

TOWARDS A HOLISTIC SHAPE OF THE EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY

Presidential Address to The Church Service Society

The Revd Bryan D. Spinks

In her now classic book *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer made a number of feminist observations about how society in general, and males in particular, perceive women. Under "Body" she wrote:

There have been great changes in the history of feminine allure on the approved posture of the shoulders, whether sloping or straight, drawn forward or back, and these have been bolstered by dress and corsetting, so that the delicate balance of bone on bone has been altered by the stress of muscles maintaining the artificial posture.¹

Greer also observed that when a man wants to express the idea of the ideal shape of a woman he undulates his two hands in the air and leers expressively, because

"the most popular image of the female despite the exigencies of the clothing trade is all boobs and buttocks, a hallucinating sequence of parabolae and bulges".²

Like many in the feminist movement of the late sixties, Greer was highly critical of the way in which men, and advertising and the media which were controlled by males, had pressured women to exaggerate the waist in order to emphasise the outward curve of breast and buttock. This, so it was argued, was an artificial shape, and was part of a culture which prevented women being who they really were. The resulting call to shed corsets and burn bras, and to parade the natural shape or portray shapelessness, can now be seen to be an over-reaction.

The zoologist Desmond Morris, writing in rather a different context, suggested that the shapely curves of female *homo sapiens* are not particularly well developed for their basic biological function, namely breast feeding and giving birth; rather, so he argued, the curve of breast and pelvic area have been developed precisely for the purpose of attracting and arousing the male.³ Not even the most militant feminists have been able to alter this. Thus, although the film-star shape of the late fifties and early sixties, squeezed by wire corsetting - Marilyn Munro and Jane Mansfield - is, despite the efforts of Madonna, no longer in vogue, most Western women, when occasion seems right, wear clothes which even if not exaggerating the natural shape, at least enhance it. However, what Germaine Greer and other feminists did achieve in this context was to remind the male population, and women themselves, that women are more than just their shape, and need to be seen as persons in their own right, and in a holistic manner.

Far from being an irrelevant and irreverent digression, it seems to me that this discussion has a parallel in discussion of the shape of the eucharistic rite. The counterpart of the wire and corsets of the ideal female shape has been Dom Gregory Dix and his four action shape. Ever since the publication of *The Shape of the Liturgy*, Anglicans in particular have been conditioned into seeing the 1552/1662 eucharistic rite as less than perfect, and that any worthwhile eucharistic liturgy will be structured around an eternal, ideal, heavenly four action shape of taking, thanksgiving, breaking and communion. This preoccupation is to be seen in the 1958 Lambeth Conference discussions on eucharistic revision; in the Pan-Anglican documents; and the revised eucharistic rites which are collected in C.O.Buchanan's *Modern Anglican Liturgies*, 1968 and *Further Anglican Liturgies*, 1975.

Though an Anglican, the influence of Dix has been far reaching. Thus the American Lutheran scholar, Luther Reed in his book *The Lutheran Liturgy* 1947 and revised in 1960, appealed to Dix's eucharistic shape, and Timothy Quill's STM thesis documents how this influenced the rites in *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 1978, and in spite of reaction, also those of *Lutheran Worship*, 1984, of the Missouri Synod.⁴ One can see its influence in Methodist rites, and though perhaps less consciously, also in the communion rites of the United Reformed Church, and the Second Order of the 1979 *Book of Common Order* of the Church of Scotland.

This concern with what, to adapt Greer's language, might be termed "liturgical buttocks and boobs" began to be seriously questioned by a number of liturgical scholars. One may point to G.A. Michell's criticism in *Landmarks in Liturgy* in 1961; the Joint Liturgical Group's 1972 publication, *Initiation and Eucharist*; and Beckwith and Tiller's *The Service of Holy Communion and Its Revision*, 1972. The first of Arthur Couratin's unpublished essays on the eucharist was entitled "The Myth of the Four Action Shape"; and my own criticisms are found under the title "Mis-Shapen. Gregory Dix and the Four Action Shape" in *Lutheran Quarterly* 1990. Amongst liturgists it is accepted that there are not four actions of equal importance and equal antiquity, but basically two theological actions - thanksgiving and communion - to which are added for utilitarian reasons two other actions, of physically placing bread and wine, and breaking a loaf, both of which have subsequently been ritualized.

