

LITURGY WITHOUT PRAYERBOOK

David J. A. Clines

A liturgy is a set form determining the content, order, and phraseology of a service of worship. In comparison with the printed liturgies of other Christian churches, Brethren forms of service would seem at first sight to be entirely non-liturgical; but closer acquaintance with Brethren practice reveals that the content, order, and (to a certain extent) phraseology is in fact determined, by custom reinforced by theological explanation. One may thus speak of Brethren unwritten 'liturgy',¹ or rather, 'liturgies', for there are minor regional differences and some churches which do not conform at all. There are of course separate liturgies for the various services of the church, but attention will be concentrated here on the 'morning meeting'.

It will be suggested in this article that Brethren liturgy, partly because it is unwritten, and partly because of peculiarly Brethren theological concepts, shares in large measure the weaknesses of the liturgical form while lacking many of its strengths.

I. Content

A distinguishing feature of a new member of a Brethren assembly is his ignorance of what is and what is not suitable at a 'morning meeting'. It is not always possible to discover precisely what is suitable, both because practice varies somewhat from assembly to assembly, and because the content of this service is thought by many to be a matter of 'spiritual apprehension' and so not amenable to rational enquiry. But the ruling principle is that it is a meeting for worship, understood as adoration. In worship we are concerned not with others, ourselves, or our blessings, but with the Lord alone.

'Worship is not prayer. The suppliant is not a worshipper. When I unite with others in prayer and intercession, we are before God as those who are seeking special blessing; but when we worship, *we give rather than receive*; we are before Him asking nothing, but with full hearts overflowing in adoration at His feet Thanksgiving is the consequence of blessing received But in worship—considered in and by itself—we lose sight of ourselves and our blessings, and are occupied with what God is in Himself Led by the Holy Spirit, we rise above ourselves, and contemplate the Lord in all His varied attributes and glories'.²

When this principle of worship as adoration is most strictly interpreted the conclusion is drawn that no prayer or hymn is in order which is not of the nature of adoration, and 'ministry', which must necessarily be addressed to the congregation and not to God, is debarred from the principal part of the meeting. In the most extreme cases, it is not even permitted for the Scripture to be read, since to do so is not to 'adore' the

Lord. It is interesting to notice that opponents of these strict views usually accept the same presuppositions as their brethren, namely that adoration is the proper occupation of the believer at the Lord's Supper; for they defend the reading of Scripture and 'ministry' before the breaking of bread on the ground that these things are *conducive* to worship.

The normal 'morning meeting' is therefore restricted to 'worship' (adoration) and to such elements as may contribute towards it. The range of activities comprises: prayer (of praise and adoration), hymns (of praise or reflection on the work of Christ, usually with emphasis on his death), reading of Scripture relating to the work of Christ, 'Christ-centred' ministry, and of course the breaking of bread. The content is thus determined by the unwritten liturgy.

It is not generally recognised by Brethren, however, that the connotation they put upon 'worship' is unknown to most other Christians. In normal use, the word 'worship', far from being the term for a particular kind of prayer, includes all the activities which take place in a church service: confessing of sins, intercessory prayer, hymns, reading of Scripture, confession of faith, sermon, collection, etc.

Examination of the words translated 'worship' in the NT (see Appendix) confirms the usage of the majority of Christians, and leaves us without Biblical authority for restricting the term to one form of prayer, even if it is the highest. Worship is rather the constant attitude of the believer toward God, his recognition and expression of the worthiness of God. C. F. Hogg wrote: 'Worship is not something done on occasion and in association with others; it is the characteristic and normal attitude toward God of the believer's soul'.³ To serve God, to fear God, and to worship God are virtually synonymous.

