

THE TEACHING OF LITURGY

within an

ECUMENICAL TRAINING

for

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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One day I went to our College chapel to prepare for the eucharist, and there, to my surprise, sitting in front of me on the vestment chest was a delightful little model of a parish church. It was beautifully made from porch to belfry. A closer look revealed a church of the Victorian era: a quick glance would have made any vicar apprehensive about bills for heating and maintenance. Beside the church porch was inscribed "St Agatha's". St Agatha's had been assembled by Jonathan, who had just been tackling a question in the liturgy essay list. Most of the essay titles were conventional: the familiar stuff of liturgy courses, perambulating through the syllabus from baptisms to weddings to funerals. But there at the end of the list was my question on St Agatha's, sticking out like a sore thumb. I had been searching for a way to confront our students with parish realities, with no escape route for those who might prefer recondite liturgical texts. While I drafted my question from an Anglican perspective, the issues it raises are common to us all.

Perhaps my St Agatha's sprang out of the "typical" parish church used so effectively in the book "Anglican Worship Today" (Collins Liturgical Publications, 1980) though my church was quite definitely located in Cheam - not so very far away from no. 3 Railway Cuttings, and with no ancient history to its credit. It was the kind of parish church left stranded - if not high and dry - by the swift passage of the twentieth century. The vicar had just retired after an incumbency of twenty years, of which the last ten had been a struggle to prolong the glories of former times. Inevitably, he finally ran out of steam. St Agatha's had a fairly large congregation for these days - even for a parish of some 13,000 - about 35 at the 8 o'clock Holy Communion,

50 at Matins at 11.00, and 24 at Sung Evensong - 12 in the choir and 12 in the congregation. The 1662 Book of Common Prayer was used at these services with the exception of Matins, where the vicar had introduced the ASB order of service. The Parochial Church Council had not raised objections to this innovation, though it was generally unpopular. (After all, it was the vicar's business, it was said, to look after the worship.) The mid-Victorian building was chiefly noted for a rather sickly-looking Good Shepherd carrying a lamb in the East Window (it was remarkably visible from every aspect of the church.) Preservation and repair of the building was the anxiety uppermost at meetings of the PCC. Nothing much happened on the ecumenical front, though a united service at the local Methodist Church in Christian Unity Week had become almost an ancient tradition. The nearest RC Church was about half a mile beyond the parish boundary. Canon O'Sullivan was parish priest at St Boniface's, where there were several Masses on a Sunday and large numbers of communicants drawn from a wide area. He was full of good will, but had always maintained he was far too busy to get involved in ecumenical activities apart from the annual service. A number of families of West Indian origin were beginning to settle the other side of the main road which roughly bisected St Agatha's parish, but only one family came to church from that area. The streets there felt rather down-at-heel compared to the relatively plush surrounds of St Agatha's. Some of these families were involved in an independent charismatic house church. At the furthest bounds of the parish was a street with some immigrant families from Pakistan. There was a much larger settlement of Muslims in the neighbouring parish of St Cyprian. There had been talk of adapting a disused evangelical chapel just inside St Agatha's parish to serve as a mosque; protests from a residents' association had so far held back the granting of planning permission.

My question concluded : you have just been appointed as the new incumbent of St Agatha's. Write a letter to your old College friend Bill, setting out your hopes for the worship at St Agatha's and how you see the role of worship in the total life of the local church. By all means invent persons and data consonant with the given outline of the question.

St Agatha's has become quite a popular question with Westcott students, and not simply, I believe, because it can be written out of the top of one's head without recourse to books ! It is also because it requires and encourages a kind of thinking which is only implicit in the other liturgy questions : how am I going to approach worship in the context of pastoral ministry ? What is the relationship between worship and mission ? What "message" does the architecture of a church building, its internal order and furnishing, the frequency and nature of its use convey to the Christian community and those around ? What can you do with a church building no

longer suitable for your contemporary needs and perhaps wrongly located to provide a community focus for your area ? How do you work at worship with other members of a local church community ? How is worship involved in building ecumenical bridges between church communities ? How might a rather reserved largely white congregation make families of West Indian origin feel more welcome and develop some relations with an independent Christian house church ? What about communities of other faiths and the building of links with them ? Whom do you approach to develop good relations; how do you answer requests to use your church premises or property for the worship of other faiths ?

