

The Liturgical Movement: Right and Wrong Directions—I

by Duncan Cloud

On the face of it, the liturgical movement is one of the big religious success stories of the twentieth century, a paradigm case of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the Churches. From small beginnings, Pius X's encouragement of frequent communion, his reform of the breviary and his interest in Church music on the one hand and the renewed scholarly concern with ancient liturgical texts, manifested by men like Edmund Bishop, on the other, sprang up in Benedictine monasteries like Mont-César and Maria Laach a movement to rediscover and revive the principles embodied in the great liturgies of the patristic period. These principles have gained wider and wider acceptance and the official seal of approval was placed on them, first of all in a rather grudging manner by Pius XII in his encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) and then wholeheartedly in the Liturgical Constitution of the Second Vatican Council promulgated in 1963. Parallel movements in the Church of England and among the Lutherans only confirm the authentic character of liturgical developments.

Yet, despite the evident signs of the movement of the Spirit, there are some disquieting features in the present situation. A substantial minority on the right remains stubbornly unreconciled to any change, while on the left there are some who are preoccupied with 'underground' or domestic liturgies and others who question *any* special concern with liturgical forms as, in effect, a gigantic irrelevance and a distraction from the Christian's primarily political role. Consequently, it is worth the effort to distance ourselves from the liturgical movement and its principles and enquire if, among the many sound intuitions into the nature of worship which it has promoted, there are some attitudes and approaches which are of more doubtful value.

One such attitude of doubtful validity is the assumption that at some time in the past there existed some perfect eucharistic liturgy and that the function of the liturgical reformer is merely to re-introduce such a liturgy. A variant of such a view is that the perfect liturgy consists of a combination of the best elements in a series of ancient liturgies. The most favoured candidate for such a privileged position is the Roman liturgy of the fourth to sixth century. The Liturgical Constitution itself (article 50) adopts such an assumption, though in a qualified form: in order to clarify the basic structure of the Mass and achieve more easily the devout and active participation

of the laity, 'elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigour which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary' (Fr Clifford Howell's trans.). The qualification 'as may seem useful or necessary' (*prout opportuna vel necessaria videantur*) removes some of the sting from the passage, but basically the doctrine is that reform of the eucharistic liturgy should consist of discarding post-patristic accretions and restoring pre-sixth century elements which have since dropped out; if this is done, then the basic structure of the Mass will become clearer and the participation of the faithful more meaningful and devout.

Now there is nothing self-evidently true about such a doctrine; indeed, there is something paradoxical about the idea that a liturgy evolved between the fourth and sixth centuries should be the ideal medium for twentieth century worship. Fr Verheul's excellent *Introduction to the Liturgy*¹ not merely expresses the doctrine in a more modest and defensible form but also suggests its genesis. The liturgical movement arose as, in part, a by-product of the revived interest in ancient liturgical texts. Study of liturgical fragments embedded in the writings of the Latin Fathers and of the three major ancient Sacramentaries revealed an altogether more wholesome theology of worship than that current in practice in the Roman Catholic Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was more biblical in content and, in particular, greater use was made of the Old Testament for chants and readings. Sobriety was characteristic of the prayer-style; all prayers in the eucharistic liturgy were directed to the Father through the Son, not to the Son, much less to Mary or the saints. Popular participation was assured through the singing of psalms, responses and acclamations. One could well defend the proposition that the Latin rite reached its summit in the period of the Fathers, in that it combined the expression of the essential features of liturgical piety with a maturity of theology and style hitherto unknown in the West. But it is fatally easy to move from this position to the one embodied rather hesitantly in the Constitution, that the Latin rite of the Patristic period represents, not merely a summit of achievement, but a kind of Platonic form to which a twentieth-century liturgy must approximate, if it is to be any good. It was particularly easy to slide into this position, given the situation of Catholicism and the liturgical movement in the early twentieth century.