From this it follows that *public* worship is ideally the collective expression of worship (in the wider sense) on the part of the faithful community. The activities of public worship will therefore reflect and collectivise the life of worship of the individual members of the church, and since nothing is more characteristic of private worship than the diversity of its expression, the concept of diversity and complexity will be prominent in public worship. Whatever means the individual Christian uses to express his sense of worthiness of God will, on the whole, be appropriate also in times of public worship. If, for example, by confession of sin or the obedient hearing of the Word of God the Christian acknowledges the holiness and worthiness of God, the church as a whole in its public worship may also employ these means. Brethren often say that a 'morning meeting' reflects the spiritual life of the congregation during the week; I would go further and say it ought to reflect their spiritual life in all its variety. It is interesting to find Oscar Cullmann remarking that the component parts of the service of worship in the NT church were 'extraordinarily manifold', and that 'the worship life of our Church in contrast seems remarkably impaired'.⁴ And Cullmann belongs to a liturgical Church!

Diversity is of course one of the first features a person used to Brethren ways notices about an Anglican service. In the service of Morning Prayer,⁵ for example, the following elements appear: sentences of Scripture encouraging repentance, an exhortation to repentance and confession, confession of sin, pronouncement of God's forgiveness for the penitent, the wide-ranging Lord's Prayer, invocation for God's blessing on the service, a psalm (95) which includes both praise and warning, an OT reading, the *Te Deum* (praise and confession of faith), NT reading, the *Benedictus* (Lk 1: 68ff.), the Apostles' Creed (confession of faith), prayers (for spiritual blessings: intercession for queen, royal family, clergy and people; benediction); and in addition (though these are not prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer) many churches include a sermon and hymns.

By comparison, the scope of a 'morning meeting' is rather narrow, in that there are essentially only hymns and prayers of adoration in addition to the breaking of bread. Any sermon before the breaking of bread will probably be limited to the person of Christ. And there is still in some places a tendency to focus attention throughout the service almost exclusively on the death of Christ.

What elements, then, do we appear to be lacking in our services of worship?

a. Confession. It is sometimes remarked by visitors to Brethren assemblies that the Brethren do not seem to think it necessary to confess their sins. Everyone knows that the Anglican service of Morning Prayer begins with a call to confession and the general confession, but Brethren sometimes raise three objections to that procedure: (i) that it is not necessary to ask for forgiveness because our sins have all been forgiven (ii) that we come to the Lord's Supper to remember the Lord, not to remember our sins, and (iii) that any confession of sin should be a private matter, done by way of 'preparation' for the Lord's Supper.

(i) Perhaps there are not many who would make this objection, and it is probably only arguable within an ultra-dispensationalist framework, but a certain feeling that to ask for forgiveness is somehow sub-Christian lingers on among some who could produce no reason for their feeling. There is not much in the NT perhaps about confession and asking for forgiveness, but these practices are such natural expressions of the religious conscience that it is not surprising that the NT does not take much space to inculcate the habit. It is only among Bible-worshippers, for whom everything must be justified by a text of Scripture, that any objection could be felt to the practice of confession of sins. In any case, surely the phrase from the Lord's Prayer, 'forgive us our trespasses', is sufficient warrant, and if Brethren are right in calling this a 'model prayer' rather than a set form of words, there is all the more reason for the frequent asking of forgiveness. Brethren know all about the past, present and future aspects of salvation; there are also past, present, and future aspects of forgiveness

and confession. The Christian man is, in Luther's phrase, *simul justus et peccator* (at one and the same time justified and a sinner), and so may, and indeed should, make his daily confession to God without detriment to the once-for-all forgiveness he has obtained.

(ii) This second objection is perfectly valid, but the purpose of confession is not to direct attention to our sins, but to God who 'pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel'. There cannot be many who have not found that their appreciation of God's goodness is enhanced by their recognition of their own worthlessness. And further, it is morally dangerous to concentrate on God's worth and glory without constantly allowing our knowledge of Him to impinge upon our own lives; it is to separate religion and ethics, which is paganism (and the sin of those notorious 'saints in the assembly, devils at home').

(iii) To the third objection it may be replied that even if each member of the church had 'made his confession' beforehand, it might still be proper to have a *communal* confession of sins in church, or a confession 'one to another'. And since it is extremely unlikely that every member of the congregation will have made such a confession previously, is it not valuable to incorporate a general confession into the service of the church? It is interesting to find in the *Didache*, perhaps the earliest Christian document outside the NT, evidence for such confessions: 'In the church thou shalt confess thy transgressions, and shalt not come to thy prayer with an evil conscience' (chap. 4), and 'Now on the Lord's Day, when you are assembled together break bread and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions' (chap. 14).

