

# THE WORSHIPPING CHURCH

By PLACID MURRAY

WE ARE ALL familiar with the phrase 'the Church militant', which is commonly used to distinguish the Church on earth from the blessed in heaven and the souls in purgatory. It is significant, however, that when the Council touched on this truth, it did not use the word militant, but pilgrim (or its equivalent).<sup>1</sup> Now the idea of pilgrim Church suggests at once a journey, an onward march, and also a sense of incompleteness, a longing for fulfilment. This description of the Church is not just a figure of speech, but corresponds to biblical reality, both in the Old and New Testament; hence we are not surprised that the Council documents should emphasise prayer and worship as being a marked characteristic of this pilgrim people of God. We are on a pilgrimage back to God, and worship is the antenna for our direction-finding in the desert.

## *The relevance of liturgy*

Liturgy, then, for the Council, is not primarily a virtue of religion having for its object 'not directly God himself but something to be done, certain acts to be accomplished with respect to God and to honour God . . .'<sup>2</sup> This relegation of liturgy among the moral virtues, in subordination to the theological virtues, puts all the weight of the matter on human effort in worship. Such a scholastic view is not the doctrine of the Council; and certainly, if liturgy were to remain thus confined, it would be difficult to see its relevance. The true relevance of liturgy to christian life can only be understood if we see the place of Christ in liturgy, and the connection between liturgy and salvation.<sup>3</sup> According to the constitution, Christ is

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Maritain, Jacques and Raissa, *Liturgy and Contemplation* (London, 1960), p 25.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the role of Christ in the liturgy, as set forth in the constitution, met with opposition even in the *aula* of the Council, so deeply rooted had become the idea of liturgy simply as cult. Cf *Code of Canon Law*, 1256 and article 1 of the instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, 3 September 1958.

present in the liturgy as high priest and mediator. In the liturgy we go both to Christ and through Christ, and this throughout the whole range of liturgy – prayer, sacraments and mass. To go to Christ is to encounter him in the foreground of our consciousness and our faith: to go through him is to plumb the depths of our relations to the Persons of the blessed Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

As examples of prayer to Christ we need only think of the *Kyrie*, the second half of the *Gloria*, the *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei*. In the sacraments we go to him, or come to him; as, for instance, when we go to confession and lay our sins before him as our judge and saviour. At mass we encounter him in the liturgy of the word and in holy communion.

It is however the other aspect, that of going (to the Father) through Christ, which is the inner depth of the liturgical mystery. Too often and too long, our Catholic piety has remained in the foreground of the mystery: it went straight to Jesus as alpha and omega, but not to Jesus as the way. The history of spirituality demonstrates that emphasis on one or other aspect of the mystery of Christ has constantly shifted, now to his humanity, now to his divinity. The texts of the roman liturgy remain as a witness to the 'place of Christ in liturgical prayer'.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus then is with us not only as the great object of our worship, as, for instance, when we visit the blessed Sacrament. He is with us in the Church as our saviour; he is offering us salvation here and now, contemporaneously, in the liturgy. So that when we pray to him, as in the *Kyrie* or the second half of the *Gloria*, the Church almost always transforms this prayer, at the end, into a prayer through him to the Father. He does not merely come among us as a revelation of the divine; he has taken flesh to become the head of a body, a new people of God whom he leads to their home. In the sacraments and at mass too, we have more than an encounter in faith with Christ; we have a transcendent union with and through him.

### *The sacraments – signs of faith*

This salvation in the liturgy is offered us in the word and in the sacraments. Christ no longer walks in Galilee: men no longer have

<sup>1</sup> Fischer, B., 'Der Verherrlichte Mensch Christus und die Liturgie', *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 8 (1958), Heft 4, pp 205–217.

<sup>2</sup> This is the title of Fr Josef Jungmann's book, the first major modern study on this theme. Cf Vagaggini, C. (ed), *Problemi e Orientamenti di spiritualità monastica, biblica e liturgica* (Rome, 1961), pp 568–72 (with bibliography).

the opportunity to meet him as in the days of his flesh. We have however his word preached to us, in the Spirit, in the liturgical assembly. A reproach had been levelled against the roman liturgy (by Karl Barth, if I remember rightly) that it was only a torso: a sacrament without the word. The Council has redressed this imbalance; and we have had, since the beginning of this year, the benefit of a new lectionary of scripture readings for weekdays,<sup>1</sup> which has already made us familiar with a varied, full and effective liturgy of the word.