Perhaps more important is the apparent disenchantment or second thoughts on the "ideal" shape found in some of the more recent eucharistic rites. For example the 1978 Anglican Australian Second Order has a title "Preparation for the Lord's Supper" which is concerned with the preparation of the communicants as much as the gifts. The fraction is subsumed under the heading of "The Communion". The Welsh rite of 1984 has the preparation of the bread and wine as a small item under the general section of "We Pray With the Church". The fraction and communion are placed in the section entitled "The Great Thanksgiving" and a further section or unit is entitled "We Go Out in God's Strength". The Scottish Episcopal rite has in its 1982 rite four sections, but they do not correspond with those of Dixian orthodoxy. Certainly it has "the Taking" and "The Great Thanksgiving"; but the fraction and communion are united under the heading "The Sharing", and the fourth action is "Thanksgiving and Sending Out". Other units or structural movements are thus recognised as possible and desirable. It may well be that obsession with the four actions of Dix has been superseded by a need to stand back and look at the rite as a whole; not just "liturgical buttocks and boobs", but the whole liturgical rite of which they are but a part. However, I would like to explore two factors which I think need consideration when we speak of the shape of the eucharistic rite.

1. Rite is multidimensional.

Earlier I suggested that even if Desmond Morris is correct, and evolution rather than males is responsible for the curves of the perceived ideal female shape, nevertheless the feminist movement has reminded Western society that women are individuals and persons rather than just a shape. In a similar fashion, although the four action shape cannot be entirely dispensed with, it is part of something greater. The problem with Dix's four action shape is that it has encouraged us to think in a one dimensional linear fashion. The same criticism could be made of the very influential book by W.D.Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship*, 1936, where services are reduced to a menu, with a basic structure of Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Upper Room. This is an excellent teaching aid, but quite disastrous when used in reverse, with a linear menu from which to construct a service. Liturgy is not just a series of prayer texts in a book. It is more like a musical score, or the script for a play; it is about performance, and is multidimensional.

I would like to illustrate this by reference to the sixteenth century Anglican theologian, William Perkins. Anglican history has not been kind to Perkins and the other Conformist Puritans of the sixteenth century. The Tractarian revival has been successful in promoting Richard Hooker as the archetypal Anglican theologian and hero of the sixteenth century. Perkins and Hooker were contemporaries, and the reality of the matter is that Perkins was the most widely published and read English theologian in his day, whereas Hooker was a publisher's financial disaster. Perkins was schooled in Beza and Zanchius, and in the Aristotelian method as corrected by Ramus. His most famous work was *A Golden Chaine* (1592) in which he discussed the shape of the Lord's Supper. First, at a basic level, he argued that in the eucharist there is indeed a fourfold action of the minister - taking, thanksgiving, breaking and receiving - thus anticipating Dix by some 365 years. However, the stress here is that these are the minister's actions. The total shape consists of other things. In good Ramist fashion he was able to expound this in chart fashion. First he posits a two-fold division between things sensible and things spiritual. The sensible and external actions of the minister are the four-fold actions; but the Christian receiver has a different part. He or she takes or receives the bread and the cup, and eats and drinks. But under things spiritual, God too comes into the action. God sends Christ to be Mediator, for which he was sealed from all eternity. God through the

effusion of his blood offers Christ to all, even to the hypocrite, though he gives Him only to the true Christian. The spiritual action of the christian receiver is to apprehend Christ by faith, and have true communion with Christ.