It is encouraging to see that in recent years there has been some criticism of current Brethren practice, as the following quotations will show:

There seems no justification in Scripture or common sense for the concept that the morning meeting is distinctively and exclusively a 'worship' meeting, from which the expression of all spiritual sentiment other than adoration is to be excluded. This idea finds a bizarre expression in the notion that penitence is out of place on this occasion, and many of us might feel that little impoverishes the Communion Service so much as a complete absence of all sense of unworthiness to eat and drink the Lord's Supper.⁶

The NT emphasis on the Lord's Supper as an act in which we re-enter into the saving grace of the death of Christ presupposes the necessity for an acknowledgement of our own unworthiness, and the confession of our many sins and failings.⁷

How can we possibly forget our sins, our sinnership, when we remember the Lord at the Supper?⁸

That Christ saw fit to refer to the forgiveness of our sins as immediately behind his provision of this memorial [cf. Mt 26:28] should be sufficient to silence, once for all, any suggestion that it is wrong to refer to the forgiveness of our sins when we meet around His Table.⁹

b. Petition. Petitionary prayers are often looked down on by the 'spiritually-minded' and excluded from the service of worship. It must be acknowledged that many of the 'bread and butter' prayers one hears take a rather mechanistic view of the activity of God and so are uninspired and uninspiring. But there is reason for thinking that intelligent and large-hearted petitions may have a place in worship and a connection with the Lord's Supper. The man who begs a favour of his superior honours the power and position of the one to whom he addresses his request. Can it be denied that 'large petitions' may be as much an expression of our worship (sense of God's worthiness) as any recital of the glories of God's nature? And if in the Lord's Supper we have set before us the self-giving concern of Christ for his people and the world, what more appropriate occasion can there be for bringing church needs and world problems before him?

c. Sermon. Brethren are sometimes criticised for making overmuch of 'the ministry of the word', setting up the image of the 'ministering brother' as the ideal type of Christian, and turning their churches into 'preaching boxes' out of *Cold Comfort Farm*. But side by side with this overvaluation has gone a deprecation of the importance of the sermon at the Lord's Supper, so that it is often called 'a little word' or 'a few thoughts' (sometimes more appropriately 'a few scattered thoughts') and at times omitted altogether or else squeezed into the last ten minutes. Although many assemblies have made room for a sermon at the end of their morning service, the sermon is not thought of as *belonging* to the Lord's Supper, and in some cases it becomes the catalyst for a quite separate service subsequent to the Lord's Supper. The justification offered for this 'ministry of the word' is: 'On Sunday morning we get the largest number of the church together; more often than not they go away without any food at all'.¹⁰ This is, it must be realised, an argument from expediency; and of course in the absence of a better argument there is nothing wrong with that. But the question remains whether there might not be some theological reason which not only allows, but demands a sermon.

It is a commonplace among writers on liturgy who stand in the Reformed tradition that the two basic elements in the service of worship should be the Word (scripture and sermon) and the Sacrament.¹¹ The sermon is, as R. H. Fuller puts it in his valuable book *What is Liturgical Preaching?*, 'a bridge between Baptism and the Eucharist . . . It is the function of the liturgical sermon to reach back to the Baptism of the members of the congregation, to renew in them the sense of membership of the ecclesia, and to lead forward to the liturgical action of the Eucharist'.¹² As I see it, the significance of the Word is twofold: first, as Word of God, since it comes from God's side and not from the congregation, to be God's 'contribution' to the service of worship (and as such it should be an independent, free-standing element in the service just like the sacrament); and secondly, as *Word* of God, to be explanation of the significance of the ritual of the Lord's Supper and announcement of the action of God that is to occur in the Lord's Supper. The service of the Word should

thus be seen as an integral part of the meeting,¹³ not as a mere appendage to it, and as preceding and explaining the breaking of the bread, not as a subsequent item.

