THE GREENING OF THE LITURGY

The Cosmic Liturgy in Eucharistic Prayer

The following is an abbreviated, edited and updated version of a paper originally read in Nottingham as the 'Patriarchal Lecture' at the 1988 Conference of the Society for Liturgical Study.

The Liturgical Task of the Church of Scotland Minister

Seventeen years ago and to a predominantly Anglican audience it seemed important to describe briefly the then *Book of Common Order* (1979) and to explain some of the thinking behind it. It was important to remind the audience that Books of Common Order in Scotland do not provide definitive forms and orders, only models. That means that a dutiful minister is required to work as diligently at the preparation of prayers as at the preparation of sermons and to be involved at all times in the search for language and for forms that are appropriate at once to worshippers and to Christ, the Lord of the Church, in the worshippers' midst. This search must go on tirelessly in a Reformed Church, which is at once *reformata* and *semper reformanda.*

In the 1979 *Book of Common Order* pride of place was given at the beginning of the book to orders for the celebration of Holy Communion, bearing clear witness thereby to the normative character of the service of word and sacrament, which character was undoubtedly recognized by our reforming forefathers, as it had been down the centuries by the universal Church. Where Holy Communion is not celebrated on Sunday the committee preparing the 1979 book took the bold and logical step of ordering worship according to the eucharistic pattern: that is to say, the reading and preaching of the word leads to a climax in prayers of thanksgiving which have all the fullness of praise and thanksgiving and anamnesis characteristic of a eucharistic prayer together with other appropriate nuances – all indeed except the references to bread and wine. This prayer concludes with the Lord's Prayer. *The Church Hymnary* (Third Edition), which appeared in 1973, gave advance notice, as it were, of this model. Recognizing that hymns and psalms belong to the people's part in worship and that the hymnary is the nearest thing to a worship book that is put in their hands the Revision Committee arranged the hymnary liturgically and again according to the eucharistic pattern. The

1979 model of the *Book of Common Order* was not followed in the preparation of *Common Order* (1994) though of the two full orders for Morning Service provided the first follows the eucharistic pattern with prayers of thanksgiving, intercession etc. after sermon.

The eucharistic order for Morning Service without Holy Communion has implications for the work of the dutiful minister. Random thanksgivings, even comprehensive litanies of thanksgiving, serve well enough where they occur in conjunction with intercessions between gospel and sermon. After all in this scenario the climax is going to come in eloquent sermon. More questionably in some services the climax may appear to come in a procession to the Holy Table, with gifts of money, leading to prayers of dedication with words or overtones of self-offering. When bread and wine are brought to the Table with the overtones of Christ's self-sacrifice, when we have the Great Entrance proper, then the dignified ceremony is wholly appropriate, as is our singing of verses of Psalm 24 to the tune St George's, Edinburgh. Without bread and wine the attention focused on our offering, staged with impressive organ music, is wholly disproportionate. Of course if the collection of money and procession occur during an anthem, the words of which are of praise and thanksgiving to God and are made available to the congregation, then the situation is different. Without bread and wine however and without an appropriate anthem this piece of theatre may transmit the wrong message. Add to this the possibility that the sermon has concluded with a stirring challenge, the good news of the gospel not having been preached, and what should be a seemly but modest gesture becomes perfervid Pelagianism. If prayers of thanksgiving are to be the liturgical climax of the service then it is the splendours of the good news of the gospel that lead to it most naturally. The indicatives of the gospel carry with them their imperatives of course, they do so however hopefully, optimistically, with promise.

Eucharistic Prayer in the Church of Scotland

The task of the Church of Scotland minister is the preparation of 'eucharistic' prayers of the style mentioned above. They must be prepared in such a way that they constitute the emotional high point of the service. A minister may look around at prayers in use in other parts of the Church today or back at the classic prayers of the early Church. In all of these there are motifs or concatenations of motifs that can be usefully employed from time to time. Will the worshipper in the pew say Amen (or think it) at this giving of thanks,

this *eucharistia*?[1] Do the models ancient or modern give full expression to twenty-first century belief and experience? In one particular regard I find the modern models disappointing and that is in their references to created nature. In our day we have new and ever increasing knowledge of creation: we live in the space age. The more we know about our universe the more we know about God. The versatility of God in creation is a gauge for his versatility in salvation. Why is the celebration of God the creator so meagre in eucharistic prayer?

