

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

THE STUDY OF THE LITURGIES - ANCIENT and MODERN - OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS GIVEN TO THE ANNUAL
MEETING OF THE CHURCH SERVICE SOCIETY IN EDINBURGH
ON 20th MAY 1982

Members of the Society will have observed the blank space on the front cover of the first issue of our new newsletter and I am grateful for that blank space as a launching pad for the presidential address.

A blank space of this kind might fall into a sophisticated category of advertising in quality newspapers. Space, perhaps a whole page, is purchased at vast cost and then left empty except for the name of the advertisers neatly printed in a corner at the bottom, or else the page is completely blank and the advertisers with quintessential modesty explain in a brief sentence on the opposite page that their product is of such widely acknowledged quality that they can safely dispense with the vulgarity of text or tableau to commend it. That is not the nature of our particular blank.

Again our blank could have Shakespearean overtones, "And what's her history" the Duke asks in Twelfth Night to which Viola replies, "A blank my Lord.

She never told her love,
But let her concealment, like a worm i' the bud
Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought;
And with a green and yellow melancholy,
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief."

There will be some of our members, I am sure, who will feel this is a very apt account of the story of our Society in recent years, a blank - a Society that has not told its love, has not sufficiently articulated its aims and objects; a Society whose work has been worthy and diligent but done with such modesty as would pass for concealment in this extrovert age of ours; a Society that with exquisite sensivity and a green and yellow melancholy has deplored the mediocrity of so much modern liturgy and para-liturgical material and done little more; a Society which has sat like patience on a monument smiling at grief devoutly waiting for the consolation of Israel. It is worth recalling that Simeon and Anna and the Galilean society to which they belonged, the group originally described as just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, were not content just to wait but are credited by some New Testament

scholars with some of the finest devotional material in the Church's possession. I am thinking of the view that holds that from that devout little community in Galilee there may in fact have emanated one or more, perhaps all of the three best-known New Testament canticles - the Magnificat, the Benedictus and the Nunc dimittis.

Now you will say I make too much of this Shakespearian motif and of course you are right. The whole story of the Society in recent years, were I to tell it properly, would not be a blank but perhaps I have made a point. Certainly there is no intention to leave that space a blank and indeed you know very well that it is a clever editorial dodge to enlist the help of all of us in thinking out what would be an appropriate new design or emblem for the Society, an emblem that would be indicative of our primary interest in worship.

The question immediately arises; what is wrong with the present emblem and in the end the Society may decide there is not very much wrong with it. I think however we shall almost certainly lay quietly aside the latin motto which reads "*Juxta laudabilem Ecclesiae Scotiae Reformatae formam et ritum*". We shall do so not, I hope, because we are self-conscious about latin but because first it is just slightly unfortunate that the provenance of this particular motto is Canterbury and because second it is not now the aim of the Society, if indeed it ever was, to find a "form and rite", singular, however praiseworthy for the church of Scotland, which is what the motto seems to suggest. The latin words are in fact Archbishop Edmund Grindal's and the reference is to that Archbishop's approval of the form of ordination of John Morrison, Parish Minister of Bara in East Lothian, who in 1582, was licensed to minister within the Province of Canterbury, since he had been "ordained to the holy ministry by the imposition of hands, according to the laudable form and rite of the Reformed Church of Scotland.

Whatever we do about emblems or motifs to fill our blank at this significant point in our history the Society will, I trust, have no hesitation in adhering to its original object, defined as "the study of the liturgies - ancient and modern - of the Christian Church, with a view to the preparation and ultimate publication of certain forms of prayer for public worship, and services for the administration of the sacraments, the celebration of marriage, the burial of the dead etc." It is from that original definition that I take the title for this address, and although I have abbreviated the title considerably it is not to be thought that I intend to speak of the study of the liturgies - ancient and modern - of the Christian Church in a vacuum. Our study must still be with a view to the preparation of liturgical material for use in services today and for publication, in the new circumstances and certainly in the first instance, in this booklet which we are calling the Church Service Society Record and which, it is hoped, will appear three times in the year.

