

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for the *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_cbrfj.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_cbrfj.php)

# INTRODUCTION —

## ALL THINGS DECENTLY AND IN ORDER

Someone once asked Dean Inge if he was interested in liturgiology. 'No', replied that worthy churchman, 'and I don't collect postage stamps either'. Some members of the Fellowship may have a similar feeling of mild puzzlement on discovering that this latest issue of their *Journal* has been devoted to the subject of liturgy.

Is it just the sound of the word that makes us think of mournful dirges and clerical droning that is as uninspiring as it is uninspired? Certainly most of those brought up in orthodox Brethren ways will react instinctively against it. But we trust that what follows will prove enlightening and constructive. There is no doubt that it will to those who have learnt that many of the classic either-or's of Christian controversy are to be set aside in favour of both-and's, which tend both to mutual love and respect amongst Christians and to the glory of the many-sided grace of God. How often the saying of William Temple is found true: 'Men are right when they assert and wrong when they deny'.

'No man is an island entire by itself'. If we wish to describe ourselves fully and accurately, we cannot exclude elements from the past (heredity) and the present (environment), however external they may seem to be. The principle of interdependence\* is one that is seen throughout God's world. If an inanimate object is at rest, it is because of equal and opposing forces acting upon it. If a society is stable, it is because it is experiencing the achievement of justice through the equilibria of power. There is in these situations an underlying tension, but a balance of power is not in itself conflict, nor is it essentially evil.

So too on the human level, a choice or act of ours made under the apparent constraint of external factors is in a more real sense our own than a purely capricious or random one would be. The freedom to be ourselves is only enjoyed within a framework of discipline, and behaviour that is predictable and that conforms to some set pattern can nonetheless be the product of a free will. Equally in Christian worship, if it is to be a truly personal expression of our response to the word of God, we shall seek neither to disclaim the heritage of the past nor to ignore the requirements of the present.

The highest achievements in the arts have been made within a framework of what would seem to us strange limitations, but are to the artist the essential conditions of his work. The Athenian dramatists using only three actors, the sculptors of the Parthenon fitting their work into the triangular pediments at each end, Beethoven writing his most expressive

---

\* Cp. J. A. T. Robinson, *On Being the Church in the World*, 47f.

work in sonatas for solo piano or string quartets (not quintets, sextets, etc.), and all those who have chosen the discipline of verse rather than the apparent freedom of prose—in all these, form is seen not as a hindrance, but as a channelling of the artist's gift.

It is in service, or bondage, to Christ that we find perfect freedom, and this liberty/slavery paradox lies close to the question of liturgy. On the one hand, Paul could write to the Galatians, who were busy subjecting themselves to various rules and regulations, and urge them to enjoy the liberty which Christ had won for them. On the other hand, he had to write to Corinth and tell the 'do-it-yourself' enthusiasts there that God is a God not of confusion but of peace, and that all things must be done decently and in order.

The first Jewish Christians continued to take part in Temple and synagogue worship, which itself was a judicious blend of the fixed and the free, and its abandonment by the early Christians can hardly be put down to any fundamental discontent with this pattern of worship, but rather to circumstances. When we come to the mixed Jewish-Gentile churches, the evidence of the letters of Paul is of a small, but definite and growing number of liturgical expressions\* which Paul could expect his readers to be familiar with. The epistles of the mid-fifties presuppose in such sections as Rom. 8: 14-17, 1 Cor. 16: 22, and 2 Cor. 1: 18-22 the use and understanding of the Semitic words 'Abba', † 'Amen', and 'Marana tha'. The next decade, as reflected in the Pastoral Epistles, sees the extension of liturgical forms from corporate prayer to credal statements, 'faithful sayings' enshrining 'the pattern of sound words'. Finally we come to that blaze of liturgical colour, the Revelation, proof, if ever one was needed, that 'repetitions' need not be 'vain'.

We should therefore neither fear forms or set patterns in worship, nor think them unbiblical. Rather let us fear that which is without form and void. Here we might touch on the perils attached to extempore forms of worship (which are often extempore in more senses than one!). George Whitfield said of a certain preacher 'He prayed me into a good frame of mind, and if he had stopped there, it would have been very well; but he prayed me out of it by keeping on'. Spurgeon quotes this in the *Lecture to my Students* entitled 'Public Prayer', and adds: 'The abundant long-suffering of God has been exemplified in his sparing some preachers, who have been great sinners in this direction!' At the time of a proposed visit to Scotland in 1769, Dr. Johnson observed to Boswell: 'And, Sir, the

---

\*Of course the liturgical enthusiast will find in the NT many more traces of liturgical expression than can safely be agreed upon. C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament*, 69ff., gives a restrained survey of the evidence, more so than in O. Cullman's *Early Christian Worship* or R. P. Martin's *Worship in the Early Church*.

---

†Since in both Rom. 8.15 and Gal. 4.6 Paul supplies the translation of 'Abba' ('Father'), it is difficult to know why he should quote the word in Aramaic at all, unless as an allusion to the Lord's Prayer in its Lucan form.

