

slowly, with feeling

One with Christ



1. Jesus said, 'I am the Way.'
Master, show me where I must go.
You in me, I in you,
We shall walk as one.

2. Jesus said, 'I am the Truth.'
Master, teach me what to believe.
You in me, I in you,
We shall think as one.

3. Jesus said, 'I am the Life.'
Master, make me ever your own,
You in me, I in you,
We shall live as one.

Words and music :
William G. Neill

I HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE LORD

One of the most misunderstood liturgical practices is that in which the minister, prior to administering the holy communion to the elders, himself partakes in both kinds. 'Look at him helping himself ! All the rest of us are served by our neighbours. Why should it be any different for him?' This is a very typical reaction, not from the pew alone, but from some fellow-ministers.

But the minister is not serving himself. He, like everyone else present, is served by Christ. It is a sound principle in spiritual matters that we should never seek to pass on to others what we have not first of all received ourselves. If the blind may not lead the blind, what have the unfed to offer one another?

But how do we avoid the widespread misunderstanding which always seems to arise when the minister himself partakes first? One possible way would be to paraphrase from the opening of the words of institution, so that, in distributing the elements, the minister says 'I have received from the Lord what I also pass on to you: the body of Christ which is broken for you... and I have received from the Lord what I also pass on to you: this cup which is the new covenant in the blood of Christ' In this way the minister is understood to be the first among equals, and not a priestly functionary who regards himself as occupying a higher plane than his fellows.

W G N

NEW WORSHIP IN OLD WAYS

If congregations can be invited to rediscover worship in new patterns of corporate behaviour, is it out of the question to suggest also that fresh vitality might be put into the old patterns of worship by the introduction of new styles of congregational praise? Organists have long complained that services consist of a "hymn sandwich", congregational singings, all to the same pattern, separated by utterances by the minister.

This note suggests that, if congregations were prepared to praise God in a variety of musical forms, traditional worship could be given a new relevance to contemporary life.

The Scottish Federation of Organists, at a recent conference, was addressed by Dr. Allan Wicks, organist of Canterbury Cathedral. Dr. Wicks' theme was that people go to church with minimal expectations, and that it was up to the organist to see that they did not leave without encountering true religion. The implication that very little may be expected of the clergy was presumably directed, in Dr Wicks' own mind, to those who serve English cathedrals, but his audience would have liked him to go on a tour of the presbyteries. In particular, Dr Wicks suggested that hymns would make a greater impression if they were used more sparingly, and he described as an example a Good Friday service, sung completely without organ, which included one congregational utterance only, "When I survey" being sung at the end with immense effect.

This was all very well; but no parish church should wish to copy Cathedral solemnities for Good Friday. The relevance of this example to ordinary churches seemed to me to lie in the pin-pointing of the tremendous impact that certain hymns can make on even an uncommitted worshipper. Hymns which are universally accepted as standing on the highest level of poetic fervour, scriptural truth and personal commitment are not numerous, but if every service included one of them there would always be a reason for going to church in an expectant mood. And once the principle were established of singing at least one unassailable masterpiece every Sunday, perhaps greater freedom could be allowed to choose other pieces in an experimental, contemporary, light-weight vein, and to build out of them a coherent progression of praise.

Such reflections on Dr. Wicks' address were running in my mind when I happened to attend a service planned on these principles and carried through with skill and verve. This was in the Catholic Cathedral at Arundel. Twenty-five years ago, I suppose, this was a church where the congregation stood in respectful silence while the choir sang the mass. Now cantor, choir and congregation were vying with each other to carry forward the action of the service. The items in which the congregation joined included liturgical texts (E.G. Gloria in excelsis and Sanctus), a psalm in the Gelineau style, an acclamation before the gospel and two hymns. Leaving on one side their expectations from the ministry of the word and the sacrament of the altar, this seemed to be a congregation which came to church expecting to bear their part in the action of the eucharist by their singing; and the varied styles of the music and the leadership of the cantor ensured that the people did not flag in the good work. Other churches would not wish to copy the service as a whole - for instance the choir sang a motet at the point where I looked for a big hymn and St George's Edinburgh would have been in place - but the employment of a cantor and the use of non-hymn styles of music are devices which could be taken up by a congregation of any denomination where there is a desire to revitalise worship.

It might be easier in many congregations to revive the office of cantor than to maintain a choir. Some ministers might find it possible also to serve as a cantor, or in some places the organist might take both roles. A service in which the cantor rises without announcement to lead the praise at the appropriate points maintains a steady momentum, whereas the formal giving out of hymns and first lines may prevent it from getting off the ground. A cantor's help is also invaluable for singing prose chants. The fundamental reason for recommending that psalms and other scripture passages should be sung in prose - preferably in modern translation - is that the metrical psalms have lost most of the cutting edge that they no doubt had at the reformation. After centuries of use and generations of assimilation with hymns they have become conventional, middle-class and complacent. The Old Hundredth, for instance, is sung by (preferably large) congregations to congratulate each other on being in church; but it was written as a clarion call to the heathen outside to come into the temple of the true God. And if you sing it in the Gelineau style with a refrain such as "Be joyful all the earth in God your maker" the uncompromising voice of the Hebrew poet comes through. Or compare CH 3, no. 393 with the Gelineau version of psalm 126 quoted in Liturgical Review May 1981 page 6.

