does He state any preference for any particular method of preaching. The Word may find

innumerable modes of expression, the choice being part of the freedom we enjoy in the Holy Spirit, as sons of God. Similarly the mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper is not decreed for us by Jesus, only the celebrating of it with bread and wine and with reference to the institution of it is enjoined ; but that is unmistakably enjoined : " This do ". Our Lord's intention that we should all be gathered together in His name for worship is implicit in the very nature of preaching and of the Lord's Supper, if it is not sufficiently explicit in a text like Matt. xviii, 20., " Where two or three have met together in my name, I am there among them."

We take these as Jesus' minimal requirements for worship and we go further and assert that they contain within themselves an implicit negative, namely, that nothing should be allowed in worship which is not in some way subservient to these basic requirements. The freedom of which we spoke is the freedom granted to the Church which has heard the Word of God through the Holy Spirit. It is an eschatological freedom, but it is obviously freedom to serve the Lord of the Church, freedom to use any of the forms and fashions of the world to serve the Word. It is something quite different from human predilection or whim. We have then two outer limits to the area of the Church Service. The one arises from the delimitation involved in our Lord's commands : preaching, celebration of the Lord's Supper, gathering together. The other arises from the delimitation involved in the fact that in this preaching, and in this celebration, and in this gathering together Jesus the Lord is present, and therefore nothing has any place here which contradicts His Lordship or the power and authority of His gospel or of the Spirit which is His gift. The area between these two limits is considerable, very wide in fact : and this is the area of spiritual freedom, the area in which we are free to sing metrical psalms or prose psalms ; to have fermented wine or unfermented wine ; to have set prayers or free prayers, read prayers or extempore prayers ; symbols, gestures, clergy in gorgeous vestments or sombre black Genevan gown. This is the area in which liturgics develop and have a history, where in the freedom of the Spirit the Church takes from the world, from its language and its art and music, new forms, and presses them into the service of the Word. Always and essentially, however, it is an area between these two limits, an area ruled over by Jesus Christ present in Word and Sacrament where *everything* that is done

be it ever so human, must be done in a way that is proper to its real subject, who is Jesus Christ the Word.

It will no doubt be contended at this point that the foregoing is a far too narrow interpretation of the meaning of Christian worship and that it reveals an ignorance of or a deliberate disregard for the great tradition of worship which lay behind Christianity in the Temple at Jerusalem, and on which the early Church undoubtedly drew. It may therefore be helpful to counter this criticism before proceeding further. Consider first the New Testament evidence of Jesus' own attitude to the worship of the Temple; it will be found to confirm the validity of what we have been pleased to identify as our Lord's minimal requirements. Take, for example, the incident commonly referred to as "the Cleansing of the Temple." Ernst Lohmeyer, in his book *Lord of the Temple*, makes a fascinating study of this incident and draws attention to these points among others. He emphasises that it was really the Temple and not Jerusalem as such that was the objective of our Lord's triumphal journey. Approaching Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, that is to say from the north, and arriving at the Temple, one does not in fact touch the city centre, for the Temple was in a northern suburb of the city. Therefore Jesus' triumphal entry is a triumphal entry into the Temple. It is the Temple which Jesus enters as Lord and King. Then He cleanses the Temple, as we say; but it is not the Temple proper that He cleanses, it is the Court of the Gentiles. The Temple proper with its reeking altars and its vast tradition of worship He leaves severely alone and completely disregards. His royal denunciation, addressed, it would seem, to no one in particular, is of the profanation of the Court of the Gentiles: "My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer but ye have made it a den of thieves." The Court of the Gentiles—one of the marvels of the ancient world for its size—was built to enshrine a holy, God-given hope which runs through the pure worship-tradition and prophecy of Israel, that one day all nations will come to worship God on Mount Zion. By using the place for the Temple trade (and of course it was with the permission of the Temple authorities that it was so used; Annas the high priest's father-in-law owned one of the stalls selling doves) by using the place for all this sordid business they had profaned that age-long hope, and our Lord used miracle to reassert it. It must have been miracle, this action of the God-man, which, apparently without the aid of the disciples, could clear this tremendous area

of sheep, doves, hucksters, and the whole sanctimonious monopoly, and not, it would seem, provoke the intervention of the Temple police or attract the attention of the Roman garrison in the nearby Antonia fort. And this, perhaps the most dramatic of all our Lord's miracles, was performed in order to prepare the place of prayer for all nations, because the priestly authorities—thieves He called them—had robbed the peoples of the world of their promised inheritance in this place.