In the anaphora in the Communion Service in the *Book of Common Order* (1940) the creation reference is in a relative clause and consists of 30 words: 'who didst create the heavens and the earth and all that is therein; who didst make man in thine own image and whose tender mercies are over all thy works'. In 1979 these same words recur in the first order and in the second. In the third the reference is even briefer (17 words). Only in an appendix to the second order is a larger reference offered (43 words). Fifteen years later in *Common Order* the situation is little better. In one anaphora creation is again subordinated and thanks are offered, somewhat curiously, for the fact that when creation was accomplished 'the morning stars sang in chorus and the angels of God all shouted for joy', the whole reference consisting of 56 words. Another undoubtedly manages to green the liturgy modestly with mention of 'the vast expanse of space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses and this fragile earth' (85 words). The Introduction describes the second order for Holy Communion as reflecting the Celtic tradition but its anaphora manages only 56 words. References in morning and evening services are likewise minimal. These figures are to be compared with 700 words in the corresponding section of the anaphora in Book 8 of the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*,[2] which, even if it reflects, as the experts say, the liturgical idealism of a scholar in his study and not something ever used, is unlikely to have been written in a vacuum and probably reflects at least to some degree the liturgical practice of the day in the Church in Antioch, which city is almost certainly its provenance.

Church of England anaphoras reveal similarly unflattering statistics and of the eight anaphoras in *Common Worship* none manages more than 40 words. Some have as few as 7 and two have no reference to creation whatsoever.

A Theological Framework

Ancient doctrine speaks of the *vestigia Dei*.[3] We are to see in nature not merely God's 'works' but also 'traces of God', hidden tokens of his presence. We shall not say that nature is the revelation of God, nor yet his image, but it shows traces of God everywhere. Nature is a mirror and reflection of God's beauty. The person who knows God knows God because God reveals himself to him and only that person will be able to recognize and interpret the traces of God in nature but it is unthinkable that he will do so only analytically and not gratefully, adoringly, eulogistically, eucharistically. Moreover since God reveals himself as the triune God the *vestigia Dei* in nature are *vestigia trinitatis*. Creation is the work of God who 'saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good'. Creation is that which was created through Christ and for Christ, it is that also which is eschatalogically recreated by the power of his resurrection. To believe in the resurrection is not just to believe in the raising of Jesus; it is to believe also in creative liberty in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power of the resurrection, life-giving to men and through them and their liberty to the whole creation. Moltmann writes: 'Human beings and nature have their own destinies on their own particular levels; but in their enslavement and their liberty they share a common history'.[4] It is strange that we should celebrate our human salvation-history in Christ so expansively, in proper prefaces, amamnesis etc., and the salvation-history of the universe so meagrely, often in one throw-away line.

Moltmann speaks of a eucharistic community of nature and man. We know the world as God's creation and the primal form of our knowledge is thanksgiving for creation and for the relationship we have with it and adoring praise of the Creator. The range and sweep of possible praise would fill all our days: for today we might speak of immensities of space, eternities of light years, infinite complexities of natural laws, unimaginable glories of galaxies unnumbered while tomorrow we might want to emulate Christopher Smart, who wrote gratefully, eucharistically about his cat:

> For I will consider my cat, Geoffrey.
> For he is the servant of the living God,
> duly and daily serving him.
> For at the first glance of the glory of God in the east
> he worships in his way.
> For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round

with elegant quickness.
For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.
For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.
For I am possessed of a cat surpassing in beauty
from whom I take occasion to bless Almighty God.

