

INTRODUCTION to the Ampleforth Breviary of 1976 (principle editor Dom Timothy Wright). In the winter of 1972-3 Abbot Basil Hume appointed a group to prepare a form of the Office suited to the whole Community in the post-Conciliar world. They began by agreeing on this statement of principle before any further work. Their names appear at the end.

A VIEW OF THE OFFICE

This paper states the theoretical position on which we mean to plan a more lasting form of our liturgy; it purposely keeps to general principles, leaving their application to later. For this reason, it does not directly discuss any published documents of the Church or of the Congregation: they are sufficiently well known on their own merits. At an early stage in discussion, certain ideas seemed to be of particular importance and gave us our section headings. These were:

- 1 Different views of the office: principle and obligation
- 2 Liturgy
- 3 The scriptural core of the office
- 4 Unity and development

We also discussed a more radical question, whether monastic office was in itself Christian; we think the question of some academic interest but scarcely applicable to a consideration of the common prayer of a traditional community of Christians committed by public vow. Should monastic office be in fact specifically Christian, with the whole background of Jewish and Christian thought and theology, rather than merely monastic — that is, an office in which, for example, non-Christian monks such as Buddhists could join without qualification? We held strongly that, since our deepest commitment was to the knowledge and love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ his eternal Word, rather than to monastic profession as such, our praise and worship of God should also be that of his final revelation, namely through Christ our Lord. To attempt to bridge the gap between religions by ignoring the entire tradition of Christian worship would be inappropriate.

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE OFFICE

Is Liturgy something given, or something we ourselves create? The answer must be, that it is both: for the liturgy is simply an application of the paradox of the Incarnation, in which the completed work of Christ in heaven is carried out by men on earth. That is why we feel the pull of two poles in the phenomenon of Liturgy. One view looks to the givenness and stability, to the sameness and static nature of the divine heavenly liturgy in which we partake, sees liturgy as the prayer of the Mystical Body, having objective value in itself, which the Church performs through

monastic communities and others. The other view, responding to the sacramental quality of liturgy, as it symbolises, focuses, reflects and expresses all the values, aspirations and sadnesses of human experience, sees the need to adapt our liturgy to the times, places, situations and needs in which we find ourselves, so that it is constantly creative and in continual adaption to the actual situation with its work, need and concern. Some have called these views objective and subjective.

This is perhaps misleading because the distinction applies also to the standards by which a liturgy is formed. Personal preference inevitably produces views wholly or partially exclusive of each other: in such cases the solution is usually either arbitration or compromise. In this situation it helps to shape liturgy as far as we can in accordance with discernible principle, in the hope that this will correspond more closely with people's real needs, despite differences of temperament, taste or experience, and therefore with the real needs and formation of succeeding generations: it is in this sense that 'objective' has precedence over 'subjective': but there is of course some danger of impersonal ritualism and remoteness from contemporary life.

Either of the two views taken alone is inadequate: they are rather complementary, like the two aspects of a sacrament — *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*. In the latter sense, the personal reception of the grace of Christ is largely dependent on the dispositions and prayerfulness of the person.

The objective view does not itself impose any particular pattern on liturgy, but it provides a means of relating it to the work of Christ in heaven. Details of structure and content vary according to period and place; over the centuries the variations have been sometimes local, sometimes regional, as in fifth century Alexandria or fourteenth century Sarum, and sometimes centralised, as in the Tridentine rite.

If the office becomes enclosed in too personal or expressionist a mould, there is risk that the office might be cramped by the limitations of one human situation and so lose its universal application, and be hindered from expressing the basic reactions of men in the presence of God. The effectiveness of the office down the centuries has been due largely to its classical or generalised form, which has enabled all to identify themselves easily with the sentiments expressed. The office is above all the prayer of the Body of Christ — the Christ whose prayer included praise, worship, gratitude, love, intercession for the needy, hungry, diseased and distressed, and for forgiveness. In praying the office we should have all this in mind,

since we share in the priestly intercessions of our Head. In this sense the office is universal (world-wide), eternal (embracing all time), priestly and official.