I also wished to see if there were ordinands of authoritarian bent who were just waiting for a congregation on which to implant their ideas ! There were in fact some who revealed an attitude which might be expressed as follows: "I know best what is needed for the worship of my congregation; all I need now is a strategy for introducing my new pattern of worship and getting it past the PCC." Such an attitude needs to be challenged, particularly at a time when many laypeople are feeling deprived of Prayer Book services.

St Agatha's leads me on to consider more systematically the various aims of liturgy teaching in preparation for ministry. I will outline these aims under five heads, concerned with the following aspects of liturgy:

1. Sharing in worship, and understanding worship.
2. Knowledge of liturgical history.
3. Understanding denominational traditions of worship.
4. Worship and sociology.
5. Worship and collaborative ministry.

I will refer frequently to our experience in the Cambridge Federation of Theological Colleges which has provided the background to my thinking.

1. Sharing in worship and understanding worship: In our teaching we must take the worship experience of our students seriously, and not proceed with a course as if each student is a liturgical tabula rasa. Certainly within our Federation student body in Cambridge there is a great variety of background and experience. Our four theological colleges, Ridley Hall, Wesley House, Westcott House and Westminster College represent three denominational traditions, Anglican, Methodist and URC, and our ordinands share together in what is largely a common programme of training, leading to the Cambridge

Certificate in Theology (recognised by our three denominations for ordination requirements.) A number of our students also sit for the Cambridge University BA in Theology, the tripos, which means that for two of their three years with us their studies are largely within the tutorial system of the University. The focus of our common life in the Federation is our weekly Federation Eucharist on a Tuesday evening, at which the Colleges take turns to preside. Our denominations have granted us permission for inter-communion within the context of the Federation and for the acceptance of one another's ministries at the Eucharist. I am no lover of the term "inter-communion" which seems to contain an inner contradiction; I prefer to think of there being communion within the Federation, a communion which is itself the earnest of future unity and fellowship. For this very reason, when a student receives communion from a minister of another denomination within the Federation this should never simply be a falling in with other people's expectations; unless that communion bears with it a commitment to strive in one's future ministry for the fellowship of the churches and the unity of the Church according to the will of Christ, it is empty of its proper significance. The Federation Eucharist is held on Tuesday evenings; on Sundays students are usually in local churches to which they are attached to share in their life and work. The Sunday worship in the local churches seems the right place to be for ordinands. Worship in the local church reminds us of the goal of our training. Returning to that variety of worship experience which our students bring with them, we try to provide occasions when this experience may be shared within an ecumenical group with other students. An impression may then be gained of the variety and the richness which exists within the Christian tradition as a whole. Some ordinands enter training with very fixed ideas about what is right or wrong in worship, drawn from their own growth within a strong but fairly narrow tradition; it can be right to challenge such fixed assumptions, and friendships crossing ecumenical boundaries are one of the best contexts in which this challenge may arise.

Within the Federation, liturgy is one of the subjects for which a common course is provided. In some ways this is quite an achievement, given the contrasting liturgical practices and emphases of our denominations. We have recently adjusted our course, to allow space within it for each denomination to find time for specific instruction of its own ordinands in its liturgical tradition and texts. For the more general part of the course, lectures and seminars are held in common, and the teaching input is a shared exercise by four staff members, one representing each of our Colleges. We have grown relaxed enough in this exercise for one session to be kicked off by a URC minister giving his not wholly complimentary impressions of Anglican worship, while I have endeavoured to be equally

charitable about the Free Church tradition. One of our local Roman Catholic clergy addresses us concerning the changes in parish life and in outlook brought about by liturgical revision. Sometimes we are lucky enough to have an Orthodox student with us, who will tell us, emphatically, how things liturgical have always been done since the time of the apostles.