First of all, the notions of progress and change are exceedingly difficult to express in Latin, the official language of the Church. Inevitably that language is strongly influenced by its classical inheritance and every schoolboy knows the sinister or pejorative

¹Burns & Oates, 1968, 35s., especially pp. 137-8.

overtones of words and phrases like *novare* and *res novae*, used to express the concept of revolutionary change. Underlying this hostility to change is the fundamentally unchristian view of history as involving a steady regression from some mythical Golden Age. Thus it was linguistically difficult to express the concept of progress except in terms of change for the worse in the language used for manuals of theology and official documents; the classical education which their authors had received predisposed them to the 'Golden Age' theory of theology. This predisposition was powerfully reinforced by the unwelcome experience of the Reformation and its aftermath and then of the Modernist crisis. It would hardly be too much to say that the only conceptual framework for advocating change without heresy was in terms of changing one's liturgical 'Golden Age' from the vaguely High Medievalism of Dom Guéranger to something older.

There is a second reason for this attitude to the past in the liturgical movement. Until after the Second World War its sponsors and leaders were chiefly Benedictine monks; monasteries like Maria Laach in Germany, Mont-César in Belgium and St John's, Collegeville, in the U.S.A., were its principal centres. Generalizations inevitably need qualifying—Dom Beauduin's interests were as much pastoral as scholarly and one should not forget the Klosterneuberg movement in Austria under Fr Parsch's direction, but it would not be unfair to say that the concerns of people like Dom Odo Casel were primarily academic and directed towards the recovery of partly obscured patristic insights and the analysis of ancient texts. Classical scholarship provided both training and models for their activity. Their work was both important and necessary, but in the nature of things such studies tend to become ends rather than means. Concentration on them did no harm so long as the liturgical movement remained a peripheral activity, but it can be more dangerous now that the themes of the movement have become virtually a new orthodoxy.

For instance, to provide a good uncorrupted text of the old sacramentaries is a praiseworthy activity, but to suppose that, if you correct the prayers in the Roman missal in the light of the best texts of the old sacramentaries and replace medieval and baroque prayers with others from the sacramentaries, you have done all that needs to be done to provide prayers suitable for a twentieth-century Mass, is a much more dubious hypothesis. Yet in face of this assumption, which I suspect is accepted by a number of those working for the *Consilium* in Rome responsible for our revised or new liturgical texts, it must surely be maintained that the Roman rite of the time of Leo or Gelasius was only a good one in so far as it embodied principles of liturgical action arrived at by other, theological and biblical, routes—*lex supplicandi* is emphatically not *lex credendi*. In some respects, the eucharistic liturgy of that epoch was worse than our

own; it was inordinately long for one thing. It is clear from St Augustine's sermons that this was felt to be a drawback at the time; the excessive length was due to the disproportionate emphasis on the liturgy of the Word. Even in terms of the needs of the fifth century this emphasis was mistaken; after all, the Mass ought never to have been treated as an occasion for psalm singing and protracted catechesis with a sacrificial meal tagged on to the end. But some justification can be provided in terms of the lack of other media than the spoken word for the catechesis of largely semi-literate or illiterate congregations, and a rhetorical sermon was about the only respectable entertainment available in the provinces. These excuses hardly apply today.

Nor is sheer length the only respect in which the fifth-century Mass was inferior to our own. The use made of psalms and Old Testament readings was surely excessive, though understandable in terms of contemporary culture. Hymn singing was scarcely known in the West until St Ambrose made it respectable, so initially there were only psalms to sing. Moreover, in a theological climate where the allegorical method ran riot the most unlikely psalms could be given a Christological reference. The same is true of Old Testament readings; no matter how devoid of current relevance the text might be, the allegorical method in dexterous hands could yield a rich harvest of unsuspected theological truths, as any reader of St Augustine's sermons and his *enarrationes in psalmos* knows. But we are surely in a different position and the motives for including as many as four psalms *in toto* in one eucharistic celebration are by no means so compelling: relatively few are particularly suitable to the Mass, wholly intelligible without elaborate exegesis and free from ethical blemishes, at one and the same time. As for the prospect of *lectio continua* including weekly instalments from *Leviticus*, the mind shudders!