Our response to this re-vitalized liturgy of the word is to be one of faith, not only in the sense of belief or assent, but of an obedient faith which will deploy itself in a life modelled on what is heard.<sup>2</sup>

In the strictly sacramental liturgy too, the liturgy of the eucharist, the Council calls for a conscious exercise of faith. It by no means proposes the reformed position of the eucharist simply as a place where the gospel is set forth for our faith. The Catholic position had been clearly stated at Trent on this point, against the 'faith alone' doctrine of the reformers.<sup>3</sup> Vatican II does not reverse the doctrine of Trent; what it does wish to correct is a certain undesirable practice in the administration of the sacraments, which crept in under cover of this dogmatic position. Sign and symbol will seem to be almost irrelevant if contrasted with 'validity', with 'essentials', with the 'grace of the sacrament' as depending on the validity of the rite and the absence of obstacles in the recipient. It is here that the greatest need of re-education lies for us all, both clergy and people. We have to take the signs seriously, not merely in order to do things better, but precisely in order to feed our faith. Since Christ no longer walks in Galilee, we must look for him elsewhere, and where can we find him nearer at hand than in the sacramental signs?

### *Clarifying the sign*

In the present reform of the liturgy, there is in the true sense of the word a process of demythologizing. This does not mean a debunking of past liturgical history, but a careful effort to clarify the biblical sign contained in each of the sacraments. The reform of the rites sets the central sign in an ever clearer light, and presents this sign ever anew to our faith.

<sup>1</sup> The author is speaking of the Church in Ireland. Ed.

<sup>2</sup> 'La foi et la vie du baptisé', *Vocabulaire de Théologie biblique* (Paris, 1962), col 396.

<sup>3</sup> Lengeling, E. J., *Die Konstitution des zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils über die heilige Liturgie* (Münster, 1965), p 133.

*The example of concelebration*

Perhaps I may be allowed to quote here the experience of our own community in Glenstal, which has had a daily concelebration now for about fifteen months. While safeguarding, of course, the liberty of individual priests to celebrate as heretofore, and assenting without reserve to the encyclical of the present Holy Father that 'it is not right to exalt the so-called, "community" mass, to the detriment of masses which are celebrated privately',<sup>1</sup> the fact remains that the majority of the community have spontaneously opted for concelebration instead of individual celebration, and this not merely for motives of convenience or on aprioristic, doctrinaire grounds.

The constitution on the liturgy<sup>2</sup> says that concelebration manifests appropriately the unity of the priesthood. The instruction on the new rite adds two further marks of unity shown forth by concelebration: the oneness of the sacrifice and the one priest, Christ.<sup>3</sup> The sign then to look for in a concelebrated mass is unity.<sup>4</sup>

To return to our community experience of concelebration. Though not all the monks are priests, the whole community attends the concelebrated mass, and those who are not priests usually receive communion at it, which they do under both species. A fourth aspect of unity, the unity of the whole celebrating community, is the aspect of the sign most immediately perceptible. This is beautifully in evidence at the communion, where all are seen receiving the same food from the same altar. Ritual beauty is not, however, the main point, although the rite is indeed full of the 'noble simplicity' promised to us by the Council.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I think, my brethren would bear me out in saying that it is the claims of fraternal charity in the daily life of the monastery which are felt with greater sensitivity, due to the celebration in common of one eucharist around one altar. Here, I feel, we have tangible evidence of the spiritual result of taking the sacramental sign seriously. This is all the more striking since up to the time when we began concelebration, the daily private masses and the daily conventual mass had been felt by all to be the spiritual core of our monastic day. Here then is a case where the clarifying of the sign has linked up eucharist

<sup>1</sup> *Mysterium Fidei*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ritus servandus in Concelebratione Missae* (Vatican, 1965), pp 5-7.

<sup>4</sup> We must remember of course, as Pope Paul insists in the passage from *Mysterium Fidei* quoted above, that symbolism does not express nor exhaust the *whole* meaning of Christ's presence in this sacrament.

<sup>5</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 34.

and life, sacrament and community. It has made the rite an 'open' one, opening out immediately into life, not a 'closed' one, carried out as something rounded off in itself.

*The parish mass after the council*

It would be utopian to think that everybody everywhere finds all the changes in the celebration of the parish mass for the better;<sup>1</sup> but by and large there has been a great step forward in participation. Many problems remain, particularly of uniformity of texts and practice.