But if the title of this address repeats the original definition of the Society's aim, the emphasis today is quite different. 115 years ago the task was to persuade ministers and lay persons in the Church of Scotland that liturgy had a value at all: the extraordinary fact is that 115 years ago printed prayers and a measure of order in worship were regarded as innovations and were highly suspect, so lamentably had the Church of Scotland lost the sense of its own catholicity and so blindly had it strayed from the Reformation and the fiercest critics and detractors of the Book of Common Order, so far from spurning liturgy, actually produce a rival book, heavily subsidised to promote sales. So it is not necessary to argue the case for a liturgy. Neither do I imagine it is necessary to plead in this Society for the study of modern liturgies. Few of us can have been untouched by the ecumenical fervour of these last decades and efforts of bodies like the Joint Liturgical Group and I.C.E.T. have all helped to break down the denominational barriers and introduce most of us to the contemporary liturgies of other churches. It is the study of the ancient liturgies which I believe has been neglected by the Society in recent years and it is to that subject I should now like to direct your attention. A Profile of President Mitterrand that appeared in the Times the other day describes how the Elysee palace is for him simply an office and a place of entertainment: he does not live there but goes home every evening to his home in the rue de Bievre: he was quoted as remarking frequently to his friends, "A man loses contact reality if he is not surrounded by his books". The liturgies are this Society's books par excellence, liturgies ancient and modern and not the one without the other.

Without the liturgies and in particular without the ancient liturgies we lose contact with reality. I am speaking, of course, of reality in the full Christian sense of the word and not in the pragmatic sense in which it so dominates our days and constricts our vision. The full flowering of Christian reality requires not just an ecumenism among the Churches spread throughout the earth today, it requires what Father George Florovsky calls an ecumenism in time. Because we believe there was a new reality inaugurated on the day of Pentecost long ago, a new communion of men and women with the living Christ and through Christ with God and with one another, therefore the whole Christian story and the whole Christian reality and the whole Christian unity embrace Chrysostom, Cranmer and the entire company of diligent designers of the patterns of the Church's prayer. The prayer activity of the Church, however disparate the contributions of Churches and ages may appear to be, is not fully appreciated unless everything from Didache and Apostolic Constitutions to Euchologion, Book of Common Order and every minister's files of parish prayers is seen belonging together in a concatenation and coherence that is unique because energised by the same Holy

Spirit, designed to be caught up into the worship of the same Lord, age after age importuning the same God with the same anamnesis, the same memory of that God and of what he has done. We are guilty of a terrible sloth or spiritual pride if we suppose that we have nothing to learn from an encounter with the Church of former ages or that learning ever stops or can be exhausted. And when our critics accuse us of dilettante eclecticism, of nostalgia, or of escapism from the reality of the present into an age of supposed liturgical innocence we are in poor shape if we do not know how to answer them. In St. Giles on Sunday we sang from the 65th paraphrase.

"Hark how the adoring hosts above
With songs surround the throne!
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues;
But all their hearts are one."

Is it conceivable that the great company of the redeemed who achieve this mighty eschatological unison have not produced some rich harmonies in the separate parts they sang here below and is not part of the preparation and training for that unison to listen to one another?

But now let me come down a key. It may well occur to you to ask what can we expect to learn more from the ancient liturgies: has it not all been learned and absorbed and exploited in the course of the history of this Society for example and by some of its distinguished members. The simple answer is No. Research and scholarship in the last few decades have greatly increased our understanding of the ancient liturgies and there is much to be learned by all of us and much to be carried over into the preparation of liturgies for today and tomorrow.