Within Cambridge University, liturgy is not at present examined within the structure of the Theology degree, and so tripos graduates join the Federation worship course in their final year. They take a rather accelerated form of the course, and in addition are encouraged to attend lectures offered in the University by our colleague the Revd Bryan Spinks which cover the development of the Eucharistic Prayer and the history of the Liturgical Movement.

Sharing worship together and discussing our experience of worship in ecumenical seminars is an important part of our training for ministry. Ordinands are encouraged to reflect on the nature of worship itself - on how we may attempt to define it, and on the extraordinary range of human experience within which men and women have encountered God. Our federation course is described in our handbook as "the Worship Course", not "the Liturgy Course", and one of my URC colleagues staunchly defends this. He claims that to many students "liturgy" smacks immediately of the remote and academic, particularly to students coming into ministerial training from the workaday world. The term "liturgy" has to be 'sold' with some degree of tact to such students, for whom even the term "theology" may at first be as distasteful as it is to journalists. One of the primary aims of our course, whatever we term it, must be to approach worship with a sense of the mystery of God and the wonder of an adoration which demands the offering of all that we are and all that we can be. St Paul appealed to his fellow Christians to present God with their very selves as their spiritual service (Romans 12:1). We need to approach the liturgies of our churches as particular expressions of our total self-offering in response to the love of Christ. Liturgy will then be truly life-giving.

Room must also be made for an awareness of the worship of other faiths, and the challenge with which this presents us, particularly in our increasingly multi-cultural society. In a recent visit to Newcastle, students from our four Colleges visited a Hindu temple, a Sikh Gurdwara, and a mosque, and in each place encountered the worship and the theological challenge of a believing community. Such an experience and the discussions which followed made us realise that theological differences among ourselves are no longer on denominational grounds.

2. Knowledge of liturgical history: Ordinands need to have some sense of perspective for their own liturgical ministry, and this is provided by a

knowledge of major developments in the worship of the Church through the centuries. Yet I believe we must distinguish between the rather small number of ordinands who maybe drawn to specialised liturgical study, and those who look to a course in worship or liturgy for some fairly basic and practical guidance. They may need some convincing that historical material is in fact relevant to their requirements. I therefore have to go to some pains to interest my students in liturgical history, and have found that carefully selected texts, like the journal of the pilgrim Egeria, often succeed where other approaches fail.

I believe the main aim in teaching the historical liturgy to ordinands must be to illuminate the present, and to call to mind the wonderful resources of the Christian tradition. Too often, I suspect, we fail in our teaching to take a fairly ruthless look at our aims and objectives. I know from experience how easy it is to dwell on matters which have become of particular interest to me - but are of little immediate relevance to others. In teaching liturgy with the pastoral ministry in view, there is much to be said for the kind of method which might be termed "archaeological". We have to begin from where we are and what we have, whether it is in baptism or the eucharist or another liturgical celebration, and dig back into the past to account for the shape of the present. FD Maurice used to say that he was "only a digger". I think this is an honourable epithet for a liturgist.

3. Denominational traditions: Few people feel particularly at ease in worshipping within a wide variety of church traditions. We all know where we are at home, and the kind of worship which is like a door through which we can pass to a communion with God and neighbour. Ordinands have a deep need to become well-established and secure in their own liturgical tradition. Often they cannot take the step of appreciating something rather foreign to their experience of worship until they have found their own roots.

We need to take care within ecumenical theological education that we do not confuse ecumenism with an abandonment of the riches of our own traditions. We have found in the Cambridge Federation that our joint Eucharist is most appreciated when it truly expresses the ethos and tradition of one of the denominations participating; unease and dissatisfaction is felt if we are all trying to be terribly polite and somehow to imitate one another's liturgical manners. We are learning something, perhaps, about accepting one another in Christ, and beginning to understand that there is a Christian unity which will not come about through great efforts for uniformity. And so I believe that the knowledge of our own liturgical tradition is the prelude to the exploration of other traditions, and it is in that spirit that we try to teach liturgy. There are several

opportunities for experiencing one another's worship within the Federation structure, including interchange of some students between Colleges for periods of about two weeks in a term. Some students take the opportunity of being on attachment while they are in Cambridge to a church of another denomination - I can think of Westcott students who have been attached to Roman Catholic, URC and Methodist churches for one year of their training, and others have been attached to the Society of Friends. Within the planning of the pastoral studies courses in the Federation, attention is now being given to increasing the number of ecumenical placements of a month or more's residence within a Christian community elsewhere in the country. In the case of local ecumenical projects, students can be sent jointly by two or more of our Colleges. We are preparing for a ministry in which we can no longer ignore one another's existence, and where co-operation will certainly extend well beyond the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