In this eucharistic community of which we speak, however, we give thanks not only for creation but with creation: 'Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge'.[5] Two more lines by Christopher Smart are worth quoting. He writes:

For there is a language of flowers.
For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.

The anaphora in the Liturgy of St James,[6] dating from around the year AD 400 and associated with Jerusalem, pursues this theme: 'You are hymned by the heavens and the heaven of heavens and all their powers; the sun and moon and all the choir of stars; earth, sea, and all that is in them'. All creation praises God in its way, even without man, but it is man's thanksgiving that looses the dumb tongue of nature. Man is the priest of creation, gathering up the worship of all creation and offering it to God through Jesus Christ our high priest. In Christ is a true man, the first of a new creation, loving his fellow men and having a perfect dominion over nature, being all that man was meant to be in the purposes of God. Man taught by Christ the choirmaster is inspired to sing the cosmic liturgy: through man the cosmos speaks its eucharist.

Both liturgy and theology condemn us: we are culpable of neglect of creation themes in the Church, certainly in the Church in the west. We have neglected to relate creation to the faith. Indeed we have trivialized nature. We have demoted St Francis of Assisi with his comradeship of men and women and all created things and assigned him to picture books for primary children. Likewise the annual service of thanksgiving for harvest in our Churches is becoming increasingly a children's festival. For too long our society has treated nature as merely a backcloth to real life, a playground for romantic poets and a laboratory for scientists. Even now when we have greater awareness of global warming, pollution and the threat to the planet, even now when science has left behind its upstart, arrogant years of immaturity and speaks no longer of a closed universe running like a machine but of an open universe

in which novelty is a real factor and mysteries are impenetrable, even now the expression of creation's eucharist is still only a shy whisper.

Our Heritage from the Ancient Liturgies[7]

Passing reference has been made above to nature themes in *Apostolic Constitutions* and in the Liturgy of St James. But the paper would be incomplete without at least a brief survey of anaphoras and other references from the early period. The concern will be not to note expansiveness of expression for some anaphoras are brief and one does not know whether this was the original whole or whether one has to assume extempore prayer in addition; nor will the concern be with language because some of it would sound extravagant to the modern ear. Rather the emphasis will be on the almost universal presence of nature themes and their relation to salvation themes.

In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, probable provenance Rome, probable date AD 150, the earliest outline of a eucharist that has survived, eucharist is described as something our Lord handed down to us 'to do' and eucharistic prayer as including memorial of the passion of our Lord and the giving of thanks to God for having created the world and all that is in it for the sake of man. It is here for the first time we hear of the president's praying 'with all his might' or 'to the best of his ability' – presumably extempore prayer.

It is suggested that there are possible echoes of eucharistic prayer in an even earlier source, from AD 96 in fact, the epistle known as I Clement. Here is grateful apperception of God and creation, lyrically expressed with a neat transition to christology in the words, 'All these things did the great Creator and Master of the universe ordain to be in peace and concord, and to all things does he do good, and more especially to us who have fled for refuge to his mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ'. Similar echoes may be heard in the writings of Irenaeus.

The almost total absence of creation themes from the anaphora in *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus has long been a problem and it remains one. Since the anaphora also lacks the Sanctus yet claims to represent 'that tradition which has persisted up to the present' scholars feel sure there is some explanation. Certainly a Hippolytus-style anaphora was not subsequently developed.

The anaphora of Saints Addai and Mari, the oldest parts of which probably go back to the third century, and that of the Liturgy of St Mark, equally early but more colourful, are examples of the classic pattern with creation and soteriological motifs in fine balance.

The anaphora of St James, where nature is part of the mighty choir that sings God's praises, has been described above. Similar in style is the anaphora in the Liturgy of St Basil, still in use in the Orthodox Church. Here our knowledge of God in creation and salvation is acknowledged to be by revelation. God is Master of creation and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is he who enables the praise and glory which all creation seeks to render.

