

## *Chapter Six*

# **The Liturgy**

Much of the misinformation that surrounds Anglicanism is a product of the ignorance of our own history. Anglicanism as we know it has very little to do with Henry VIII (1491-1547) and his various wives — as fascinating as that may be. What has shaped its last four hundred years or so was Elizabeth I's efforts to give meaning to a reformed Catholicism, which was neither Roman nor Protestant (in the strict sense of Reformed or Lutheran). She went about doing this by passing several acts through Parliament, which makes for much duller reading than Henry VIII's wives.

The Elizabethan Settlement has to do with uniformity of worship and authority of government. The latter, which outlined the relationship of the crown, parliament and the two convocations of Canterbury and York, was peculiar to England and, unfortunately, was not sustained in the seventeenth century, which failure has been a source of problems in the Church of England ever since. The former still prevails in one form or another and is particularly characteristic of Anglicanism. Its contemporary form is that we expect worship in the Anglican Communion to conform universally to that edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* as is authorized in a given province of our communion.

Elizabeth herself said that she was not interested in poking around in the conscience of people, but she expected outward conformity. We still live in this spirit. The Act of Uniformity of 1559 applied to clergy and laity alike, and it lives on in our

expectation that every practicing Anglican will be in church on Sundays and Holy Days to worship God according to the use of the *Book of Common Prayer*. It does not take much imagination to realize that this cardinal principal has set the tone of our life together.

An important effect of Anglicanism's passion for the *Book of Common Prayer* has been that those persons whose commitment and learning have shaped the evolution of the various editions of that Prayer Book have loomed large in our history (e.g., Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), Gilbert Sheldon (1598-1677), William White (1748-1836), Walter Frere (1863-1938), Edward Parsons (1868-1960) and Massey H. Shepherd (born 1913). If we ask the people involved in the revision of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* who was a seminal figure in this process, they frequently mention William Palmer Ladd (1870-1941).

Ladd was not trained in the science of liturgics. As with a number of scholars of a previous generation involved in liturgical revision, he was a church historian. This perhaps gives some credence to the charge that recent Prayer Book revision has suffered from a desire to ratify the past. Ladd in his less inspired moments did fall into this trap. He served most of his priesthood at Berkeley Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut, first on the faculty and then for twenty-three years as dean. He was a New Englander all his life: silent, undemonstrative, clear and logical. He was a person of firm conviction, contemptuous of all intellectual hypocrisy and sham.

In reading the testimonials of Ladd shortly after his death, what strikes us is that Ladd was remembered not for his interest in liturgy, but for his social consciousness. His vita listed numerous commissions on which he served in the course of social justice. He was active in such issues as child welfare and labor. Ladd was an internationalist, who long before World War II called attention to the threat of totalitarianism. He was concerned that the United States assist the Allies early in the war.

Later in his life, Ladd was attracted by the English "Parish and People" movement, an expression of the fourth movement in the Catholic revival within Anglicanism. The "Parish and People" movement believed that a sensitive liturgy constitutes a living and active Christian community, which will witness to the world. As principal spokesman, A. G. Hebert, SSM (1886-1963) wrote on this subject, and his books were read widely in this country. Ladd brought Hebert to Berkeley to lecture, only to be disappointed to

discover that Herbert's interests had gone a different direction since his books published in the mid-thirties. Ladd continued until his death, however, to reflect in their light on what constituted effective liturgy. His thoughts were shared in a column in *The Witness* and later collected in a book entitled *Prayer Book Interleaves*.

Ladd believed in the symbolic relevance of liturgy, as well as its dignity ("without that distinctive Anglican vice, stiffness") and beauty. Symbolic relevance means the ability of the liturgy to engage its participants at a level of their consciousness which awakens their sensibility. Liturgy pertains primarily to a receptive or left handed form of thought. It forms and alters the social drama which people live out, often unaware, at a fundamental level of motivation. The liturgy has the power to bring us, relatively unencumbered by social expectations, to a place where we can hear God at the depth of our being. Often people confuse good liturgy with what is sentimental, faddish or even cute. Good liturgy is more likely to be fearful and make us uncomfortable. Good feelings or a sense of security can often be the very antithesis of effective worship.