I make no apologies for labouring the rather obvious point that the fifth and sixth-century liturgies of Rome are not in every respect models of perfection, as an exaggerated reverence for these models has had an unfortunate effect on recent liturgical developments. There are trivial consequences, like the tendency of some liturgists to denigrate any development subsequent to the epoch of St Gregory the Great which lacks a precedent in the Latin rite in its 'Roman' phase. Attempts to prevent the people taking part in the stichomythia at the beginning of Mass and to eliminate any form of general confession from a revised eucharistic rite are examples of this attitude.¹ Appeals to the so-called 'High Mass rule' are mere rubricism; consistency would require the Lord's Prayer likewise to

¹Eg. by Fr Clifford Howell, S.J., in *Mean What You Say* (Chapman, 1965) and the same author's article in *The Clergy Review*, Vol. 51, pp. 143-7 (although he does not want to eliminate a general confession altogether).

be said by the priest alone. As for the *Confiteor*, no-one would claim that it was an ideal form of general confession, particularly in its Roman rite shape, but a revised form of general confession either at the beginning of Mass or after the completion of the liturgy of the Word makes good theological sense.

There are, however, more serious consequences of the habit of mind embodied in art. 50 of the Liturgical Constitution. It fosters a tendency in liturgical writers to regard changes and development as something past, over and done with, once old elements are restored and recent additions discarded. Such a tendency is slightly evident even in Fr Verheul's book; it is particularly noticeable in Fr Myerscough's contribution to another popular book on the liturgy which has recently gone into a seventh edition.¹ The impression that one is reading about some distant historical event is heightened by a failure to recast the first edition article in a sufficiently thorough-going manner. Even in 1964 (the date of the first edition) Archbishop Grimshaw was hardly a representative guide to current thought on the place of English in the liturgy; it is quite absurd to summarize his *Tablet* article, which implicitly rules out a vernacular Canon, in a 1968 edition. It is also misleading to speak of the use of the mother-tongue in 1968 as 'a much disputed question'. It is the use of Latin which is the disputed question.

My point about the mistakenness of regarding liturgical development as if it were a past event is not an academic one; the approach of Fr Myerscough makes it very difficult to understand, and more importantly, make others understand, what is going on even at the 'official' level. If a popular writer on liturgy makes no effort at detailed prediction of future changes—and apart from a passing clause on the Offertory rite and the recasting of the Communion and the kiss of peace, Fr Myerscough says nothing about the future, though he must know about the *missa normativa*—each new change will come as a quite unpredictable bolt from the Roman blue instead of the logical consequence of the principle enunciated in art. 50. For instance, it has been possible to predict ever since 1963 that the *Consilium* would recommend an increase in the number of Scriptural passages read, at least on Sundays, as well as the substitutions of full psalms for the truncated fragments embedded in the chants of the present Roman missal. The merits of such changes have not been properly discussed, but once it was clear that the Roman rite in its early phase was to be the paradigm of a reformed eucharistic rite, it was obvious that these changes would be recommended, since two of the most conspicuous differences between the fifth-century eucharistic liturgy and ours are the presence in the

¹*The Liturgy: renewal and adaptation*, edited by Austin Flannery, O.P. (Scepter Books, Dublin, 7th ed. 1968, 25s.). Fr Myerscough's contribution falls below the general level of this useful symposium; the value of the book is enhanced by its dossier of Roman documents relating to the liturgy from the Constitution itself to the Instruction on eucharistic worship of 25th May, 1967, all in serviceable translations.

former of three readings from the Bible and four psalms.