Presbyterians have no form of prayer in which they know they are to join. They go to hear a man pray, and are to judge whether they will join with him'. Another Scottish traveller, Charles Simeon said: 'I have on my return to the use of our Liturgy felt it an inestimable privilege that we possess a form of sound words, so adapted in every respect to the wants and desires of all who would worship God in spirit and truth. If *all* men could pray at *all* times as *some* men can *sometimes*, then indeed we might prefer extempore to pre-composed prayers' (H. C. G. Moule's biography, p. 124).

Further, as Mr. Clines shows in his article, it is useless to pretend that we do not have a liturgy of our own. It is too late to ask 'Should we use a liturgy?': rather the question must be 'What sort of liturgy meets the requirements both of scriptural principles of worship and of twentieth-century life?'

David Clines was the Secretary of the CBRF group in Cambridge while he was studying at Tyndale House, and is now a Lecturer in the Department of Biblical History and Literature in the University of Sheffield. He is concerned to show us the self-contained liturgical world that most Brethren live in: you may not always think the cap fits, but it is worth giving it a serious trial for size! There is also much here that is constructive, although this has been basically Mr. Stunt's area.

Next in our *Journal* we take a look over the garden fence. Dr. G. F. Tripp, who is in general practice in Dartford, and was a fourth generation Exclusive Brother until 1960, describes recent liturgical tendencies in that movement. He has asked us to mention his debt to Mr. Douglas Malpas of Bournemouth in the preparation of the article, and it is only fair to add that it was written in 1965, and therefore does not purport to cover any developments since that date.

The description of 'an attempt to be a true Indian expression of New Testament practices' was sent to us soon after his arrival in India by Mr. W. J. Pethybridge of the Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade.

Some current thinking among Baptists is represented by Mr. Winward's article. This was originally presented as a paper to a Baptist seminary in North America, and is reproduced by kind permission of the editor of the collected papers, *Worship and Renewal*, John E. Skoglund, Colgate Rochester Divinity School. Stephen Winward will be well-known for his writings in conjunction with Godfrey Robinson, and draws upon over 25 years' experience as Minister of Highams Park Baptist Church in this article. This is itself a much condensed version of his 1963 W. T. Whitley Lectures, *The Reformation of our Worship* (Carey Kingsgate Press), which we warmly commend.

Finally, Mr. Stunt points a way ahead. We are grateful to him for producing this at a time when in addition to his work as a lawyer he is coping admirably with the CBRF Secretaryship, ironing out the deficiencies bequeathed by me, and raising it to a state of rare efficiency. Philip

Handley Stunt comes from a family, members of which have for several generations been committed to brethren principle. Educated at an Anglican school, and now living in a rural area which is rapidly being developed without provision for new churches, he finds that practice of the biblical doctrine of the church in his neighbourhood clearly means playing a full part in the life of the parish church, where he is a member of the P.C.C. He is glad to record that there are many Brethren and quite a number of Assemblies (in the London area and Home Counties at least) who take no exception to his ministry on that account. As leader of an ecumenical house-group in Chelmsford last year, he was encouraged by the high proportion of CBRF membership from local Assemblies who took part.

What follows, therefore, is based not on speculation or even ignorance, but on first-hand experience and observation. It may be that some of what is suggested here has already been tried: comments from such experience would be gladly received by the Editor, whether encouraging or discouraging!

But is all this important, a top priority? Is the general revival of interest in liturgy a hankering, as sociologist Bryan Wilson suggests (*Religion in Secular Society*, ch. 8), after a special area of professional competence by men who have seen their previous rôles as social workers and counsellors taken over by others more qualified? Are we turning in on ourselves and consoling ourselves for a failure in evangelism? Are we giving too much weight to something that may stop a little inter-church drifting, but which will not bring the outsiders rushing in? Are we being offered the thin end of a clerical wedge in the new importance given to the 'liturgical draftsman'?

I hope that what follows will allay these suspicions. We shall see that liturgy is 'the work of the people', the form of our response to God as redeemed human beings, not professional holy men. But in this we need to recognise gift. At present we recognise the gift of the hymn-writer and tune-composer. Now we are being asked to foster gift at present dormant, not to suppress it in any way. Finally we can realise that there is no need to fight a battle over the priorities of worship and evangelism. The convert must become a member of a worshipping community, and that worship must lead to witness in life and work, 'till work itself be worship, and our every thought be to thy praise'.

J. M. SOMERVILLE-MEIKLE

---

The communion of saints means sharing in a tradition, in that flowing life of the People of God from one generation to another, in that sharing and handing down of God's gifts to the Church. This means the Bible of course, and the great literature of devotion (hymns, prayers and liturgies, and lives of godly men and women)—an enormous fund of real wisdom, an unending set of Mrs. Beeton's and Bradshaws and Wisdens.

Gordon Rupp, *Last Things First*, p.19