Emotional expressiveness, then, should be restrained and yet appeal to the deepest needs of the individual. Such a tradition is in fact the accumulation of many insights of experience: from it one may discern what are the deep desires of men. At the same time, the office, in so far as it is a means of communication, must use the best means provided by the culture of any particular age or society. A community's prayer can only become personal if the individual sees the office as formative of his prayer life and hence requiring a period of growth or training. The objective aspect may be safe-guarded — against perhaps the current desire even of a majority at some particular period — by reference to liturgical or monastic principles, to the practice of the Church, or to that touchstone of unity, accepted authority.

Unless we are to see Obligation in a purely canonical and external sense, we must look for its roots in our nature and in our situation. For one thing, all creation depends on God: rational creatures ought to acknowledge this, and human ones in language; for another, Christ himself took part in the prayer of the Jews, and taught, indeed commanded, his disciples to watch and pray. Thirdly, Christians by their calling share Christ's priesthood and are involved in his mediation: and for every monastic community the office is an essential and effective part of its search for God.

In each of these ways the responsibility towards the office impinges upon the monk, and the Church rightly obliges all solemnly professed to recite the *Opus Dei*. Its importance in the prayer life of the Benedictine is such that it cannot be replaced by any other work: *ergo nihil operi Dei praeponatur*. Where it is impossible to share in the common recitation, a monk who understands the proper value of the office will ensure that due time and place are allocated to saying it by himself. If the monastic life has taught him to appreciate it and its formative influence, then obligation will be seen as part of his monastic commitment.

LITURGY AND DEVOTION

'Devotion (*devotio*)', according to St Thomas, 'is nothing else but the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God'. Along with prayer, it forms the principal interior constituent of the religious act.

Thus, all our worship of God should embody this interior giving of the soul, as the 'form' which animates the 'matter' of exterior words, gestures and religious ritual. Over the more recent centuries, Western Catholics have, for various reasons, — use of Latin, over-clericalization of the Liturgy, alienation from the laity, — found *devotio* more readily in extra-liturgical vernacular devotional practices. Liturgy is distinct from 'devotions' but embodies *devotio*. It is that part of activity where, as community or 'assembly of the saints', we join the risen Christ in his everlasting worship of the Father — 'we give thee thanks for thy great glory'. The office opens for us a way into the redemptive mystery of Christ, in which we are linked not only to him but more immediately to the praying Church, and so it is open to all Christians to join in, and we should allow, indeed welcome, lay participation, either of the school or of guests.

For the individual, the Liturgy, and especially the office, calls for an attitude of openness and attention to the Word of God: hence the office must be intelligible. It will also require some understanding of the Jewish and Christian mentality which formed the holy Scriptures, of the roots of human religious actions and of the history of liturgy: this is the more important because liturgy is formative both of the individual and of the community, being the main means of moulding its common search for God. Because liturgy has its roots in theology, it is above the whims of individual preference, but this does not preclude a flexibility which makes it genuinely adaptable to an actual Christian community's situation.

This does not mean that the liturgy should be stripped of all emotional content: on the contrary, elements of ritual, ceremonial and music may reinforce our sense of praise, joy, lament, contrition and other sentiments, while good and sensitive speaking from the text of the scriptures will avoid the theatrical and enhance the communication of the word of God. To eliminate emotion would be to make the office lifeless, dull and uninspiring: it should on the other hand be subservient to the prevailing mood of the season, feast or hour.

THE SCRIPTURAL CORE OF THE OFFICE

The essential core of the office which cannot be dispensed with in a Christian community is the emphasis on psalmody and scripture, because of their special inspiration, and of Christ's own use of them — to say nothing of the Church's constant tradition of their use. We may well

remember that what the Church does, what Christians do, is a good indication of what Christians really believe, or realise to be important; it is an instance of the Vincentian canon, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus...* For a long time the office in the Abbey was arranged thus: Matins-Lauds, Prime, Little Hours en bloc with Conventual Mass, Vespers, Compline. Current development has been towards Matins, retained as a quasi-Vigil, of predominantly meditative character; Lauds and Vespers as the two main daily formal offices of praise and thanksgiving; while Compline, as the retiring prayer of the community, and the Midday office are comparatively short and light in character. Perhaps this trend should be made a little clearer.

The mood or tone of the office should be set by the three main activities of praising, listening and interceding, which should be balanced, though not necessarily in equal proportions, together with the seasons and feasts of the Church, and of our own calendar, through which various themes are expressed in the office.