What in fact takes place in Brethren churches? 'There is many a celebration of the Lord's Supper at which the Scriptures are not read at all. If we add to these the many cases, when all we hear is either the institution of the Supper or the Passion Story, it is no exaggeration that for many of us the Scriptures have no living link with our worship'.¹⁴ Both the Scripture and the preaching of the Word are neglected in our morning services, and the result is that the rich significance of the Lord's Supper¹⁵ is only dimly recognised by most of the members of our churches.

Attention has been drawn here to three respects in which our services of worship seem to me to be deficient; without doubt there are others. The strength of liturgical forms of service lies to a large extent in their ability to incorporate all these elements of worship into one service, ensuring that all types of expression of the church's sense of God's worthiness are represented. Is this something which only a fixed liturgical form can do, or is it possible that when we recognise our deficiencies we may be able to introduce these elements into our own more free form? I do not know; perhaps the question can only be answered after we have tried. But I suspect that there is a limit to which a free form of service is capable of accepting expansion of scope. The more pieces there are to fit into the jigsaw the more there is to go wrong; and from the point of view of time it is difficult (though perhaps not impossible) to imagine how so many varied items could, in free form, be fitted into an hour or so.

The weakness of the liturgical form in respect of the content of the service is of course that it allows for no flexibility, but ordains that such and such elements, no more and no less, shall appear in each service of worship. But we may well ask whether with our more free form of service we have escaped the snare of inflexibility. What items in the 'morning meeting' are optional, in practice? It should also be noted that liturgical forms are not necessarily inflexible, and that given certain basic principles a great deal of variety and adaptation is possible. There is undoubtedly no group of churches who could make liturgical experiments and innovations with more freedom than the Brethren, and it is possible that it will be in the realm of liturgy that they will make their greatest contribution to the life of the ecumenical church of the second half of the twentieth century.

II. Order

We glory in the absence of pre-arranged order from our services of worship. Yet there is an order, perhaps not so rigidly fixed as to need an Act of Parliament to change it, but very firmly rooted all the same. If I walk into an assembly where I have never been before, I can be morally certain that the following will occur: There will first of all be a hymn, followed by a prayer. The alternation of hymn and prayer will continue for about three-quarters of an hour (not necessarily in the 'hymn-sandwich'

form, for there may be two or more prayers in a row, but never more than one hymn; and there will perhaps also be a 'little word'). At about 11.50 (if the meeting began at 11), the bread is broken, and the collection and notices will certainly come after that, and usually in that order. There will be a sermon of some sort, and the closing item will be a prayer. My guess is that no more than 10 per cent of assemblies in this country fail to conform to this pattern.

When it is pointed out that there is little to recommend this sequence of events, there are few that maintain that there is anything sacrosanct about the sequence, and most quite happily agree in theory that there is no good reason for this particular order, and that there could be no objection to, say, beginning with a Scripture reading or breaking the bread 15 minutes after the beginning of the meeting. But the minimal number of occasions on which such innovations are introduced and the rapidity with which they drop out of fashion is evidence of the remarkable pertinacity of the traditional order.

That there is no reason for the order and that another order might be equally good is readily agreed, but this is because it is consonant with the principle that order is human, but spontaneity divine. All orders are equally human and fallible, so there is little to choose between them. But if one tries to suggest that the order of a service of worship may have a spiritual significance and express an important theological truth, the agreement soon vanishes.

What theological truth, then, ought to find expression in the *order* of the service?

At the heart of the meaning of worship, as it seems to me, lies the notion that it is something men offer to God by way of response to the divine action and initiative. Logically and theologically the divine action comes first, and the offering of worship (the human *re*-action) is determined and motivated by it, and thus secondary to it. So worship is not something contrived by the worshipping community, but essentially a consequence of God's activity. The service of worship should therefore reflect this dependent and secondary nature of worship.