Let me make it quite clear what I have in mind. It is not to be supposed that ancient liturgies have been discovered which wait only to be translated imaginatively out of their original language to be ready to use in our prayers next Sunday. But there are perceptions to be discovered, there are searchings, certitudes, illuminations, there are motifs and sequences of thought to be found and there are liturgical forms there to be imitated again, the neglect of which has produced loosely structured and self-consciously written prayer to abound in recent times, prayer which constantly runs the risk of turning praise into preaching, an interior monologue or speech which though purporting to be addressed to God cannot resist the temptation to get a message across to the people.

Before proceeding to give examples of some of these perceptions, motifs and sequences which I have just mentioned let me make just one more point of a more general nature and it is this, that our study of the ancient liturgies will be

more valuable not only because it takes us back to a classical period, not only because the further we push back in time the nearer we come to the Church's unique experience in the apostolic age, but also because in searching for the origins of early Christian liturgy, certainly in searching for the origins of eucharistic prayer, we find ourselves studying Jewish models of prayer, the product of a people probably unique in the world in the quality of their religious apprehension.

So what do we find in the ancient liturgies that is going to be of such value for our preparation of liturgical material today? Take chapters nine and ten of the Didache, which have been the subject of much scholarly research in recent years. It is not possible here to go into the detail of the argument which still surrounds this whole area of study nor to do more than mention some of the magisterial contributions made to an important liturgical week of the Institut Saint-Serge back in 1965 and published in 1970 as volumes 46 and 47 of *Lex Orandi* under the title 'Eucharisties d'Orient et d'Occident'. Dr. Willi Rordorf argued there that in Didache chapter 10 where we find prayers said after a Christian community meal and before eucharist we have a primitive praefatio or eucharistic prayer: he has further shown that this prayer is step by step a christianising of the Jewish blessings or benedictions spoken as grace after meals.

Whatever the merits of Rordorf's case there is no doubt that he brings to the attention of even the most casual student basic patterns of prayer - benediction - thanksgiving - supplication and the prefiguring of all later liturgies. But the study of Didache chapter 10 yields its true value for us not only in identifying similarities between eucharist and the Jewish grace Birkat ha-Mazon, but also in identifying deliberate differences, conscious adaptation of the Jewish original to give expression to distinctively Christian emphases. It is these that are so significant.

Father Louis Ligier in the same publication examines later liturgies and demonstrates how even the most complex have developed from the same sort of original blend as mentioned above: he describes it as a mixture of celebration and anamnesis, the one sometimes differentiated from the other, sometimes not; sometimes separated by the Sanctus, sometimes not; the one sometimes more amply expressed than the other but nearly always both motifs present. Perhaps only in Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition and in one other eucharistic prayer is the note of celebration of God almost absent and only anamnesis of the mystery of salvation expressed. The Liturgy of the Twelve Apostles, John Chrysostom, Addai and Mari, St. Mark all of these have the two themes indissolubly linked-celebration of God in praise and blessing and anamnesis of his mighty

acts. In even the most complex eucharistic prayers there are still the two dominant elements. And if the permanence of these elements underlines the strength of the influence and the discipline of the Jewish original the independent and wholly Christian development of these elements, obvious even in such a curious feature as the dropping of the definitive introductory formula "blessed art thou", reveals the freedom of the Spirit in which the early Church carried on its liturgical work. There is much for us to learn here about eucharistic prayer!

Let us turn our attention to another feature of ancient prayer neglected today, rarely heard - pure adoration. Listen to this only slightly adapted from Apostolic Constitutions,

"O God all-powerful, true and incomparable,
present in all things, yet limited by none,
untouched by place,
unaged by time,
unhurried by the years,
undeceived by words,
not subject to birth,
nor in need of protection:
thou art beyond all change
thou art by nature immutable,
living in light that none can approach
invisible, yet thou makest thyself known to men
and thou art found by all who seek thee with their whole heart
thou art the God of Israel
and of all who hope in Christ,
thou art God and we adore thee,"

One does not hear this kind of prayer; I suppose in our slick liturgies we literally have no time for it. One thinks of the familiar lines,

"What is this life, if full of care,
We have to time to stand and stare?"