4. Worship and sociology: Rather than dwelling at length on this inexhaustible field of study, I will simply mention points which may be neglected in teaching liturgy. Sometimes we give little attention to the need to match worship with the cultural and social situation of a local community. That is not to say that worship should simply reflect the outlook of the society where it is offered; far from it - often it is a challenge to the norms of society. It may be that challenge, yet it also needs to be the authentic offering of the people in terms which are real to them. There is a fairly pervasive "middle-classness" about much Anglican worship, from the hymns which are sung to the embroidered kneelers and the church bookstall at the back. I suspect that nowadays something of the same is true of the Free Churches - though they may draw a line at the kneelers ! A tradition with so much emphasis on the Word of God may have a cut-off effect in the age of television and the popular press - unless the word can be presented far more visually than is usually one's experience.

While our churches are very conscious of the needs of urban priority areas, we need to ask ourselves whether we have a worship which can be their authentic offering. Many ordinands are very conscious of this problem, and I often hear complaints that our church has exchanged a 17th century prayer book for one which is impossible for ordinary people to follow. Members of Westcott staff are often criticised for their fondness for quoting poetry in Compline addresses, and the more radical assail our impeccable good taste in chapel and at the liturgy. "What good is it all going to be to me at Kirkby or Wolverhampton ?" we are asked. Furthermore, it is fashionable in Cambridge not to know the answer to anything, while working-class people like to know where they stand, and the curate to have a ready and down-to-earth response to their questions.

And so this makes us aware of the tension between worshipping in Cambridge as a community of theological students, mostly from fairly privileged backgrounds, and the worship that may be appropriate on a run-down council estate interwoven with stinking lift-shafts covered with graffiti. My only answer to this is that we have to come to God as we are, with the poverty of our riches if necessary; it is no use aping the norms of a society elsewhere. If poetry and music are important to most people in our community, then offer them we must. A transformation will take place once we arrive in Brixton or elsewhere, though we may be surprised to find how important poetry and music may be to the lives of people there as well. Wherever we are, we have to find out which kind of worship is authentic, and what makes the feel of our worship phoney or false. We all have to shed something of our personal likes and dislikes as we move around in ministry - compared to the shipwrecking of St Paul, it's a small penalty for being a disciple. We also have to beware of identifying our particular cultural inheritance with the Gospel. The main-line churches are now becoming more aware of the alienation of the black population in Britain, and the need to build bridges with black independent churches in a spirit of humility.

5. Preparation for collaborative ministry: There is now a large measure of agreement between Protestant and Catholic theologians concerning the vocation of the laity in the life of the Church. The worship of the local church is the expression of the collaborative ministries of the participants, ordained and lay. Greater lay participation in worship has often been matched by a fuller vision of the local church's ministry - a vision in which every member is called to offer his or her particular gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Ordination training has been rather slow to catch up with the spirit of collaborative ministry. At consultative meetings on ministerial training theological colleges are criticised for producing a number of priests and ministers who are well on the way to becoming autocrats. Despite seminars which consider diverse models of ministry, and examine the vital role of the minister in enabling the ministry of the laity, some ordinands are still too much concerned with 'their vocation' and 'their ministry'. For Anglican ordinands the long-awaited goal of ministry is often that increasingly rare situation of the traditional incumbent in charge of one church and one congregation. Team ministry can be seen as second-best simply because it involves the necessity of working with other people. And yet, as we know, the best of team ministries are a liberating experience for those involved - no longer is one expected to be omniscient and omnipresent. And so a collaborative ideal of ministry draws strength not only from the ministry of the laity, but also from the great gift of having colleagues with whom

to share the joys and sorrows of ministry, in whom to delight, and with whom to get frustrated.