The greatest single problem that is being increasingly felt, though perhaps people are not able to put it into words, is the fact that the liturgy of the word has been developed almost at the expense of the eucharistic liturgy. For many people the silent canon is now only a gap in the proceedings; the mass leaflet which superseded the prayer-book and the beads does not cover the canon. This leaves them at a loss. From this point of view the restoration of the parish mass is in inverse ratio to the renewed rite of concelebration. In the latter, it is the sung canon which dominates the whole rite, and which makes the onlooker feel spontaneously that here the last supper is being re-enacted. In the parish mass, it is the readings, the prayer of the faithful and all the other parts shared in by the people which are more in evidence. Since we know, historically speaking, that the silent recitation of the canon came in only because its declamation ground to a slow halt,<sup>2</sup> it would seem that the restoration of the recited or sung canon could, with profit, be extended from concelebration to all the other forms of mass. A vernacular canon is not likely to be granted for some considerable time, though the council documents made it explicitly clear that there was no doctrinal reason for the retention of the latin canon.

Under parish conditions then, the clarifying of the sign will not be as immediately obvious, as it would be in a monastic liturgy; the overshadowing of the liturgy of the eucharist by the liturgy of the word, and in some places the controversial issue of the vernacular, will tend to blur the desired clarity.

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<sup>1</sup> The changes as far as Ireland is concerned may be seen in two reports from a number of dioceses, published in *The Furrow*, 1966 (May), pp 297-312; and (July) pp 463-9. The Episcopal Commission for Liturgy has published a Pastoral Directory on the Building and Reorganisation of Churches. *The Furrow* (July 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C. A., *The Silent Recitation of the Canon of the Mass* (Bay St Louis, 1962).

*The liturgy and the rest of the Church's life*

We may well ask, has the Council over-stressed the importance of liturgy in the Church's life? Has it presented an over-idealized picture of some aspects of the liturgy – for instance, the statement in the constitution ' . . . the Church reveals herself most clearly . . . in the full, active participation of all God's holy people . . . especially in the same eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers'.<sup>1</sup> What then is the relevance of the 'worshipping' Church to those other great features of the Church's life and mission, such as we are considering in this present issue of *The Way*? How relevant is liturgy to the 'sacrament of the world', to the 'serving Church', the 'pilgrim Church', the 'tempted Church' and to 'the man of the Church'?

At the risk of encroaching somewhat on the territory of my colleagues in this symposium, I should like to touch briefly on the links between liturgy and these other areas of the Church's life, such as they appear to a liturgist from a study of the Council documents. We should remember at once that this problem of the relevance of liturgy has been all along the great debate between those in favour of and those refractory to liturgical renewal. By 1947, Pius XII could refer to this as something of which everyone was aware.<sup>2</sup> This document was so carefully balanced and analytical that it could hardly be called an unreserved approval of the relevance of liturgy. It is Vatican II, so to speak, which has given liturgy its innings, and it is now busily piling up runs! Those unsympathetic to liturgy may still feel reluctant to clap as the scores mount up.

*The Church and the world – liturgy and mission*

Does the Church's liturgy look inwards or outwards? In its relations with the world, does the Church put her liturgy in the forefront, as an instrument of her mission to the world?

One can find a practical, concrete answer to this in the african situation, as presented in the study *Katigondo*.<sup>3</sup> It would seem from a careful reading that those concerned with Africa are looking to the liturgy for a catechetical renewal. I do not, however, find any indication that they are looking to the liturgy for a directly mission-

<sup>1</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 41.

<sup>2</sup> *Mediator Dei*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ledogar, R. J. (ed), *Katigondo, Presenting the Christian Message to Africa* (London & Dublin, 1965), esp. p 126.

ary role and this would seem to be the true meaning of article 2 of the constitution:

Hence while the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit . . . at the same time it marvellously strengthens their power to preach Christ and thus show forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations . . .<sup>1</sup>

This standpoint had already been that of the *Centre de Pastorale liturgique* before the Council, which held that liturgy was not directly missionary, but was an inner-Church activity, aimed at the faithful who already believe and who practise.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that the Church itself is not missionary, going out for new conversions and going after its own lapsed. But liturgy is not the direct instrument of conversion or of re-conversion. Liturgy will be, of course, indirectly missionary in its results, particularly in the present crisis which obtains in many mission lands. By building up the Church from within, it will of course reveal the Church to those without, 'as a sign among the nations'.

