

FAMILY SERVICE FOR PLOUGH SUNDAY

The name of "Plough Sunday" is not generally found within the Church's Liturgical Calendar, although there is a Sunday designated as such within the Church of England's list of festival dates, namely the 2nd Sunday in January - the 1st after Epiphany.

Within an urban or industrial congregation a service for such a Sunday might not be altogether relevant, but within a rural setting, not only is it appropriate and entirely relevant, it is wholly meaningful to the lives of the people and their part within the Church and parish where the agricultural and the ecclesial have formed a vital link of the centuries.

Having such a service now firmly established within worship of our congregations over the past five or six years, I know that each looks forward to it with keen interest as an important and significant expression of their faith and worship linked to their life and daily work.

To select an appropriate Sunday in the year on which to hold "Plough Sunday" required a fair amount of thought and organisation on the part of the minister, especially if it is not to clash with other special Sundays and, more particularly, those pertaining to the Christian Year. I have found that the first Sunday in the month, with one or two exceptions, is an excellent choice for a Family Service; and that the first Sunday in February fits in well for a Plough Sunday celebration. While, indeed much ploughing and sowing have already been carried out in late autumn, nevertheless, ploughing continues through the winter. A further reason for the choice of February is that such a family service fills a gap, as it were, between New Year and Easter. At any rate, it works and works very well: certainly this is the impression received from the response one gets from the congregations.

A Plough Sunday service seeks to be a kind of Harvest Thanksgiving in reverse, if I might put it that way. At the start of the year we ask God's blessing on the land, upon the produce harvested and upon the lives of the people engaged in this work. It attempts also to remember most aspects of farming life, including stock-rearing and food production.

A Family Service such as this necessarily involves quite a bit of participation on the part of the people. Many a minister will know

how daunting a task it can be to go round folk asking them to read a lesson or do this or that - and how disappointing a response he can end up with. The task can be doubly difficult (or trebly so) in a linkage, especially when you choose to have the service in different churches on the same day! A fair amount of advanced planning is therefore necessary: it is no use rushing around to persuade people on the Friday night before the service is due to take place. Once the draft Order of Service has been finalised, it can be used year after year, varying the choice of participants, although I have found the same people, in several cases, eager and willing to take part regularly. The Order of Service which I use requires a total of nine members of the congregation to take part, the minister doing everything else! Viz:

A Reader to lead the initial Responses

Four people to read the Lessons

Four people to bring in the various items pertaining to the land and farming.

The various items that are brought forward and laid at the front of the church, normally in front of the Communion Table, can easily be provided by those taking part. A tractorman can usually get hold of part of the plough - the share or mould: a farmer or shepherd will bring his shepherd's crook: someone else brings in some grain (if possible see if they can get their hands on an old seed sowing basket): and, finally, a housewife is persuaded to bring in her mixing bowl and spoon to represent the making of bread and food generally from the land.

The Service as a whole, can, of course, be adapted and altered in any way that seems most suitable to minister and congregation. It is also adaptable for including the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Within a linkage, the question of timing is of vital importance. The whole Service is timed to finish within 50 - 55 minutes at the outset.

Needless to say, the preparation necessitates duplicated copies of the Order of Service for the congregation to follow and respond, where necessary. To those who wish to try it out, I wish them all success. While the preparation beforehand can and does involve much effort and occasionally frustrating hours with a duplicator, everything appears to fall into place on the day: and, we always trust, provides a fitting and reverent offering to God within the worship and witness of the congregation.

FAMILY SERVICE for PLOUGH SUNDAY

With Sacrament of Holy Baptism

ORDER OF SERVICE

Welcome

Intimations

Call to Worship

All creatures of our God and King
(omitting vv 2&3)

Call to Prayer (all standing)

Prayers of Approach, Confession & Petition
with Collect for the Day, saying together 'AMEN'

HYMN 30

Reader: The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.
CONGREGATION: THE WORLD AND THOSE WHO DWELL THEREIN.

Reader: The Lord is good to everyone.
CONGREGATION: AND HIS TENDER CARE RESTS ON ALL HIS CREATURES.