Shall we call this the dominical institution of the ecumenical movement ; shall we even see it as the dominical preparation for the ecumenical liturgy (the place of prayer for all nations) ? It was through the portico there in the Court of the Jews and in the Court of the priests that prayer was said and worship was offered ! But our Lord was not interested. He could so easily have used His kingly power and authority to reform the Temple worship. There was in all probability the beginnings of a demand for reform in the cells of piety in Galilee to which people like Simeon and Anna are thought to have belonged ; devout people "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Why did He not enter into the conflict with the ecclesiastical laws and usages of the Temple authorities at this time if He really wanted to restore the Temple as a place of prayer for all nations ? Surely the answer is because the cultus, as the Temple had developed it, was at an end. Add to this princely disregard of the Temple worship proper the complementary and fiercely mounting tension between Himself and the priests, a tension which eventually resulted in their hounding Him to the Cross, and one sees unmistakeable evidence of our Lord's attitude. The cult, as Jewish cult, is at an end. The rending of the veil of the Temple coinciding with Jesus' death is the final declaration of it. With Jesus striding into the Temple as Lord there comes the time of eschatological preparedness, the beginning of a new time. And what for cult ? "This do This is My blood which is shed for many." It means—"for all nations."

I am suggesting that there was a definite break in the tradition of worship. Of course, as we know, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the freedom which He grants, many elements of Temple worship were taken over into the early Church. There was, nevertheless, a definite break with the whole spirit and tradition of the Temple (traces of which bedevil much liturgical thinking today), with all ideas of cultic impurity, all priestcraft, all suggestions

of spectating, approaching, embellishing, enlarging in order to make the acceptable sacrifice. "The sacrifices simply go out like a fire that is not tended," ⁽¹⁾ the Temple falls, the altars disappear. I am suggesting there was in worship a new dimension (eschatology) and a new concern (obedience): the true worshipper shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. The minimal and quite new and definite cultic requirements are as indicated: preaching, celebrating the Lord's Supper, and the gathering together in Christ's name to do these things.

Consider now a philological argument. Is it not indicative of the utter novelty of this Christian worship that the New Testament found itself faced with a complete bankruptcy of language in the liturgical vocabulary of Judaism and Hellenism to cover it? Peter Brunner⁽²⁾ has made an interesting study of this question and has shown that the New Testament uses neither *λατρεία* (Heb. ix. 16) nor *θρησκεία* (Acts xxvi. 5) nor *σεβασμα* (Acts xvii. 23, xviii. 13) nor even *λειτουργία* (Heb. ix. 21, where it is used for "service" in the Old Testament sense and the fulfilment of it by Christ Himself), forsakes cultic vocabulary altogether and uses terms from everyday life *συναγεσθαι* (Matt. xviii. 20), (1 Cor. v. 4) or *ἐν ἐκκλησία συνερχεσθαι*, (1 Cor. xi. 18, 20). These are the terms which cover most adequately what we mean today by worship or the "Service". It is significant that for a long period in the Church the Eucharist was actually called the Synaxis, until the word gradually gave way to the cultic term "liturgy." The only other phrase used by the New Testament for what we would call worship or the "Service" is "the breaking of bread" (Acts ii. 42, 46), again not a cultic word but a household word.