Perkins, although perhaps by modern standards rather clumsily, does actually reminds us that we have at least four dimensions: the rubrics and texts, with the elements; the minister; the congregation's part; and the actions of God. This is precisely what Gerard Lukken and the late Mark Searle have been concerned to teach us in their writings on semiotics and liturgy.⁵ In rather more sophisticated manner than Perkins, Searle reminds us of the multidimensional nature of the rite in terms of the verbal codes, public and private; the musical code; the visual and kinetic codes; and the congregation's role. But we need also to note God's role.

If we apply this to the entrance rites (1-6) of the First Order for Communion in the *Common Order* (1994), the following analysis can be given:

Divine.	Verbal Code.	Musical Code.	Visual/kinetic Code.	Congregation's role.
			Bible is brought in. Minister (robed) enters. Choir (robed ?) enters.	Stand.
	Call to worship.			
	Hymn.			Sing.
	Scripture sentence.		Direction/posture of Minister ?	Listen.
God cleanses.	Prayer			
God/Christ forgives.	Confession			Response
God gives love.	Kyries			
	Absolution.			
	Prayer			
	Collect			
		Gloria		Sing

The first thing to note is that unlike the Roman Catholic and Anglican rites, there is no opening greeting in the name of God and presence of God. Here surely the Roman Catholic greeting is on strong theological ground. The congregation is assembled in the presence of the triune God, and the grace from 2 Cor.13:14 is a very fitting opening. In the light of recent rediscovery of the Cappadocian teaching on the Trinity, with its concern for Being in relation - here we may cite John Zizioulas, T.F.Torrance, Colin Gunton, Jurgen Moltmann and Catherine Lacugna - it would seem that the fact that we assemble in the fellowship of the triune God who is Being in Communion with himself and with us, needs to be asserted and celebrated at the outset. Indeed, in this entrance rite the triune God is not named at all, but only addressed as "Almighty God", "Most merciful God", and only in the absolution is the triune God revealed in his persons.

A second thing is the lack of concern for the visual and kinetic. Is the minister robed? What of his direction and posture? What is being said about the role of the minister, and how does his posture express the presence of God, and his actions on behalf of the congregation as ordained minister? Of course, no Panel on Worship, or Liturgical Commission can legislate for this, because much depends on the architecture and liturgical space, not to mention individual ministerial eccentricities. But it does make a difference if posture and direction suggest that it matters whether the triune God is present. Those modern tendencies to copy the Television compere or chat show host are not generally conducive of this, and such worship tends to degenerate into banal entertainment of an audience with little awareness of the presence of God. Another problem here is the Reformed fear of symbolism and ceremony; in the light of modern anthropological studies on the importance of symbol and ritual in human society, perhaps this needs looking at again. And lastly, the congregation. Is not more participation needed - for example, a common confession of sin - if the *koinonia* nature of the christian is to be reflected in worship. They are a body with many parts and functions; but all too often worship assumes one disembodied voice with a multitude of disembodied ears.

A holistic approach will concern itself with the interaction between the triune God, revealed in the persons of Father, Son and Spirit, within a community of persons, who move, sing, pray and interact with God and one another.

2. The Third Stratum or Soft Points of the Liturgy.

In his book *The Shape of the Liturgy* Dix described as the third stratum those finishing off pieces which gathered around the Entrance, the Offertory, the Communion and the Post - Communion. More recently Robert Taft has called them the "soft points" of the eucharist. ("How Liturgies Grow: The Evolution of the Byzantine Rite" in *Beyond East and West*, Pastoral Press Washington, 1984). Amongst these are found private devotions of the celebrant; preparations and devotions of the people; and what we might call "liturgical interludes", covering up a silence or providing a bridge between sections or units. In modern liturgical revision these have tended to be the first casualties. Their third stratum status has resulted in them being regarded as late accretions of little value, and they have been weeded out in order to restore a more pristine and primal shape.