Many important consequences follow from this distinction between a Church that is missionary, and a liturgy that is intra-ecclesial. Our attitude to the liturgical celebration will be eased of that neurosis for 'success' for 'numbers', if we realize that what is essential is the spiritual quality of our celebration in its actual performance. This will make for calm, for recollection, for inwardness, and hence for fruitfulness. True, outside the time of celebration, we can and must think up ways and means of improving even the liturgical presentation of the service. But this should avoid the trap of salesmanship. It has been well pointed out that in the early Church it was not the liturgy but the charity of Christians which was the great motive for conversions. Indeed, how could it have been otherwise, since access to the mysteries was barred to those without?

The Church's effort at clarifying the sacramental sign need not be directed to making it intelligible to the outside world, but rather to the believing faithful, who can be given a long-term catechesis on biblical and liturgical spirituality. We need not be over-concerned if a certain difference of climate remains between the technological

<sup>1</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Roquet, A. M. in *L'Eglise en Prière*, Martimort, A. G. (ed) (Paris, 1961), p 232.

world outside and the liturgical world inside the Church. Two great bridges can be constructed between the two worlds – language and art. The introduction of the vernacular has already done much to humanize the language of the liturgy, while the encouragement given to contemporary art, both in the constitutions on the Church in the modern world and the liturgy, will do much to harmonize culture and liturgy.<sup>1</sup> For the irreducible differences which remain (due mainly to the biblical roots of the liturgy), we must accustom ourselves to the great truth that revelation is a God-given, not a man-made, thing; and the sacramental signs are a constant reminder of this fact.

### *Liturgy in the serving Church*

There is one particular area where the liturgy has already trained priests to a priesthood of 'service': the confessional. Here, in a tribunal of mercy, every confessor already has an experiential knowledge of what it means to have been 'chosen from among his fellow men, and made a representative of men in their dealings with God'.<sup>2</sup> The moment of confession is a time of truth for both penitent and confessor; and while penitents often feel after confession that lightness of heart so well described by Brentano in his poem *Nach der Beichte*, confessors on their part often feel that the words of comfort they have spoken could not have come from themselves, but were an inspiration from the Spirit of God. This knowledge makes them humble and co-operative with grace.

Unfortunately, just as penitents relapse into sin, so confessors forget this humble service, directly dependent on the Spirit, and they relapse into a less merciful attitude towards their fellow servants.

It would seem then that confessional practice would be the best seed-ground for priests in learning the new attitude of service to the flock. This is all the more important if we are to avoid undermining the true notion of hierarchical authority within the Church. It is not by substituting democracy for hierarchy, but *servitium* for *dominium* that we shall exercise the office of Christ the head and the shepherd,<sup>3</sup> in an evangelical spirit of compassion.

### *The liturgy and unity*

Not only can the liturgy contribute to fostering a more Christ-like use of authority within the Church; it can also furnish the central

<sup>1</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 62; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 122–130, esp 123.

<sup>2</sup> Heb 5, 1 (Knox).

<sup>3</sup> *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.

focus of unity both within the Church and in ecumenism.<sup>1</sup> We are all painfully aware of the differences of opinions even on grave issues which are current within the Church today. Much of this, even if painful, will no doubt be beneficial; and the constitution on the Church in the modern world has explicitly envisaged and even encouraged such tensions.

... it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the gospel message. Hence it is necessary for people to remember that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion. They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good . . .<sup>2</sup>

It may be questioned if we have as yet learned this programme fully: our discussions are indeed honest, but charity seems to suffer raw wounds in the process. It is not too fanciful to imagine the demon of discord stalking through our ranks, using our legitimate differences of opinion to inflame our feelings and sour our mutual relations.

What can the liturgy offer to sweeten christian life in this raw post-conciliar age? Traditionally, we associate sweetness – *dulcedo* – with the eucharist, meaning thereby the overflow of Christ's peace even into our sensitivity after holy communion. This is a stilling and a calming of our worries, a lulling to sleep of our over-worked faculties. But something further is required today. It is precisely when our faculties are aroused again and given full play in life that we need to infuse *dulcedo* into our hearts and actions and bearing, into all that we say and do. We may take it that this kind of difference of opinion mentioned in the Council text is something which will be on the increase in the years to come, and hence something we shall have to live with increasingly.

The renewal of eucharistic worship will play a large part in making the liturgy 'open' to life; but it will need to be supplemented constantly from another liturgical area – that of baptism. In a sense,

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, R. P., and Taylor, M. J., *Liturgy and Christian Unity* (New Jersey, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 43.

the unity based on baptism calls for a more austere exercise of faith than does that based on a eucharist celebrated in common. There is not that overflow from faith into feeling such as accompanies the eucharistic celebration. We have, indeed, the renewal of our baptismal vows each year at the Easter vigil, and this no doubt is one of the most important pedagogical functions of the liturgy in the entire year. But this is a psychological not a sacramental renewal, and leaves the heart somewhat empty.