The liturgy is the church's ritual and we believe that without ritual humanity lacks a significant source of meaning in its life. Ritual is the repetitive enactment of the symbols of that event which called the community into being so that event is present now with power. As we said in the last chapter, that event for Christians is the Incarnation fulfilled in the Passion of Christ. The liturgy must be an embodiment at the heart of its form of these symbols which awaken the reality of the Passion within its participants.

Ladd was an advocate of Prayer Book revision. While he was not someone to attract friends easily, two of those most influential in the development of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, Massey Shepherd and Boone Porter, drew much inspiration from him. Ladd knew that Cranmer's work as the author of the first Prayer Book in 1594 was only a beginning. Each age has to appropriate the prayer book for itself. For liturgy is an expression of the experience of God at various levels. It is like a parfait, constructed of a series of layered images. Those at the top reflect the current times, while those at the bottom contain the primordial memory of humankind. The former must change or the deep symbols will become obscured under surface anachronisms.

One example of this which Ladd never tired of recalling was the obsession in the Eucharistic rite of the 1928 *Book of Common*

*Prayer* with confession. In the Holy Communion, he said, it would appear that we really do not believe God can forgive us our sins. We confessed our sins, they were absolved, and we continued to declare ourselves miserable sinners. This low opinion of ourselves was a product of a sixteenth century image of humanity which no longer pertains and has been removed to a great degree in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*.

The Prayer Book is, of course, a living liturgy. It will always be changed to reflect the historical situation in which it is used — both time and place — but it will also frame those fundamental symbols of our faith that re-present for us the mysteries of Christ's Incarnation and Passion: the water of Baptism, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, as well as the other manifold expressions of blessing, healing, joining and forgiving.

Ladd was deeply committed to the participation of the entire congregation in the liturgy. His theory was that the reason Morning Prayer came to replace the Eucharist as the principal service of worship on Sundays was that Cranmer did a better job of making the Daily Offices participatory than he did the Eucharist. Another way of putting it, which overlaps Ladd's theory somewhat, is that the Eucharist required more effort than Morning and Evening Prayer and as theological conviction lagged and Anglicanism became lazy, the Eucharist fell into the less frequent use.

There is no question but that Anglicanism holds the Holy Eucharist to be the principal service of worship on Sunday. It is not a matter of providing "alternatives" to the Eucharist or Morning Prayer, any more than for a husband and wife reading love poetry is an "alternative" to sexual intercourse. The heart of liturgical worship for the Christian as Anglicanism sees it is the weekly remembrance of Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist.

It is important that the Eucharist be celebrated so that it invites participation at a sensible level.

Sensibility comes through being a part of the action. It requires the inclusion of persons other than the priest in reading the lessons, offering the prayer of the faithful and in distributing the elements, but it calls for more than that. There should be times of silence to allow the people to make themselves at home in what is being said or done; and there needs to be a sense of presence on the part of the priest which does not intrude his personality and yet invites intimacy. These are ideals in Anglican worship, which should be

cause for rejoicing when present rather than complaint when absent. They are difficult to achieve.

Preaching is an essential part of liturgy to Anglicans. Our intention is that the readings in the lectionary, as given to us by the church, are to be interpreted in the sermon so as to illumine the lives of their hearers. Anglican preaching has been characterized by some as boring, unenthusiastic, pedantic and uninspired. It can be all of these things, but our conception of its purpose does not require that it be any of them. It is true that we do not "preach for a decision," as is often the intention in the revivalist tradition (which includes the Methodists, Baptists, Disciples and the various Pentecostal groups). We preach for insight that requires an ability to listen and think with the left hand.

The spirit of the revivalists is not unknown among us, however. Revivalism comes from the Pietism that was brought to this land early in the eighteenth century and is associated a generation later with John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitefield (1714-1770). Pietism teaches the absolute authority of the Scriptures and the necessity for a personal experience of salvation. Preaching is at the center of its worship.

Where Pietism stuck in Anglicanism it is known as the Evangelical movement. It was responsible for a reawakening of Anglicanism in England at the end of the eighteenth century, which included religious education and a renewed social consciousness. Although it is difficult to generalize, it is probably fair to say that where Evangelicalism exists today in Anglicanism there is not the awareness of liturgy as the heart of our Christian life. Liturgical worship does not usually effect that dramatic, identifiable moment of knowing God's overwhelming presence, which evangelistic preaching seeks, and consequently is played down. It is also true that there are more obvious points of contact between Evangelicalism and the expectations of popular American religion, and consequently, the homogenized worship of Protestantism seeps into some Anglican parishes in this country.