The lengthy anaphora of the Liturgy of St James has also been noted above. The theological thought-patterns of this Liturgy are impressive. Here the proper context for considering man's salvation is commemoration of universal creation. This truth, adumbrated in other liturgies, is here expressed *in extenso*. The anaphora celebrates God's goodness to us in creation and in this goodness the agent is Christ: 'You, eternal God, made all things through him and through him you vouchsafe a fitting providence over everything. Through him you granted existence, through him also a good existence'.

Lastly mention should be made of eucharistic prayer in Gallican liturgies. Our knowledge of this group of rites, used in northern Europe, is limited. They have features in common with eastern liturgies and they are written in a florid style echoed perhaps in some of the hymns of Celtic origin which we sing today. The interwoven themes of creation and salvation are certainly there and nowhere more lyrically.

In the light of all this the nagging questions return. Why is the celebration of God the creator so meagre in our eucharistic prayer? Why have we almost dropped creation from the eucharistic community when nature's contribution to the praise of God is so enormously rich and varied and when we are designated to be nature's voice? Do we not owe it to the prophet ecologists in our midst to fill out the understanding of nature in the purposes of God and what better way to do it than to do it doxologically?

On Aesthetics

In conclusion I should like to suggest that if we are ever to move towards an enhancing of this cosmic liturgy in our eucharistic prayers there is something deeply inhibiting in us which must be overcome: that is a mistrust of aesthetics in theology. We are by upbringing and by long ecclesiastical tradition a little afraid of the category of the beautiful. We are suspicious of too much romanticism. We look askance at all rhapsodic enthusiasm as a naiveté that can be tolerated in small amounts but is definitely to be kept in check. The word 'aesthetic' to both Protestant and Catholic writers is one, if not of abuse, at least used to describe something which basically they feel to be frivolous, self-indulgent and escapist.

Karl Barth was among the first in modern times to recover the category of the beautiful in a theological manner[8] and, following in his footsteps, Hans Urs von Balthasar has pursued the task in a work of almost equally monumental scholarship.[9] On the subject Barth wrote: 'Much too much would have to be deleted which in the Bible is clearly and loudly proclaimed, if we were to attempt to deny the legitimacy of the concept of beauty because of some ultra-puritanical earnestness concerning sin'. Following Anselm Barth calls theology the most beautiful of the sciences because of its object. Barth is speaking of course of the beauty of God. This beauty will be seen not only in what is beautiful in creation but in the totality of his being and of his work. The world would count the cross an ugly thing: the Christian by grace discerns a true beauty in it. It is possible to make aesthetic statements which are also soteriological statements. Indeed one may say that just as it is impossible to attain to the living God except through his Son become man, so we should never speak of God's beauty without reference to the form of it we see in salvation history. Having established the all-embracing character of God's unique beauty and having re-established the propriety of speaking of the incarnation of God's beauty and glory we are able to speak freely of that beauty of God as we see it in his being in the Trinity and in his works in creation.

This brief excursus, doing no more than easing the lid on a treasure chest of theological riches, is meant to justify a loosening of our tongues in eucharistic prayer in order that we might become more effective priests of creation.

To the Christian, creation like salvation is radiant in its way of the glory of God and of his kingdom and transparent of his beauty. For as Anselm writes, 'If there are many and great delights in delightful things what sort of delight and how great a delight is there in him who made the delightful things themselves'. There is no hint of heresy but pure Christian aesthetics in Robert Bridges' couplet:

> My eyes for beauty pine
> My soul for Goddes grace.

Once we have breathed again the fresh air of a wholesome theological aesthetic we may be able to recover a neglected apperception and restore creation themes, the cosmic liturgy, lyrically and gratefully to eucharistic prayer.

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1 1 Corinthians 14.16
2 See R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 1975 pp. 65ff.
3 See Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 1985 pp. 63ff.
4 *Op. cit.*, p. 69
5 Ps. 19.2
6 Jasper and Cuming, pp. 55ff.
7 *Op. cit.*
8 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, pp. 650ff.
9 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 1982