Reader: While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
Summer and winter, day and night shall never cease.
CONGREGATION: THE LORD IS FAITHFUL IN HIS PROMISES
AND GOOD IN ALL HE HAS DONE.

Reader: It is good to give thanks to the Lord.
CONGREGATION: FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.

HYMN 619

By the rutted roads we follow

During the last verse of this hymn, the plough mould is
carried in and laid before the Communion Table.

1st Lesson: Psalm 65:9-13 (N.E.B.) Abundant growth through God's providence.

The Shepherd's crook is brought in.

2nd Lesson: John 10: 1-9 (N.E.B.) Growth through proper husbandry and care.

Some grain is brought in - the fruits of the soil.
Mathew 13:1-9 (N.E.B.) From bad growth to good.

3rd Lesson:

A mixing bowl and spoon are brought in - bread for man.

4th Lesson: John 6:1-13 (N.E.B.) Increasing growth through the power of
Christ.

Address

HYMN 620

We plough the fields and scatter

During the last verse of this hymn, those representing various
members of the farming community - the Tractorman, the
Herdsman, the Sower, the Housewife - come and stand at the
front to face the congregation. The congregation's responses
are given four times, as below.

After the hymn, the congregation remains standing until
the Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession.

The Tractorman:

Before the soil can be worked or seed sown or
crops grown, we must plough the land.
WE ASK GOD'S BLESSING ON THIS WORK.

CONGREGATION:

The Herdsman:

Flocks and herds need constant care, winter and
summer, spring and autumn.
WE ASK GOD'S BLESSING ON THIS WORK.

CONGREGATION:

The Sower:

Grain and seed need fair weather and careful
tending to give good crops.

CONGREGATION:

WE ASK GOD'S BLESSING ON THIS WORK.

The Housewife:

Homes and families need bread to eat and food to live on.
God provides food for our daily needs.

CONGREGATION:

He is the centre of our family life.....
WE ASK GOD'S BLESSING ON OUR HOMES AND FAMILIES.

The Minister:

May God be with you in your going out and your coming in,
and prosper you abundantly.

(The congregation are asked to be seated.)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The Offering

Prayer of Dedication and Self-Offering

Baptismal Hymn 549

Our children, Lord, in faith and prayer

SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

HYMN 617

(Psalm 145 11
vv 9,10,15,16)

Good unto all men is the Lord

DISMISSALS

The Minister:

Go out into God's world with joy;
Live by his will;
Handle His treasures and know that He has given them to you.

CONGREGATION:

WE WILL PLAY OUR PART IN GOD'S CREATION,
USING HIS GIFTS RESPONSIBLY;
TAKING CARE TO HAND ON TO OTHERS AN EARTH FIT FOR THE
LIFE OF MAN.

The Minister:

The Blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit, be with you all.
May he give light to guide you, courage to support you,
and love to unite you, now and evermore.

CONGREGATION:

AMEN.

K D F WALKER
The Parishes of
Athelstaneford, Whitekirk
and Tynninghame

OUR HYMN TUNES, their Choice and Performance, by Donald Webster;
Saint Andrew Press, 250pp, £7.50.

This book, by the organist of Palmerston Place Church, Edinburgh, contains material taken from a doctoral dissertation on contemporary hymnody submitted to Pacific Western University, California. It is claimed to be the first book which has been devoted entirely to the choice and performance of hymns, and is described in a foreword by the Director of the Royal School of Church Music as "an up to the minute resource book" for "an intensely absorbing subject". Except in passing the book does not discuss the words of hymns.

Dr Webster has written the book "in the hope that it may be instrumental in raising the standard of hymn singing from its present generally low level to one which is a vital and enriching experience for all participants". He thinks that the way forward is not to accept the new standards of musical behaviour in church represented by the "pop" or "light music" movement, but to prune traditional hymnody mercilessly where it fails to meet today's needs, while welcoming tunes of musicianly standard in a contemporary idiom. Many of the new hymn words, he points out, are in unusual metres and have elicited the composition of tunes of their own. The book gives the appearance of systematic exposition, with chapter headings such as "The case for reform", "Good and bad tunes - an analysis", and "Some hymn book reviews", but Dr Webster's style is discursive and some of his most stimulating (or provocative) points are to be found in digressions or foot-notes. An original feature, which takes up nearly half the book, is the set of indexes of tunes which Dr Webster regards as meritorious, under the headings of "main", "supplementary", "contemporary" and "hymns as anthems". (There is also a short section on Roman Catholic hymnody). These indexes would be an invaluable quarry for an organist looking for good new material to teach his choir or congregation.