A collaborative ministry will also use as never before the gifts of both women and men. Having women with us in training for ministry has made us more sensitive to the ways in which they can be marginalised in the life of the church. We know the pain of many Anglican women in training as their church wrestles with the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood. Further, we have regular arguments about "sexist" or "exclusive" language in the liturgy, and have made some modest adjustments in response to various criticisms. Through the insights shared by our women ordinands, we become more aware of ways in which the language of hymn and prayer often have an exclusively masculine emphasis.

If ordination training is to prepare men and women for a collaborative style of ministry, then study and learning must have a strong collaborative element. Here the competitive individualism fostered by the Cambridge University system needs to be balanced within the life of the Cambridge Federation. Thus, the Federation course encourages learning through group-work and seminars. Since groups and seminars normally include members of all four Houses, ordinands become accustomed to the views of those of other denominations. In individual colleges, students take part in the planning of worship, which involves them in working together with others. At Westcott, there is opportunity to share in the planning of Holy Week in those years when we keep it in the House. Much is learnt from working out together the liturgy for each day; within the House there are ordinands of an 'evangelical' and of a 'catholic' background, and so it is a great challenge to use the many resources available for Holy Week in a creative and sensitive way. This kind of work is good preparation a ministry where lay people share in planning worship.

In all our talk of preparation for ministry, we need to remember the limitations of what may be achieved in two or three years at theological college. No-one leaves college fully equipped for ministry or with an exhaustive knowledge of even one subject in an examination syllabus. Much of the learning is still to come within the context of a lifetime's ministry.

Theological colleges or courses cannot work three-year miracles on human nature; theirs is the more humble role of pointing the way towards ministry, of providing tools for further study and exploration, and of encouraging a commitment to prayer and a life responsive to the Spirit.

Finally, I wish to underline the need for an integrating method of teaching theology. It is no longer satisfactory for the subjects on the syllabus to be taught as virtually independent disciplines, or for each course to have

a kind of water-tight compartment all to itself. Education means above all the ability to make connections. To take a somewhat extreme example, it would seem bizarre to offer a course in NT Greek which simply aimed at instructing students in the language without any regard for the uses to which this knowledge can be put. Ideally, not only would the study of the language be used to throw light upon the world of the New Testament, but reference would be made to the Septuagint and Hellenistic Judaism, to the avenues of exploration among the Greek Fathers, to the opportunities of looking at some of the ancient liturgies of the church in their original language, to the possibility of encountering Greek by attending the Orthodox Liturgy, and the usefulness of learning the modern pronunciation rather than sticking solely to the artificial sounds of the New Testament classroom. A student who wrestles with New Testament Greek and never has the delight of hearing *ευχαρίστω οὐ παρακαλῶ* on the lips of a Greek of today is surely missing out on something !

Similarly, liturgy just refuses to be kept in its box, for its connections with other subjects on the syllabus are evident: from Biblical studies to church history to pastoral counselling. Rather than trying to teach our subject in some kind of splendid isolation, we need to encourage interest in its many links across the boundaries of the syllabus. For example, a course may look at baptism from the standpoint of pastoral ministry, liturgy, doctrine, history and Biblical studies, with a variety of inputs from students and teachers, probably using a seminar method of teaching. Where such methods are not used, the study of Christian initiation is often unnecessarily fragmented between courses which occur at different points in training. Some other colleges have greater experience than we do in exploring this kind of approach; for the Cambridge Federation a challenging time lies ahead, when we will need to use to the full the advantages of our ecumenical resources, while achieving greater flexibility in our teaching programme.

Postscript We began with a look at the amazing St Agatha's; I might just add that the reputation of her notional sanctuary at Cheam has spread far beyond the confines of Westcott: An ordinand who came to us from King's London went on to Cheam for his curacy (St Philip's, in fact); to his surprise he found himself billed in the King's Embertide list

"to serve at St Agatha's, Cheam". What a fate !

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