It would be to labour the point to describe in any detail how the practice of the Early Church and the character of its life confirm the validity of what we have called our Lord's minimal requirements. One important contribution to the subject, however, is worthy of mention. It has a very real bearing on the original tradition of worship in which we stand. In his book *Early Christian Worship*, Professor Cullmann rejects outright the commonly held distinction between two kinds of gathering in the early Church; the gathering for the proclamation of the word on the one hand, and the gathering for the Lord's Supper on the other. Scholars of liturgy have been in the habit of accepting this distinction and

⁽¹⁾ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple*, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ Peter Brunner: *Zum Lehre vom Gottesdienst in Leiturgia* Lieferung 2.

assuming that the fusion of the two was a later development. Even the apparently unified service described by Justin in his *Apology*, written about the year 150, has always been viewed as a later development. The two types of service were always seen as roughly corresponding to synagogue and Temple, the gathering for proclamation having a particular affinity with the synagogue service of the Word. Cullmann, while making a distinction between missionary preaching and the preaching which is part of the community's worship, claims that there is no real justification for the assumption that within this latter framework there was ever preaching without the Lord's Supper ; or the Supper without preaching. He quotes, of course, Acts ii. 20, which tells us that the first Christians " continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers," and he points out that even on one occasion when the sermon was inordinately long-lasting, till midnight indeed, nevertheless at the close the bread was broken (Acts xx. 7). What has happened by the time of Justin, Cullmann claims, is that what was originally essentially a unity has become still a unity, but a unity of two parts. The free expressions of the Spirit have disappeared and the first part now approximates more closely to the Jewish synagogue service, and the Lord's Supper has also ceased to be a proper meal and tends more and more to be a ritual meal. The movement towards this position is, however, from an essential unity of Word *and* Sacrament at every gathering of the community for a proper diet of worship.

I realize that a considerable part of this paper has been devoted to the attempt to identify our Lord's standards, if we may so call them, and the New Testament tradition. This has been done deliberately, because while through the valuable work of the General Assembly's Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion, and such bodies as the Church Service Society, churchmen are gradually becoming more familiar with our contemporary standards as they are found in the *Book of Common Order*, one suspects that there does not exist uniformly throughout the Church any very clear understanding of what it is that makes the *Book of Common Order* an acceptable standard. In the ecumenical debate it is those ultimate standards which are the essential starting point. We should be poor champions indeed if we could commend something of our liturgical practice to the attention of a future united Church only on the basis of traditionalism, or because, in our experience, our

people had "liked it." On that basis there would undoubtedly be a party in favour of giving the baby a flower at Baptism !

"Go ye and teach all nations", "This do"; never have commands been obeyed as these have been. How have we obeyed them in the Church of Scotland, and is there any aspect of our obedience which we might commend to the attention of the ecumenical movement or in the first instance, say, to the Anglicans ? And in the spacious area of eschatological freedom between the outer limits of the minimal requirements on the one hand and the prohibition of everything which does not in some way serve these requirements, have we, in the Spirit, found or developed any form or emphasis which we feel might help to edify the Church ecumenical or in the first instance the Church of England ?

Let us look very briefly first at the record of our obedience. "Tell it not in York, publish it not in the streets of Canterbury" that there have been periods in our history when our obedience was so uninspired as to provoke this comment from Archbishop Spottiswoode, writing from London to King James in 1615 : "there is lacking in the Church of Scotland a form of Divine Service ; and the framing of public prayers is left to the ministers themselves." It would be sad that it should any longer be remembered against us that for the whole of the seventeenth century and indeed, until 1843, our liturgical life in Scotland is a blank. The truth is there were happier days and are now happier days and a more enlightened and imaginative interpretation of our obedience and a more appropriate use of the eschatological freedom in which we stand.