What is worship, if full of care,

We have no time to adore the name and the nature of God?

Let us not forget that it was our Lord who taught us that God's name should be hallowed: and how is it to be hallowed? I have seen it seriously suggested that we punctuate the Lord's prayer wrongly, that there should not be a full stop after 'Hallowed by thy name'; that in fact the three phrases 'Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done' should be thought of as belonging together - they certainly do in Greek where they almost rhyme! The phrase 'in

earth as it is in heaven' would then modify all three verbs and what our Lord taught us to pray would be in effect that God's name should be hallowed in heaven; likewise that God's kingdom should come on earth as it has come in heaven and that God's will should be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Certainly the eschatological dimension appears in the Lord's prayer later on, "Give us today the bread of tomorrow" and the 'time of trial' and so on and there seems no reason why it could not be a characteristic of the whole prayer. This may seem an elaborate argument to bring forward in order to persuade this Society to put its mind to the preparation of prayers of adoration but if it is correct exegesis then it is a mighty powerful argument. It would mean patently that the very first thing our Lord taught us to pray for was that men would hallow God's name and that they would not weary of the task but go on untiringly, rivalling the angels and the saints in light. But should the straight dominical direction to do this be questionable on exegetical grounds, there is the voice of the psalmist that cannot be ignored. A Church which regularly begins eucharistic prayer with the words "Vere dignum et justum est", it is verily meet right and our bounden duty cannot fail to hear in these words an echo of psalm 92, "It is good to give thanks unto the Lord" and that same Church will not surely overlook the fact that the psalmist adds specifically, "and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High". Psalm 33 begins similarly "Rejoice in the Lord O ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright" and also Psalm 147 "Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God: for it is pleasant: and praise is comely". The Church which prays, "Vere dignum et justum est", must surely interpret that as not just thanksgiving for his mighty works but also pure adoration of what he is, of his glory, his transcendence, his attributes, his nature which is love: "God true and incomparable."

Is it that we are afraid of resolving what would be termed technically the apophatism of adoration? Are we in other words afraid that with Nestorius we shall want to say, "Thou art infinite, inexpressible, invisible, not perceptible" or with Serapion "Thou art ineffable, not to be comprehended by any created being". Are we afraid that we shall get stuck with our negatives and bogged down down in mind games, unable to get out? But of course the ancient liturgies wrestled with those problems and of course they found solutions. One of the solutions, found in the Liturgy of St. James and in the Anaphora of Cyril of Jerusalem deserves, I believe, our closest attention. What in effect they do is to avoid the difficulties of apophatic theology and revel instead in the theme of God the creator of the universe, whose creatures, all of them, in heaven and on earth, beings visible and invisible, all of them without exception must praise their maker the strength of that imperative is greater than the strength of that imperative is greater than the strength of all the worrying negatives and so with all the lyricism they can command these liturgies line up the chorus

of all creation, the heaven of heavens, the sun the moon, the legions of the stars, earth and sea and all that is in them, Jerusalem above and the spirits of just men made perfect: all of which finds a fitting climax in the Sanctus.

This brings me to my last complaint and challenge to the Society. It seems to me extraordinary that in our day, in what we are pleased to call the space age, we should so neglect, as we do, the theme of God and his Christ in creation, whether we treat of it as above in pure adoration or whether we treat of it as a mighty work - creation, to be set alongside salvation. My complaint is that either way we neglect it. *Lex orandi lex credendi*: What then do we believe? Well what are the biblical thought-patterns?

Colossians I 16 "For by Christ were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers: all things were created by him and for him".

Proverbs chapter VIII "When God prepared the heavens. I (Wisdom) was there when he established the clouds above then I was by him, as one brought up with him and my delights were with the sons of men."

St. John I. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made by him. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." Biblical thought patterns that inspired some of the most moving prayers of the ancient liturgies and we neglect them!