Nor is it simply bewilderment that is caused by a fixation on the ancient Roman liturgy. At a profounder level it helps to explain the sense of alienation from the current 'official' liturgy felt by a surprisingly large number of sensitive people from both the progressive and the conservative wings of the Church. Since for the progressive the people of God is primarily us, involved in the needs and problems of the 1960s, the Roman liturgy of Leo or Gregory is only interesting and valuable to the extent that it has something to say to us now. At best, the resuscitation of their forms of worship is a circuitous way of constructing a contemporary liturgy; at worst, it is a gigantic irrelevance. Consequently, the progressive either busies himself with unofficial liturgies or regards the real, political, work of the Christian as carried out without reference to any liturgical framework. This sense of alienation is shared by the conservative: he views the people of God from a perspective which embraces the whole sweep of Christian history, not primarily the present and much less a chunk of Christian history which ended over a thousand years ago. Hence his attachment to the Latin Mass and the Roman Canon which provide a symbolic link with his predecessors in the faith; hence his reluctance to regard every change in the liturgy and liturgical piety between the time of Charlemagne and the twentieth century as a change for the worse. Now the tension between the pull of the past and the needs of the present is in principle a creative one, since it is perceptible in any complete conception of the people of God and, indeed, it is felt by worshipping man at some level, whatever his religious allegiance; but an attitude which instead of trying to reconcile this tension, or at any rate recognizing its existence, merely evades it, can hardly be regarded as desirable.

Two variants on what I shall term the Roman fixation should evoke more sympathy but are basically mistaken for the same reasons. The first underlies two of the new *Preces Eucharisticae*, as can be seen from Fr Paulinus Milner's review of them.¹ One of these is based on Hippolytus's *anaphora*; another is an abbreviated version of Fr Vagaggini's prayer which tried to incorporate all the best themes from the ancient liturgies. To my mind, the *Consilium's* second thoughts are a great improvement on what are believed to have been their first. To have presented us with Hippolytus *en bloc* would have been a false step comparable with the substitution of Palestrina and Byrd for Haydn and Gounod as examples of music suitable for liturgical use. The Hippolytan *anaphora* would have annoyed the conservatives who want only the Roman Canon without satisfying the progressives who don't want any ancient *anaphora* at all, but some contemporary prayers. Fortunately, the *Consilium's* rehandling of Hippolytus in *Prex II* has merits of its own, notably brevity and opportunity for popular participation. It should prove a useful

¹The Three New Eucharistic Prayers', *New Blackfriars*, October 1968.

stop-gap until truly contemporary prayers can be inserted at this point in the Mass. *Prex* III too has its charms, notably its *epiclesis* petition, as Fr Milner has pointed out, but Fr Vagaggini's original scheme (if I am not doing him an injustice) was based on a fallacious assumption, namely that a repertory of eucharistic themes from ancient liturgies provides a good basis for a contemporary liturgy. I hope to show in my next article that there is *one* theme in patristic theology which has interesting implications for a contemporary eucharistic liturgy, but it is not one which plays much part in the new *Preces*.

The other variant on the Roman fixation which is superficially attractive I will term biblical archaism. Instead of taking the liturgical practice of Gregory, or for that matter of Hippolytus, for his paradigm, the liturgist takes what he fancies to have been apostolic forms of worship or even the Last Supper itself and makes that his model. This attitude seems to be based on a confusion of thought. To be sure, it is biblical theology which provides us with the principles of the liturgy, as for example the fact that the highest form of worship is worship of the Father through and with the Son as members of His Body. It is in virtue of such a principle that we judge whether a particular liturgy is good or bad; for instance, the prayers in the Leonine sacramentary are good because they are addressed to the Father through the Son; the late Offertory prayer, *Suscipe sancta Trinitas*, is bad, because we are not strictly speaking making our offering to the Trinity, but to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. But the Incarnation took place in a specific historical situation; this is part of what God becoming man entailed. We must therefore distinguish between permanent reality and the transient circumstances which the fact of the Incarnation transcends. For example, the first eucharist no doubt took place within the formulae of a *berekhah* or grace, but through the very fact of being the framework for the eucharist the grace was superseded by it. It took time to distinguish between framework and permanent reality and the *agapé*, a Christian equivalent of the Jewish prayer-meal, continued for a couple of centuries. Its eventual disappearance was no doubt partly due to the danger of confusion between *agapé* and eucharist, a confusion not perhaps altogether avoided by Hippolytus, and partly because the kind of abuse recorded by St Paul in I Cor. 11 was an ever-present temptation. Biblical archaism lies behind ICEL's rendering of 'benedixit' in the Roman Canon by 'he gave you . . . praise'. Christ's actual words may well have actually taken the form of a grace, but they were in fact a blessing and consecration of the bread and wine. That is, after all, what makes them different from an ordinary grace. Thus the liturgical gloss implied in the Latin and explicit in some of the Greek liturgies where the word *hagiasas* (=having consecrated) is added, and which is expressed by the usual rendering 'blessed', ought to have been retained.