But the main index illustrates how unwieldy the problem of good church music is. For instance, Dr Webster lists 88 tunes in common metre. Accepting that his selection is broadly sound, how many CM tunes out of the 88 can be sung by any one congregation? Elsewhere Dr Webster quotes an observation by Canon Noel Boston that "the average number of tunes a congregation can be expected to sing without practice is 30". (He was

an expert on barrel-organs, and may have been influenced by what they can play.) Between Canon Boston's 30 tunes and the many hundreds in Dr Webster's indexes, where is the happy mean? The larger the repertory, the less frequent the repetition. Hymns also recur less frequently where informal items (as in Hymns for a Day), choir pieces or prose psalms are used. Infrequent repetition may not matter to an elderly congregation, who may treat as familiar a tune they have not heard for a year or two, but if the young hear different tunes every time they go to church, month after month, they will never form an affection for any of them. In some congregations, therefore, the optimum repertory of tunes may be quite small.

In his chapter of "hymn book reviews" Dr Webster comments on some 20 books. The section on CHJ includes observations on a long list of individual hymns which are not calculated to make friends for the author. (Your reviewer strongly agrees with some of them, and rejects others with equal vehemence.) Dr Webster jalouses, probably correctly, that certain tunes written by public school masters have proved too redolent of the English establishment to take root in the Church of Scotland, but conversely he himself is not impressed by the austere beauty of Presbyterian favourites such as Leuchars and the plain version of Commandments. The fact is that would-be reformers may agree in their general aims, yet disagree violently as regards individual hymns.

Dr Webster's suggestions regarding the performance of hymns admit of less difference of opinion. The question is rather whether one has the patience and the dedication to persist with them. He offers valuable advice on congregational hymn practices, variety in hymn singing, the appropriate pitch, hymns as anthems and the use of the organ and piano. He advocates the use of other instruments with the organ, and shows how simple free parts may be devised for young players. He finds nothing improper in the guitar, but observes that, as played, it is often monotonous. He insists that the organ does not accompany congregational hymns, but leads them, though it must do so coaxingly, without bullying. In particular, the organist must think about tempo very carefully before playing over. Dr Webster might have said more, I believe, about how to lead a congregation in a tune they have never heard before. This art is often needed where the organist is determined to introduce new tunes and the congregation is equally set on staying away from rehearsals.

In his preface Dr Webster quotes a remark by Arthur Hutchings that "very rarely do hymns fire the imagination by the words alone". This is too sweeping, even for Hymns A & M, but "fire the imagination" is the key to the whole business. Dr Webster takes it up elsewhere: "we require from our tunes simplicity, fervour and imagination". It may be rather that people require to be taught through the music that imagination is a vital factor in religion. Only a fraction of the hymns in Dr Webster's comprehensive indexes will fire the imagination of any particular congregation, but those that do have that power should be identified and put into the short leet for frequent repetition. I wish Dr Webster had attempted a list of high-flyers. As he did not, here is a sample from the Church Hymnary of tunes of great imaginative power. Some of them everyone knows; the others are also eminently singable even though two of them were unaccountably not carried over from RCH to CH3.

Angels' Song 45, Ave virgo virginum 269, Down Ampney 115, Dunfermline 101, Grafton 373, Hyfrydol 381, King's Weston 283, Lasst uns erfreuen 30, Leoni 358, Love unknown 95, Luther's Hymn 14, Nun danket 368, Old 104th, Pange lingua 256, Passion Chorale 253, St Botolph 674, Stonelaw 86, Vater unser 96, Veni Sancte Spiritus, Warrington 413.

A congregation which regularly sang tunes such as these up to the number of Canon Boston's 30 could claim to have given effect already to the reform Dr Webster wants to see.

R.E.C.J.

