

L I T U R G I C A L F O R M A T I O N T O D A Y

Editorial Introduction

by

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The unprecedented liturgical development of recent decades has brought many blessings to the worshipping Church of the twentieth century. It has also taught us many lessons and revealed a number of problems. Some of these problems are related to our culture and to the complexities of human relationships and communication. Others are due to the sheer pace and extensiveness of these developments. Still others are due to differing expectations and beliefs about the principles of public worship.

The process of reconsidering and revising our forms of worship has had far-reaching effects. While this is especially true of Anglican and Roman Catholic liturgies, which have been subjected to the most detailed reappraisal and reformulation, almost every church has to a greater or lesser extent overhauled its services and rites. What has been so striking is not simply the willingness to engage in liturgical revision and development, but also the unprecedented resources available for this purpose: scholarly knowledge; new developments in the theology and spirituality of worship; new social, psychological and linguistic insights; new understanding of the relevance of space, movement, design, sound and symbolism in effective worship; the development of musical resources and so on.

It is, perhaps, both the strength and the weakness of these developments that they have been largely the work of commissions or committees of specialists in various fields. The result has been the publication of attractive and carefully compiled service books, thoroughly researched and with much to commend them. It is one thing, however, to publish new rites: it is another matter to implement them effectively and meaningfully. To put the matter rather crudely (and not entirely accurately), when the new books have gone to press, the specialists pack their brief-cases and go home. It is the local people who now take over - the priest or minister, the musicians, the readers, and above all the people. It is they who use the new forms and make them effective and fruitful: success or failure is largely in their hands.

The implementation of new liturgical forms is a complex and subtle business. To substitute the new for the old in a peremptory fashion is to invite alienation and disaffection. To impose or precipitate new forms without

preparation, without explanation and understanding, and without consultation and co-operation is not a recipe for successful and fruitful liturgical development. To act without sensitivity to people's feelings and loyalties, their prior understanding, their faith, their spirituality, and their needs is pastorally and humanly indefensible. It is a cardinal principle of counselling and communication today that one should start with the individual "as and where (s)he is", and build up from there on a basis of co-operative, interactional development. This principle should surely commend itself to the pastoral liturgist. Respect for persons, their autonomy, their intelligence, their claims, and their very status as Christians, baptised and redeemed, is of great importance.

How does one bring about co-operation, promote understanding, and make worship more meaningful by the use of the new forms? What understanding of motivation and communication is called for? This is not a matter simply of "preparing" the congregation for new forms considered desirable by their pastors. The pastors themselves need to be adequately informed and prepared. What, therefore, should be included in ministerial training in theological colleges with regard to worship and liturgy? What about post-ordination training in liturgy and in-service courses for clergy who did not study liturgy in depth at college? Is there a need for liturgical institutes and centres offering a variety of courses for clergy, choir directors, organists, those who exercise other liturgical ministries, and for lay people?

The Society for Liturgical Study was founded in 1978 at the suggestion of The late Revd Dr Geoffrey Cuming by The Revd Canon Donald Gray to encourage liturgical study and research and to be a forum for those engaged in these fields or in pastoral liturgy. Some, but not all, of the issues outlined above were discussed by the Society at its 1986 Conference held at St John's College, Nottingham, under the general title "Liturgical Formation". It is a significant title under present circumstances, even though the term "formation" is open to misunderstanding. The speakers were concerned to spell out the concept as a constructive and non-threatening term. They discussed in turn the spiritual basis of liturgical formation, the need for liturgical formation today, its development in the local church, and the teaching of liturgy as part of training for Christian ministry. The speakers stimulated much thought on these issues, and in the hope that these papers will prove of interest to all who are concerned with pastoral liturgy they are now offered to a wider audience.

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