For the same reason, I have slight qualms about some suggestions made by Oliver and Ianthe Pratt in a fairly recent book.¹ They put forward a whole range of models for unofficial and domestic liturgies and all are full of interest, but the most useful are those which use ancient precedents as a starting-point for imaginative rethinking in contemporary terms; on the other hand, their christianized *Seder*, complete with matzos, moror and charoeth and the optional chanting of *dayainu*,² must surely become an elaborate liturgical charade except in the most special circumstances. Nor am I sure that the Pratts treat the Dutch bishops' objections to making the modern *agapé* too like the eucharist with sufficient seriousness: the chequered career of the *agapé* in the early Church lends point to the bishops' hint that other sorts of food and drink than bread and wine should be used.

There is one further obstacle to the success of the liturgical movement and this is the lack of realism in the way its concepts are sometimes presented. I need not dwell on the point, since this lack of realism is a besetting fault of much theological writing on every subject. I am not referring to the exigencies of ecclesiastical politics which (presumably) account for the description of *Mediator Dei* as 'the *Magna Carta* of the Liturgical Movement'.³ Such devices were at one time essential if advances of any kind were to be made, and the connoisseur of Catholic theological writing, especially of the pre-conciliar era, recognizes them at once. I am thinking particularly of the tendency to cast prescriptive or quasi-prescriptive sentences in a descriptive mould. For instance, art. 41 of the Liturgical Constitution states that 'the pre-eminent manifestation of the Church consists in the same liturgical celebration, especially in the same eucharist . . . at which there presides the bishop surrounded by his college of priests and ministers'. In this connexion commentators speak of the bishop as being, amongst other things, the source and symbol of unity. As statements of an ideal these are unexceptionable, though it may be questioned how much point there is in telling a devout citizen of Lowestoft that he ought to be attending pontifical Masses in his cathedral church⁴ of Northampton, especially if he has no car. But as statements of fact they are at least occasionally downright untrue; there are some bishops who are at times symbols and sources of division and whose homilies, whether delivered at pontifical High Mass in the Cathedral or anywhere else, may well be avoided by some of those who wish to realize in themselves what the Constitution says in its second article: ' . . . The liturgy daily builds up

¹*Liturgy is what we make it*, Sheed & Ward, 1967, 13s. 6d.

²*Vide* Mrs Pratt's contribution to *Experience of Liturgy*, edited by O. and I. Pratt, Sheed & Ward, 1968, 13s. 6d. (The reference is to p. 64.)

³The words are cited by Fr J. D. Crichton in his foreword to the English translation (= *A handbook of the liturgy*, p. xiii, Herder/Nelson, 1960) of Rudolf Peil's *Handbuch der Liturgik für Katecheten u. Lehrer*.

⁴*Cf.* an earlier sentence in art. 41: ' . . . All should hold in great esteem the liturgical life of the diocese centred around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church'. (My italics.)

those who are within (the Church) into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit'.

These remarks are uttered *sine ira et studio*; it is, however, a fact that such statements—and parallels could be found in many other articles of the Constitution—in which prescriptive or ideal assertions masquerade as descriptive sentences do serve to alienate a number, and perhaps a considerable number, of people from the liturgy and liturgical thinking.

In my second article I shall make a tentative attempt to disentangle the principal problem facing students of the liturgy today, namely recognition and, if possible, reconciliation of two different approaches to worship, namely emphasis on the needs of the community in the here and now and the sense of corporate solidarity with the worshipping past.