Whereas Evangelicalism attempts to make the issues and answers of sixteenth and seventeenth century reformed theology normative, Ladd was very concerned that in Anglican liturgical revival we not make seventeenth century Roman Catholic practice normative. He was quick to speak out against various uncanonical or illegal liturgies that arose during the first half of this century, such as the American Missal. As he rightly pointed out, they were adaptations

of the Roman Catholic Missal of Pius V (1504-1572). Those very things which Roman Catholic liturgiologists were seeking to abolish we were incorporating (e.g., the Last Gospel, noncommunicating High Mass, private devotions at the beginning of the rite).

This leads to a very important point. It is vital for us to be clear concerning the authoritative liturgy in the Anglican Communion. We cannot have "two Prayer Books," as some suggested we ought during the debate over the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, and we cannot have the option of choosing our own liturgy. The reason is that for us what we pray is what we believe. This is usually stated in theology in the Latin, *lex orandi lex credendi* (literally, "the law of praying is the law of believing"). Whereas some communions have their official theologians and others have their confessions, we have the *Book of Common Prayer*. Our theology arises out of our common liturgy.

The Anglican commitment to uniformity of worship is more than a matter of taste or convenience. It is a question of belief. For example, if we look at the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* with a theological eye we will see an understanding of humanity as sinner and yet capable of longing for God. Anglicans since Pelagius, a fifth century British monk, have been given to thinking we can save ourselves; but the *Book of Common Prayer* is clear that, whereas we do not agree with Calvin that we are totally depraved — we removed from the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* the words in the Confession "there is no health in us" — we require God's powerful presence to become whole.

Two dangers come to mind in this emphasis upon liturgy. One is that we can become precious. Ladd was not exempt from this, as I have already suggested in passing. He seemed to make overmuch of the Nonjurors, a group of church people including eight bishops who remained loyal to James II (VII) (1633-1701), when, because of his pro-Papist policies, he was forced to abdicate in the English rebellion of 1688. James II (VII) was replaced by the Calvinist William of Orange and his wife, Mary, who actually had the claim to the throne. The Nonjurors believed that to swear allegiance to William and Mary would be a violation of their previous oath to James II. They included most of the intellectual leadership of the Church of England at that time. They also held a higher doctrine of the church and the sacraments than those who took the oath to William and Mary. Because they refused to swear they were

expelled from their offices in the church. Ladd apparently felt that we needed to recover their pure Anglican spirit.

This rendering of a period from the past as ideal imposes an artificial liturgy. Obviously, we draw from the past. But we must not do it in an arbitrary, uninformed or unreflective fashion. Liturgy has no purpose in itself. As is true for the Scripture, if liturgy is to live it must illumine our lives and give them meaning. Otherwise our worship becomes affected. Priests can fuss over an apparel on an amice — an oblong piece of embroidery that is attached to the soft collar of an alb — for ten minutes and then preach at the Eucharist an utterly inane sermon for five minutes. This is being precious. We have our priorities all wrong.

The other danger is that we lose confidence in the liturgy to effect the deep transformation of our peoples' symbolic world. We push for an immediate payoff, a goosy feeling they can repent as they walk out the church door. This leads to gimmickery or foolishness. I have heard it suggested that on the feast of the Ascension one might preach from a ladder leaning against the rood beam. More than one priest has ridden into his church on Palm Sunday on a donkey, which has provided much food for the local wits. There was a time in the 1960's when every church conference had to have helium-filled balloons at the closing Eucharist.

Liturgical tricks are only exceeded in bad taste by priests who confuse sloppiness with sincere worship. I once knew a bishop who thought it "meaningful" to read the liturgy as if he had never seen the Prayer Book before. One priest explained to his congregation that his ill-fitting alb, his levis and muddy boots made people feel that he was "one of the people." Still another cleric justified his sanctuary manners, which left observers with the impression of a hippopotamus on locoweed, on the grounds that he was afraid of appearing effeminate.

Anglicanism takes a great risk with its insistence that liturgy is the ground of church life. This claim lays upon us the need to perform great drama, or something very close to it, every Sunday. The fact that we frequently fail is not nearly so noteworthy as the fact that so often we succeed.