We meet at this point a terminological difficulty over the word 'worship'. Is worship merely the human response to the divine initiative, or is it both the activity of God towards us and our answer to Him? The latter has been argued by certain Lutheran and Anglican theologians, who speak of worship as a twofold event, God's speaking and our answering. '[God] is the primary subject. Worship is first and foremost God's service to us. It is an action by God, which is directed towards us. Our activity in worship can be nothing other than reaction and response . . . The two sides in worship are therefore in no sense equal; they cannot even be considered as the two poles of worship, for they are essentially different.¹⁶ 'Worship is a two-way traffic. It is not one-way traffic from Heaven to earth . . . , nor one-way traffic from earth to heaven'.¹⁷ Such statements, although valuable in stressing the primary character of the work

of God, introduce a confusion into the discussion. It is surely a highly idiosyncratic use of words to speak of worship as 'God's service to us'. We need to distinguish between worship itself and the 'service of worship'. There must be room in a service of worship for God to speak to us, but when he does so, as for example in the Scripture, this is not in itself worship, though our simultaneous response of believing and obedient hearing of the Word may be worship. The term 'service of worship' or 'morning worship' may indeed be misleading if it suggests that all that occurs in that gathering is worship (that is, the human response).

If we agree, then, that worship is response to God's prior activity, how should this understanding of worship be reflected in our services?

First, by avoidance of the exclusive use of phraseology which lays stress on the initiative of the church in worship. Phrases like 'bringing our baskets of first fruits' have doubtless gone out of fashion in most places, but there are modern equivalents. Even more open to objection is the distinction often drawn between 'giving' and 'getting' on the principle that it is more blessed (or spiritual) to give than to get.¹⁸ What, as R. H. Fuller asks, if this 'ostensible, and often ostentatious, devotion' to the principle of spirituality turns out to be not spirituality at all but British Pelagianism?¹⁹ The cliché that the tone of a 'morning meeting' is determined by the spiritual lives of the congregation during the week (whatever truth it may contain) likewise reflects the view that worship is primarily the *offering* of the congregation (determined by the quality of their life), and not *response* to the activity of God.

Secondly and more importantly, the rhythm of 'action of God' followed by 'reaction of men' can be woven into the structure of the service. A key point in the service is the very beginning; here is the ideal opportunity for making explicit the sense of the congregation's dependence upon the prior word of God, even in their worship. Nothing is more appropriate therefore at the beginning of a service than reading from the Scripture, whether it be sentences of God's welcome to his people, a call to confession, or an account of God's activity in Christ. Sometimes a hymn will also fulfil this function, but more often than not I feel that a hymn of praise gets the service off on the wrong foot, because it is, so to speak, our contribution and not God's. (In an Anglican church I used to visit, the service began with a breezy delivery of the announcements, one of which at least could be relied on to raise loud laughter in the congregation. This was ruinous, of course. Whether the fact that the vicar has now become a bishop has any significance I do not know.)

Furthermore, this rhythm or pattern may be appropriately applied to other parts of the service. A confession of faith (e.g. the Apostles' Creed) is a fitting response to a revelation of the name or nature of God whether in the Scripture, sermon, or hymn. But perhaps the most important place for some response, and a place where in Brethren services there is a conspicuous vacuum, is following the communion. If the Lord's Supper is an occasion when Christ offers himself to his people in the bread and wine,

there occurs here a very meaningful action of God which ought to be followed directly by a reaction of men. In the character of the Lord's Supper as God's renewal of the new covenant, it requires the church's response of 'all that the Lord hath spoken we will do'. The taking of the collection immediately after the Supper, which happens in many Brethren churches, has often been remarked on as a complete anticlimax which tends to destroy the seriousness of the Supper. To say this is doubtless to undervalue the potential spiritual significance of the collection, but it must be acknowledged that since explicit statement of the meaning of the collection is never made (as it might be in an offertory prayer) it is not surprising that many look on it as a purely 'secular' or material occurrence which takes place within the service only because this is the most convenient time for it. Nevertheless there can be no question that whatever the spiritual significance given to the collection may be, it should never be allowed to be the only expression of response on the part of the congregation to the work of God in the sacrament. In other words, if our giving of money is our return to Christ for the giving of himself in the sacrament, it is perfectly appropriate if it forms part of a larger expression of our response, but it is utterly inadequate as the whole of that response, a rôle which it is unfortunately called on to play in many Brethren churches. Some indeed have become aware of the incongruity of the collection at this point and have tried to remedy the situation by interposing a hymn. Certain hymns do in fact express the response which is proper at this time, but the number of occasions on which appropriate hymns are chosen is, in my experience, small. To be sure, some response by the whole congregation rather than by one individual on behalf of the congregation is to be preferred; and if, as in a Brethren church, the only form of written liturgy is the hymnbook, a hymn it will have to be. A communal or antiphonal reading of a passage of Scripture could also be appropriate, and though it is rarely if ever done it would not offend any of the unwritten Brethren rules of procedure. But one 'item' of response may well be thought to be insufficient for the importance of the occasion, and in my view nothing less than a whole liturgical complex is called for at this point.