In the Reformation period and for eighty years after its appearance in 1562 John Knox's *Book of Common Order* was in use in Scotland, so that, while the Archbishop's report to the King was undoubtedly the shape of things to come, it is felt to have been something of an exaggeration in 1615. This *Book of Common Order* is derived directly from Calvin's Genevan Service Book, *La forme des Prieres* (the Eucharistic rite of which is based on the Hagenau Missal) and shows evidence also of the influence of the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1552. The composition of the rite in Knox's book is unmistakably catholic, and while the Liturgy of the Word in his Communion service might seem to us now to be rather restricted, it must be remembered that its separate parts were of considerable length. It consisted only of Confession of sin, prayer for pardon, psalm in metre, prayer for illumination,

Scripture lection and sermon. It was often preceded, however, by a Reader's Service consisting of psalms and lections from the Old and New Testaments. More significant, in terms of obedience, is the fact that the norm of public worship was as it is today, with certain modifications, the Eucharist. When Communion was not celebrated the essential parts of the Eucharist, except those pertaining to the consecration and communion itself, were included. In other words the authentic tradition of Scotland from the time of the Reformation is a service with the prayers of Confession and Supplication before the Sermon; Offering, Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession, Lord's Prayer and Creed after the Sermon, with Psalms. This tradition is reflected, with modifications, in the *Book of Common Order*, 1940, more faithfully perhaps in the Alternative Order for the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion which comes after the four variations on the first and normative service; and most faithfully in the Shorter Order, where both Thanksgiving and Intercession come after the Sermon. The position of the Creed has been altered to bring it into closer association with the Gospel, and in other ways the rite has been enriched. It was in the *Directory of Public Worship*, reflecting in this detail the practice of the English Independents, that the "long prayer" was first placed before the Sermon. The General Assembly of our Church, however, would not have it and prescribed that the old custom in Scotland should not be abandoned. The old custom did in fact disappear and much later a tendency to assimilate our service to Anglican Morning Prayers made its recovery more difficult.

How, then, have we obeyed? We have essentially a eucharistic norm, catholic in form, for public worship, and an intention, at least an *intention* to have weekly Communion. Extraneous factors have always militated against this, and the "intention" has never been carried out. Is it perhaps indicative of the sincerity of the intention, however, that the *Scots Confession* (1560), in writing of the Church's worship, deemed it necessary to speak only of the Sacraments? The *Directory of Public Worship* recommends that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper be celebrated frequently.

How have we obeyed? Our obedience of the command to preach has been reflected in a full, rich and adequate Liturgy of the Word; in a strong emphasis on proclamation and exposition, of course, but also in an imaginative use of one part at least of that area of freedom and spiritual and liturgical adventure where we are free to serve the Word in

a variety of ways—we boast a strong tradition of congregational singing, and even if it is held down in ignorance in many parts of the Church at the moment, nevertheless we have the possibility here, the form and tradition of an exciting and wonderful aspect of the service of the Word. I am thinking of the Colossians text which reads roughly : “ Let the Christ Word be amongst you richly in your singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs so that you actually preach to one another as you sing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

How have we obeyed ? We have obeyed in a strong emphasis running through the *Scots Confession* and through writers like Robert Bruce, and really everywhere in our Church—a strong emphasis on *public* worship, *all* the people gathered together.

We might offer these things to the fulness of any united Church of the future as our humble understanding of obedience. We might point to our *epiclesis*, the restraint of our music, our basically utilitarian approach to church architecture, our tradition of both free and set prayers ; we should certainly be prepared to be asked to sacrifice our clerical monopoly of prayer. And yet whatever we offered or accepted it would have to be with that humility and diffidence born of the realization that worship truly belongs to the realm of strange intangible things, for worship is event.

There is a pompous dictum, which no one ever takes too seriously, that theology is conceived in Germany, and corrected in America. It may well be that we can still make a contribution of this kind to the study of liturgics in the light of the Ecumenical Movement ; that our tradition and practice, in so far as it reflects simple and faithful obedience to the Lord of the Church, really has something to offer to the fulness of the Church Catholic. But if we are in any sense correct about the basicness of obedience, and if we speak ecumenically (and convincingly) on this wise, say, to the Anglicans, then it is difficult to see how they can continue to say to us, liturgically (at the Lord's Table)—“ Nay ”.

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