An acclamation before reading the gospel offers a second opportunity to sing from the scriptures in prose. This may consist of almost any suitable text sung by cantor or choir and framed by Alleluias sung by the congregation. Several settings, based on simple musical formulas, are possible. Or texts such as "Blessed is he that cometh.." or "This is a faithful saying.." may be set to melodies easily learned by a congregation. This would be a revival in shorter and simpler form of the congregational anthems sung in some churches a few generations ago. Ch 3 includes at no. 61 a modern setting of the Trisagion which may be used in this way. But indeed the acclamation could be in metre; in effect a one-verse hymn. There are one-verse hymns in CH3, and there are several hymns of which the first verse alone might be sung before the gospel (e.g. 299/300, 301, 302).

Singing in prose may also include short liturgical texts. The use of the Kenneth Leighton settings in CH 3 need not be confined to communion services, and indeed how are they to be learned if they are not sung Sunday by Sunday? They are certainly intended for congregational use, though a cantor would be a great help and the original version of the Sanctus includes a descant for choir. They are, however, settings of texts from the English prayer book of 1662. If this is felt to be an objection, there are innumerable settings of the now standardised modern versions of these texts which may be tackled by a congregation. But the Leighton is better music.

The scheme I am outlining involves more items of singing than many congregations are used to, but some of them are much shorter. The order of service without communion might include - Invitatory (metrical psalm), Kyries as part of opening prayer, prose psalm after O.T., acclamation before gospel, "THE Hymn" after the sermon, Sanctus in the course of long prayer, "going home hymn" or "ditty" - seven singings. Considered simply as a sequence of praise, such a

service would keep the congregation on its toes from beginning to end, and send them out of church with a message to the world,

A new classification of hymns is fundamental to the scheme. The climax of each service will be one of the small repertory of "real hymns" as defined above. What is recognised as a "real hymn" will depend to some extent on personal taste and local tradition. As unquestionable examples I would suggest "O Love how deep..." (CH 223 and "Thou hidden love of God ... " (CH 96). The tune by itself cannot make a hymn, yet Thomas Wilson's melody has greatly helped "I greet thee who my sure Redeemer art" to take a top place on its first appearance, and "At the name of Jesus" (CH 300) slips back into a lower class if it is not sung to Vaughan Williams' King's Weston (EH 368). Many hymns which fail to make the highest grade still have an important place, especially at the beginning and end of a service. Some of them can be distinguished as belonging to the valuable class of "ditties". (For this insight I am indebted to Canon Roland Walls.) Ditties, like so many things in the shops, have inbuilt obsolescence, their versification or their melody may be trivial. But they may speak about contemporary concerns in more direct language than "real hymns". The "new" hymnbooks consist of ditties for the most part; they are particularly useful at the end of a service because they can strike the proper skailing note - "Look out, world! here come some Christians". And if their language is a little childish, this may be a point at which parents and children are singing together after being separated during the service. But nothing jars worse than an obsolete ditty, and all our hymnbooks contain too many of them. Some are obvious survivors from a past age, such as "Yield not to temptation" (CH 482). But nothing is more dangerously stale than the goods which were fresh only a little while ago. Is "God of grace and God of glory" still valid (CH 88) or has it already turned into a prayer for bromide?

So at last I come to the real issues, which are those presented by Professor Forrester in his lecture on the Liberation of Worship (Liturgical Review, May 1981). If the experience of Christian worship is to become liberating, for the stranger as well as for the committed; if it is to break out from its present domesticated and tamed condition; if the "extraordinary passivity of the people in worship" is to be transformed into fervent activity - then an outward vehicle for such a reformation might be a re-ordering of congregational praise on the lines I have suggested. I hope no-one will be afraid of it because the best practice of the Roman Church does it already. The essence of the matter is finding the Word of God in the mouths of God's people. The world calls out for justice, liberty and peace, but it has to learn that God is in command of His creation and that His will to give every good thing to His children is mysteriously bound up with a Redeemer who died and rose again. These have always been the themes of church praise, but the singers' throats are choked with irrelevancies. In fresh settings the ancient message of the psalms may again become a new song unto the Lord; second rate hymns may be quietly dropped; new church ditties may be admitted for so long as they keep a cutting edge; and if the various items are aptly put together - but it is not for us to command the Holy Spirit, who blesses our music, as He does word and sacrament, as He wills.

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