The strength of a liturgical form is that the basic order of events depends upon theological presuppositions, even though certain accretions to the fundamental shape may not be explicable. The Brethren order of service lacks any theological justification (beyond the secondary aetiologies that have grown up in some quarters), and at some points even runs counter to the essential nature of worship.

The weakness of liturgical forms in the sphere of order is that the order is inflexible even though it is not at all points justifiable. Once again we must ask whether Brethren services do not suffer in practice from inflexibility of order. There is a theory of free and therefore changeable form, but if we move into the realm of theory we might argue from the other side that it is not difficult to imagine a liturgical form whose order is adaptable.

III. Phraseology

Under this heading let us first consider the advantages and disadvantages of a printed form of service which supplies not only the order of the service but also the words to be used at each point; and then examine how Brethren services compare with liturgical forms.

The main advantages of a prescribed form of words are these: (i) All the congregation may take part in prayers and many other elements of the service. This can be a means of expressing on the one hand the unity of the church and on the other the right of the individual Christian to direct access to God without the intervention of a human mediator. Thus while Brethren often understand the priesthood of all believers to mean the right of all (male) believers to *lead* the congregation's worship, it is arguable that more fitting expression is given to this truth by the participation of *all* the congregation in vocal worship. (ii) Many who use a printed liturgy find that for instance the prayers of great saints not only put into words for them what they think and feel but can never manage to express for themselves, but also enlarge their understanding and appreciation of the nature of God and work of Christ. However gifted the members of an assembly may be, their spiritual experience and understanding is limited beside that of the whole church of all ages; if, by comparison, the spiritual wisdom of the church universal is laid under tribute, the depth and richness of the worship can be greatly increased. (iii) The language of liturgies is usually pithy and memorable; this is of value in that it focusses the minds of the congregation upon what they are saying or what is being said, and also in that much of it remains with the congregation after the service is over. Some also find the language of liturgy beautiful, and although the cult of the ugly has not yet gone out of fashion, it is difficult to see why, other things being equal, a prayer should not be beautiful. (iv) Familiarity with the service in all its details is to many a great help in worship; they know what is coming next, so they do not have to think for words and can think themselves *into* the words they are saying by habit. C. S. Lewis, with almost Chestertonian extravagance, says 'I can make do with almost any kind of service whatever, if only it will stay put'; and again, 'As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not yet dancing, but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice . . . The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God'.²⁰ Without going to such lengths, many of us who are not used to a liturgical service will know the value of knowing the words of a hymn by heart, so that it is not necessary to pay attention to the words as 'those words that are to be sung' and it is possible to concentrate entirely upon the significance of the words.

Some of the weaknesses of the liturgical form are these: (i) It excludes any spontaneous expression of devotion. (ii) The weekly repetition of the same words can become boring and meaningless. (iii) Liturgies tend to become fossilised and out of date, so that they no longer express the faith of Christians in the modern world.