It is part of the Christian liturgical tradition to use the Old Testament as well as the New. The main reason for this is that Christians have always seen Christ as the climax of a long development through Jewish history. The Old Testament contains both a record of God's dealings with men in the present and promises for their future happiness, some of which have been fulfilled, while others have yet to be accomplished. The Old Testament is important for us also because it is essential for the full and proper understanding of both the New Testament and our liturgical tradition.

Not all passages of the Old Testament are equally important, though to say this is not to diminish their inspiration. Some are more appropriate to study than to liturgy; others cover topics with little spiritual content or are not suitable for public reading. It is difficult to find objective principles according to which Old Testament readings should be selected, though the needs of time and the liturgical year are important factors. But much of it contains material which fits closely the universal or general quality referred to before: this forms the greater part of the whole, and should not easily be abandoned.

The public office is formal liturgy and as such should be said in a formalised way. This does not exclude the possibility of spontaneity within the formal office, but limits it to defined periods, for example in Bidding prayers. In the performance of the office considerable flexibility may be allowed, because of experiment with modes of performance in the early

stages — or if the numbers are small. The timing of the office may also be subject to minor adaption by such things as Chapters, Month Days or holidays. A less than perfect arrangement may sometimes be forced on us by circumstances, for example Lauds linked with Mass. In this process of building up an office, this practical consideration may well be a significant limiting factor.

UNITY AND DEVELOPMENT

A primary element in the constitution of the Body of Christ is unity: Christ prayed, 'that they may be one.' Unity is actual, because Christ has risen and the Spirit is with us, but it is incomplete this side of heaven because we are limited by our subsistence in matter, time and space. Unity is always — until the last day — open to growth: even marriage, mystical prayer, friendship or community spirit can be increased and deepened.

In this growth in unity, the office is a focal area for the monastic community. It is a communal act in which the aim of the community — the search for, and the praise of God — is corporately expressed: the presence of Christ is shown, and the community is further built into Christ. The Eucharist is the source of unity in the Church, and for a particular community it is so both in general, as they are Christians, and in particular, as it is the centre of their liturgy; and of this unity office is among other things the expression: we are a community, therefore we pray as a community. In this light may be seen the obligation to the office, whether in general (going to choir) or in particular (the traditional obligation to make up what one misses). In this light too what a community does may be seen as joining in what the Church does, that is part of the prayer of the Church. Any man so associating himself will inevitably, as it were, join in what is in heaven. Monks do so in a more formal way, as part of the institute or visible structural church, and in so far as they are bound to their community they are bound to its prayer. For these reasons, unity is the first principle underlying our liturgy, and from it there flow a number of consequences: we ought to sing the same office together and we ought to avoid idiosyncrasies, leadings of the choir, and all forms of murmuring and discord.

Arising from unity is the principle of Development: our liturgy should develop from what it was in the same way that the child grows into the boy, and so to manhood, or as Newman says that doctrine does, that is organically. It is interesting to set in this connection his seven notes of

genuine development, as opposed to corruption: preservation of type, continuity of principles, power of assimilation, logical process, definite anticipation in the earlier stages of what comes after, a tendency to conserve what has gone before, and chronic vigour. For the latter, he distinguishes between decay, which has no vigour, corruption, which has transitory vigour, and development, which has continual vigour.

These, in so far as one may apply them to the liturgy, seem to indicate the importance of achieving a balance between the preservation of the substance of the Church's liturgical tradition, and the need to assimilate to herself the values, forms and thought-patterns of a particular generation or culture — and to do this without loss of vigour.

Arising from the multiple nature of the human state is the principle of Distinct Levels. Office is said or sung formally and publicly in choir, sometimes in a more solemn form. It is also said by individuals privately, and some of them prefer (and have asked) that what they say should be the same as, or similar to, what the community says in choir. A third level is a different, simpler or pruned version used by individuals where the full formal version would be unreasonable or impossible because for example of the absence of books or of heavy involvement in the needs of others. This resembles the older custom of substituting five rosaries. But the three levels ought to be related by a proportion of common matter, in application of the first two principles mentioned above.

This paper is a little repetitive of ideas rather as the office itself is. We have gone to some length to establish foundations because we think that only thus will the building stand heavy use. It is our view that this work is of such importance that it should not be hurried: the more thoroughly it is thought out, the more likely is it to last and to please God and men.

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