Although probably most liturgists would agree that much of this liturgical overgrowth was not only unnecessary but also theologically undesirable, there seems to have been little pause for thought as to why the third stratum grew, and what function it was intended to serve. Not every later development is *à priori* decadent or undesirable. Perhaps some rationale was needed rather than wholesale removal.

It is perhaps no accident that a common complaint which is emerging is the lack of dignity, reverence and mystery in the modern liturgies. Indeed, in their haste to strip bare and reveal to all and sundry the core or basic shape of the eucharist, the removal of the clothing has robbed the rite of its mystery. The Entrance chants, be it *Gloria in excelsis* and *Kyries*, however historically untidy and unnecessary, served to bring the congregation together in song and thought in preparation for the Word; the preparation of the celebrant at the Offertory - the little canon - may be later Mozarabic and Gallican material of a theologically suspect nature, but it served to underline the mystery which was about to be celebrated in obedience to the Lord's command. The preparation and devotions of the people before communion tell us something of the piety and devotion thought necessary to approach the Lord's feast. And the post-communion devotions and prayers serve to wind down from so lofty a mystery to make entry back into the mundane world easier; or to put it another way, to make an easier transition from eschatological time back to ordinary time. In other words,

although some theological check may be needed, these things actually serve an important purpose. They help set the tone and atmosphere of the rite, and serve as a means of binding the community and as hinges holding together the various liturgical units.

In the Anglican tradition, Rite A of the 1980 ASB of the Church of England, and in the Scottish Episcopal rite we have examples of denuded rites, stripped almost to the core. However, elsewhere there are signs that more is needed. Thus the 1978 Australian rite recognises that simply preparing the bread and wine is not enough. Preparation of the people is also essential, and it thus provides for this. Likewise the Welsh rite in its heading "We go out in God's Strength" has laid the foundations for expansion of this part of the service - still, to my mind, a little brief in that particular rite. Ever since the work of The Church Service Society and the early editions of the *Euchologion*, the Church of Scotland was provided with the very beautiful "Prayer of the Veil" at the preparation or unveiling of the bread and wine, which calls attention to the mystery about to be celebrated. In some Reformed rites of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was thought that rather than a brief dismissal immediately after communion, this was an appropriate place for thanksgiving, possible intercession (cf. the rite of Jeremy Taylor), and collection of alms. In the new Danish Lutheran rite there is permission for an epistle reading at the end, where the exhortatory nature of some of the epistles is concerned with christian praxis in the world. Possibly, then, the whole structure of the post-communion might be changed, with a further Word and a Blessing with Dismissal ending the rite. The fact that Justin Martyr knew a different pattern is not an excuse for avoiding consideration.

If I may again invoke male chauvenistic language, it is sometimes remarked that female fashion clothes the body in such a way as to let men use their imagination; there is a sense of mystery. Simply stripped bare, nothing is left to the imagination. Likewise in liturgy; the so-called third stratum is the very point where many discover the mystery and devotion they seek. Remove all these - as some of have done - and the bare liturgy leaves little for the soul to image. My plea, then, is the need to reintroduce third stratum material as part of the shape of the liturgy, because it is here that the rest of the shape can be properly apprehended, though in such a manner as not to obscure the primary stratum. Such material reminds the congregation of the mystery of God and of worship,

and assists towards true *koinonia* in liturgy, of the presence of the God of community with his own community of the baptised.

* * * * *

Notes

1. Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, Granada paperback edition 1971, p.30.

2. Ibid., p.33.

3. Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*, Jonathan Cape, London 1967.

4. Reed, published by Fortress Press, Philadelphia. Timothy C.J.Quill, *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism*, Concordia Seminary, St.Louis 1993.

5. See Louis Van Tongeren and Charles Caspers (eds.) *Gerard Lukken, Per Visibilia ed Invisibilia*, Kok Pharos, Kampen, 1994; Mark Searle, *Semper Reformanda: The Opening and Closing Rites of the Mass*, in Peter C.Finn and James M.Schellman, *Shaping English Liturgy*, Pastoral Press, Washington 1990.

* * * * *