How does Brethren 'liturgy' fare when measured by these standards? In the first place, because there is no fixed form of words, none of the advantages of a liturgical service mentioned above are to be found. But in the second place, the absence of a written liturgy does not *ensure* that services lack the weaknesses of the liturgical form. The absence of a 'programme' does not always make for spontaneity, as we well know, but often for gaps and desperate expedients to fill those gaps. We are not compelled to use the same form of words every Sunday morning, but there are not a few members of our churches who have one basic prayer which appears on each occasion with variations. If we doubt the extent to which the language of our services is fossilised, we have only to consider how seldom we have taken from the service some fresh and memorable phrase or thought. And it might be added that the perpetuation of the venerable language of prayer which we have heard a thousand times but which remains utterly distinct from our common vocabulary is probably doing much to drive home the wedge between the secular and the sacred in our thinking and life.

To describe a Brethren service in the terms I have used will perhaps be thought to be over-pessimistic. It is true, and it ought to be said, that there are churches where there is a delightful spontaneity and freedom in the service of worship, and where people talk and pray from their contemporary spiritual experience, often struggling to fashion a new vocabulary of worship out of their own language and rejecting the second-hand language of other people's experience. But for every one assembly like this there are probably ten others as deeply immersed in cliché, tradition, and liturgical torpor as the average Anglican parish church of our polemics.

It is furthermore worth remarking that the weaknesses of the liturgical form are not necessarily inherent in that form. There is no reason why room should not be left for spontaneous prayer in a liturgical form; some Anglicans have taken a first step in this direction by inserting prayers not prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer. There is perhaps a place for much greater variety of liturgical forms; no one wants a service that is completely different every week, but perhaps some compromise between excessive variation and inflexibility may be achieved. As for the fossilisation of liturgical language, it cannot be denied that it has proved very difficult for churches to break away from the language of the Book of Common Prayer, as study of *The Liturgy in English*,²¹ which gives the communion service liturgies of 20-odd churches both Anglican and non-Anglican, will show. Perhaps the time has come for non-Anglican churches and churches without an inhibiting liturgical tradition to show what can be done in the way of contemporary, meaningful liturgy. A recent letter in *New Christian* from the Archdeacon of Doncaster draws attention to our present situation:

A new liturgy for East Africa has recently been produced, but the whole Christian heritage of worship is Western in pattern. Can the Anglican Church encourage our brothers in Africa to cut right away from the Prayer Book and this Christian heritage, and start

afresh to draw up forms of worship that really speak to the depths of the African soul? There is little sign of this being done; and if it were done we would probably pull it to pieces. We would say that it was syncretistic, or it was too emotional, or liturgically infantile, or what have you.

If Christianity is to be rooted firmly in Africa the forms of worship must be natural to the thought patterns of the ordinary people. At present members of the revival movement attend the formal church services, but for the most part they do not worship there but in their fellowship meetings.²²

I cannot but agree; but I think as well that the need for a freshly thought out liturgy is almost as great in England as it is in Africa.

It seems to me that there are three areas of our church life that stand in need of radical adjustment: witness (the equation of the gospel with preaching must be abolished), discipleship (both in teaching the Bible and in relating it to our modern world we fail to carry out the terms of the Great Commission), and worship. Our present forms of worship, however valuable theoretically, are not in practice what Christian worship ought to be; but we have in the Brethren the unique advantage of freedom to experiment and innovate and in so doing try to discover in the sphere of worship what the Spirit saith to the churches.

APPENDIX

The three most important terms for worship in the NT are *proskyneō*, *latreuō*, and *leitourgeō*, together with their related nouns.

Proskyneō, usually translated 'to worship', refers properly to the oriental custom of prostration before a (divine) king, a god, or something holy. It is not prayer but a symbolic physical act (Mt. 2.2; 4.9; 28.9). Attention is often drawn to the physical act by the addition of such words as 'falling down', or 'taking hold of his feet'. A request occasionally accompanies the prostration (e.g. Mt. 18.26; 20.20). This meaning of 'to prostrate oneself' accounts for half of the 60 occurrences of *proskyneō* in the NT.