I put it to you that Science has taught us to analyse nature and made us self-conscious about adoring the God of nature. We have come to regard nature as merely a backcloth to life, or else the playground of the poet or else the laboratory of the scientist. Until the tendency was reversed by recent space research you could almost say that science, with its apparent ability to analyse and explain everything, had trivialised nature. And in our Christian self-consciousness about nature we have related it only very vaguely and in the most tentative way to God and then mostly for the benefit of the children. Hardly at all except in sentimental comparisons have people related nature to Jesus Christ and our current environmental problems are the judgment we have brought upon our selves. We have dropped Rogationtide from our diaries and Harvest Thanksgiving Festivals are increasingly children's occasions. We have demoted St. Francis of Assisi with his expansive delight in the comradeship of men and all created things and consigned him to picture books for tiny tots. We have

domesticated nature as we have domesticated cats as a plaything for children and we have done ourselves a grave disservice. "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge" writes T. S. Eliot. And I can never forget the moving lines written by a Christian poet of a bygone age, relating his Christian faith most beautifully even to his domestic cat.

"For I will consider my cat, Geoffrey," wrote Christopher Smart

"For I will consider my cat Geoffrey.

For he is the servant of the living God, duly and daily serving him.

For at the first glance of the glory of God in the east he worships
in his way.

For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with eloquent
quickness

For he knows that God is his saviour.

For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.

For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.

For I am possessed of a cat surpassing in beauty, from whom
I take occasion to bless Almighty God".

British Society, beginning to be industrialised in 1760, put
Christopher Smart into Bedlam.

If all these thought patterns about Christ and the cosmos belonged to a byway of theology I perhaps would not complain so loudly. If we did not say in the Creed, 'I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth' and if science had not told so much in our day about the marvel of the making we might be excused. But science has extended our horizon, we have seen the other side of the moon, we have learned to conceive of infinity of space and eternities of light years. We are without excuse. Above all we cannot miss the beautiful logic of this Christian cosmology. The ancient liturgies did not miss it but time and again faithfully reflected it in the balance of their thanksgiving for creation as for salvation.

For it is not logical to suppose that the divine versatility that we see exhibited in the plan of creation will be employed in the plan of salvation. Then the scale of God's design of love for man and for his society is to be gauged from the scale of the fabulous universe which science is now bringing (with a new-found humility, let me acknowledge) - which science is now bringing to our awareness. That is the lesson for me in the prologue to John's gospel - the Word of God is the agent of creation and we have seen the Word of God among us in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, the agent of salvation, full of grace and truth. Paul similarly speaks to the Colossians, in the text I quoted earlier, about all things being created by Christ and for Christ and then in the same breath he says "and he is the head of the body the Church".

The Committee on Public Worship in preparing eucharistic prayers for the Book of Common Order (1979) were disinclined to add anything to the creation passage in the first order and so, as before, and for many a long day before, it reads: "It is verily meet right and our bounden duty that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to thee, O holy Lord, Father Almighty, everlasting God: who didst create the heavens and the earth and all that is therein: who didst make man in thine own image and whose tender mercies are over all thy works." - only that. The third order is even more telegraphic, "In the beginning you brought the universe into being from nothing. You created life by your Spirit. Only in the second order was even an echo of the poetry of space permitted and then mainly in an appendix.

I challenge this Society. Let us all go back to our books and to reality: let us cultivate an ecumenism in time and listen to what our brothers and sisters in Christ of previous ages have to teach us: above all let us who are uniquely informed by scientists and inspired by poets, let us set ourselves to write the prayers of adoration and thanksgiving that are appropriate to the scale of the divine enterprise as we now comprehend it, prayers that really can be prayed through Jesus Christ who is the Lord of the cosmos as well as the Lord of the Church, prayers which in fulness of grace, please God, and in the optimism of the Christian gospel glow with the radiance of all the galaxies. When we begin to do that then I have no doubt as a Society we shall find both the way to fill our blank and the way to fulfil our role in the Church in this land.

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