

E D I T O R I A L

Most of us are busy people. It's ironic that the busiest are those who are asked to take on yet more !

The Editor is DESPERATE for material for "The Record". I have quite a file of "Worship material" which will keep you, the readership, supplied for some time. What I am lacking are more substantial articles relating to our various concerns.

A year ago I wrote to quite a number of members of The Church Service Society inviting them to submit articles relating to their work or place of work. Only one has promised material - yet many to whom I wrote were "in the news" one way or another - newspapers, television, radio : either because of something they were doing, or because of some development, re-development or discovery about their churches, or the area around their buildings.

Too many lights being hid under bushels ! Even a paragraph would help - not just as a "space-filler", but more importantly, might spark someone else off on a new line of thought.

And now to some "meat".....

E X T E M P O R E ? o r " S E T " F O R M S ?

Words are the most obvious use of material in public worship. Indeed where, as with Christians, worship is a social act, they are indispensable. If a number of human souls are to embark upon a common act there must be communication between them to ensure that the act is really shared. Public worship does not mean the simultaneous prayer of a number of people who are united only in the sense that they are spatially near one another. Public worship is a common offering involving heart, mind and will, so that words are necessary to ensure this.

But what sort of words ? There are some (an increasing number in this decade) who say that as we must worship "in spirit", the actual words must be entirely and directly prompted by the Holy Spirit; that we must place ourselves in His hands and utter only such words as there and then He puts into our hearts. To use pre-arranged formulae is to forsake that reliance upon the Holy Spirit which must be the guiding principle. To "pray with the Spirit" is to eliminate the human factors of thought and aspiration, and to let the Holy Spirit utter what He will through us.

But the Holy Spirit does not work by suppressing or by-passing all that

is human, and replacing it by what is purely divine. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is not a process by which God saves us from thinking and supplies thoughts ready-made. The mode of His operation is rather to quicken and stimulate our thoughts, intentions, and desires at their best, and to lead them on from these further than we, unaided, could go; to make the best of such material as we can offer, and to transform it. To worship God in words which are the fruit of thought and deliberation cannot be less spiritual than to address Him without reflection.

Can we do our best if we always leave it to the last moment ?

However excellent extempore prayer can be, there is a reason why it cannot provide the staple diet for public worship. Common prayer includes a collective effort of each to make the words of the minister his own. It needs attentiveness : the words of the service must be appropriated by each worshipper so that he or she can contribute through them his/her own quota of devotion to the common act. When the officiant prays extempore nobody knows what is coming next. Each must listen carefully, but before he/she is able to digest and make an adequate offering of what is heard, the minister has passed on to another phrase, thus throwing the thoughts of the attentive worshipper into confusion. It is often all but impossible to keep pace with the one who offers the extempore prayer. The result frequently is that the individual worshipper merely listens to the prayer of the minister without entering into more than the very general sense of it. Indeed worshippers have been seen on such occasions sitting back in their pews with folded arms, apparently engaged in assessing the minister's efforts !

It is important that every congregation realises that it is not worshipping in isolation from the rest of the Church, whether on earth or in heaven, and also that it worships in and through a Being other than itself, Christ, the Head of the Church. Public worship must always be understood as a joining in something always going on, both throughout the Church on earth and eternally (as Gregory Dix in "The Shape of the Liturgy" suggested in that marvellous section: "Was ever another command so obeyed....."). A given liturgy is a constant reminder of that fact.

A fixed liturgy, gloriously indifferent to my worries and notions, not hedged about with the limitations of life in my parish or the decade in which I live, is going to do for me just what needs doing. It will confront me with eternal truths and place me on the Mount of Transfiguration. I shall realise that my thoughts are not God's thoughts nor His ways mine; and then I may begin with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven to worship and adore. Having

done this, I can look at the threat of nuclear war, conflict in the Middle East or Northern Ireland or Unemployment or World Hunger in a more balanced perspective. In theory this could no doubt be achieved under the spiritual guidance of a minister engaged in extempore prayer, but he or she would have to be of the calibre of Augustine, Cranmer or Macleod of Fuinary. A fixed liturgy with a long and steady growth behind it, slowly evolved through the centuries, with its roots in early antiquity, not too strongly emphasising the special concerns of any one period of the history of the Church, is the ideal material for public worship.

In its present task of revising "The Book of Common Order" should the Panel on Worship not be taking on-board the possibility that the fruit of its labours might be in the hands of ALL the people, and not just in the hands of ministers ?

Other denominations have done it fully :
cf "The Methodist Service Book". (1975)

Others, at least in part:
cf "New Church Praise" (with its Eucharistic order at the back for use in the United Reformed Church").

It might re-inforce the notion that the Church of Scotland is the national Church in more than just government or parish boundaries. One of the glories of the Church of England USED to be that no matter what church building a worshipper entered, he or she could be confident of a familiar liturgy, whether it was Matins, Evensong, the Eucharist, the Burial of the Dead, or the Solemnisation of Holy Matrimony. There were variations in how the liturgy was presented - but that's quite another matter !

T.G.L.

A Prayer of Intercession

We beg you, Lord, to help and defend us.

Deliver the oppressed, pity the insignificant, raise the fallen, show yourself to the needy, heal the sick, bring back those of your people who have gone astray, feed the hungry, lift up the weak, take off the prisoners' chains.

May every nation come to know that you alone are God, that Jesus Christ is your Child, that we are your people, the sheep that you pasture.

Clement of Rome

(His letter to the Christian community at Corinth [AD 96] contains the oldest Christian prayer outside Scripture. It embraces all needs. The emotion behind it is controlled, sober, foreshadowing the Roman liturgy.)