Proskyneō has also developed as a general word for 'to perform religious duties', 'to worship' God or idols. In the meaning 'to worship God', apart from one passage in Jn. and a reference to the worship of God by heavenly beings in Rv., it is used exclusively of Jewish worship, and not of Christian (e.g. Jn. 12.20; Ac. 8.27; 24.11).²³ Jn. 4.20-24 does refer to the worship of God in the New Age, but this usage is determined by the use in the same context of *proskyneō* for the worship of the Jewish cult. Paul uses the word only once, referring to the obeisance of an unconverted man upon seeing that God was in the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 14.25).

Leitourgeō 'to perform a religious service' and the noun *leitourgia* 'religious service' refer to Jewish worship (Lk. 1.23; Hb. 9.21; 10.11), Christ's 'service' in mediating the new covenant (Hb. 8.6), and when used of Christian service refer usually to service to other Christians (Rm. 15.27; 2 Cor. 9.12; Phil. 2.20). Only once *leitourgia* means Christian worship of God ('worshipping and fasting', Ac. 13.2), and here it probably refers specifically to prayer.²⁴

Latreuō 'to serve, worship' and *latreia* 'service, worship' generally refer to the regular performance of cultic acts (Lk. 2.37; Ac. 26.7). Once again most references are to Jewish worship; when these words are used of Christians they express the continual allegiance of the believer to God (e.g. 'whom I serve [*latreuō*] with my spirit in the gospel of his son', Rm. 1.9; cf. 2 Tm. 1.3; 'the true circumcision worship [*latreuō*] God in spirit'). Cf. also Hb. 9.14; 12.28; Rm. 12.1 'your reasonable service [*latreia*]' (AV), 'your spiritual worship' (RSV).

NOTES

1. 'We have become so formalized in our procedure and so stereotyped in our expressions, our utterances, that anybody might think that we have got a rubric, if not a liturgy' (F. N. Martin, in *A New Testament Church in 1955* [High Leigh Conference of Brethren], p. 57).
2. An unnamed writer in *The Believer's Magazine* (Jan. 1963), p. 20.
3. Quoted by W. Heron, in *The Faith* (ed. F. A. Tatford) (1952), p. 225.
4. *Early Christian Worship* (1953), p. 12.
5. I do not imply that of all the Anglican services Morning Prayer corresponds most closely to a Brethren 'morning meeting'; perhaps the closest equivalent would be a Sung Eucharist.
6. A. Weston, 'Brethren Sacramentalism', *The Harvester* (May 1963), p. 72.
7. J. K. Howard, *The Witness* (Dec. 1964), p. 456.
8. E. W. Rogers, *The Harvester* (Feb. 1964), p. 22.
9. 'Touchstone', *The Witness* (March 1962), p. 107.
10. E. W. Rogers, in *A Return to Simplicity* [High Leigh Conference of Brethren, 1956], p. 43.
11. This is not only the Reformed position, for the Roman Simple Prayer Book now heads the two parts of the service of the mass: the 'Liturgy of the Word' and the 'Eucharistic Liturgy'. Cf. also the Vatican Council Instruction on the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, III. The Homily (Const. art. 52), p. 20. (I am indebted for these references to Fr. Alan Livesley.)
12. *What is Liturgical Preaching?* (1957), p. 12.
13. This seems to have been the case in first-century churches (cf. Cullmann, *op. cit.*, p. 12; and Fuller, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20).
14. H. L. Ellison, *The Household Church* (1963), p. 73.
15. Some admirable articles on the subject by J. K. Howard appeared in *The Witness* (Oct. and Nov. 1964).
16. W. Hahn, *Worship and Congregation* (1963), p. 15.
17. Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
18. In quarters where the term 'catholic' is the 'O.K. word', giving is 'catholic' and 'to come to church to get is held up as something which only benighted Nonconformists do' (Fuller, *ibid.*).
19. *ibid.*
20. *Letters to Malcolm: chiefly on prayer* (1964), pp. 13, 12.
21. B. Wigan, *The Liturgy in English* (1962).
22. P. G. Bostock, in *New Christian* (Nov. 4, 1965), p. 16.
23. B. Reicke, 'Some Reflections on Worship in the New Testament', in *New Testament Essays. Studies in memory of T. W. Manson* (ed. A. J. B. Higgins) (1959), p. 196.
24. *op. cit.*, p. 195.