How then are we to set about cultivating this baptismal spirituality – to borrow a very french phrase? This cannot be done, nor should it be, in isolation: we must see our baptism in the light of Christ and the Church. The faith we are called upon to exercise will be a dry faith to begin with: somewhat like the uniformly grey light of early morning. As the day goes on, the light becomes richer, all the surrounding objects take on their own colours; so too with the illumination accorded by baptism. It is not so much by an inner probing of our own separate baptism, as by a deeper understanding of the one baptism we share in common, that our faith will take on shape and size and colour.

The whole theology of baptism has received detailed treatment in modern liturgical and biblical studies, and the Council has given it due importance, particularly in the decree on ecumenism.<sup>1</sup> Of course, printed works and Council decrees outstrip actual practice, and one may safely say that a practical realization among us of baptism as a bond of unity is as yet only in its infancy.

#### *Worshipping in spirit and in truth*

Baptism can be the desired bond of unity, only because in it we are born of water and the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> In a remarkable lecture given earlier this year, René Laurentin has pointed out that Vatican II did no more than adumbrate a theology of the Spirit: he said he was looking forward to Vatican III to complete its work on this most urgent need in western piety and theology.<sup>3</sup> If a theology of the holy Spirit is really the missing link, english-speaking readers may well be pardoned if they turn back to a classic treatment of it in

<sup>1</sup> Vagaggini, *op. cit.*, pp 55 8–60; cf Bogler (ed), 'Leben aus der Taufe', *Verlag Ars Liturgica* (Maria Laach, 1963), 64. The passage on baptism occurs in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22. The third ecumenical meeting held at Glenstal Abbey, 13–15 July 1966, took baptism as its theme. See the report of the meeting in *The Irish Times*, 16 July 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 3, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Laurentin, R., 'Mary in the Liturgy and in Catholic Devotion', *The Furrow*, 17 (1966), pp 352–4.

english, written well over a century ago, Newman's sermon, 'The Gift of the Spirit' in which he expounds the doctrine of the holy Spirit as the inner source of worship and of sanctification.<sup>1</sup>

As always in his sermons, Newman begins with a rapid review of the relevant scripture passages – in this case, those dealing with glory, from Moses on the mount down to our Saviour's words in his last prayer 'The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them'.<sup>2</sup> This glory of the gospel dispensation, being, in St Paul's words, the 'ministration of the Spirit'. Newman then examines in what sense the Church, through this gift of glory, has become what it was not before: the Church is heaven on earth, in the variety and dignity of the gifts ministered by the Spirit, and in the doctrinal implications of the transfiguration of Christ.

This gift 'is . . . imparted to every member on his baptism . . . By this new birth the divine *shekinah* is set up within him, pervading soul and body, separating him really, not only in name, from those who are not christians, raising him in the scale of being, drawing and fostering into life whatever remains in him of a higher nature, and imparting to him, in due season and measure, its own surpassing and heavenly virtue'.<sup>3</sup>

He concludes with an exhortation to reverent feelings towards the mystery of the Church, and to a worship in spirit and in truth: In this, then, consists our whole duty, first in contemplating almighty God in heaven and in our hearts and souls; and next, while we contemplate him, in acting towards and for him in the works of every day; in viewing by faith his glory without and within us, and in acknowledging it by our obedience. Thus we shall unite conceptions the most lofty concerning his majesty and bounty towards us, with the most lowly, minute, and unostentatious service to him.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, III, Sermon XVIII, pp 254–70. There are eight other sermons relevant to this theme in the *Parochial and Plain Sermons* They are: The Visible Church an Encouragement to Faith, III, XVII; The Indwelling Spirit, II, XIX; The Kingdom of the Saints, II, XXI–XXII; The Visible Church for the sake of the Elect, IV, X; The Communion of Saints, IV, XI; The Church a Home for the Lonely, IV, XII; Christ manifested in Remembrance, IV, XVII; The Visible Temple, VI, XX; Christian Manhood, I, XXVI. See also Hardelin, A., *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala, 1965), pp 77–87.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 17, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, III, XVIII, p. 266. The date of this sermon is 8 November 1835, a time when Newman was at the height of his youthful prime in the Anglican church, and was already well grounded in the Fathers. The doctrine as he understood it then is the same as we can understand it now: he had no change to make on this point when he became a Catholic.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.* pp 269–70.