

LITURGY AND SOCIOLOGY

IT has been Mr. Dawson's sound contention, time and again, in his various writings, that a civilization, a sociology, not founded on religion is bound to fail. His concern is 'for the recovery of a vital contact between the spiritual life of the individual and the social and economic organization of modern culture.'¹ This concern is born of a conviction that a culture, and hence a sociology, must have its roots firmly planted and established in theology and philosophy, otherwise the life-giving sap of religion will cease to flow. Then will the members lose their circulation, the tree will wither, and the social structure will disintegrate and decay. 'If our civilization is to recover its vitality, or even to survive, it must cease to neglect its spiritual roots and must realize that religion is not a matter of personal sentiment which has nothing to do with the objective realities of society, but is, on the contrary, the very heart of social life and the root of every living culture. The desecularization of modern civilization is no easy matter; at first sight it may seem a hopeless task.'² But the Church has second sight; and the Church has her Liturgy.

The task before us, then, is the desecularization of modern civilization; and the means are ready to hand. Our Holy Father has given the lead: 'Mindful, then, of our condition, that we are essentially limited and absolutely dependent on the Supreme Being, before everything else let us have recourse to prayer.'³ Society, and every individual member of society, is called to a renewal of baptismal vows, and to yield its members to serve justice, unto sanctification. The Liturgy of its very nature is best fitted both for the sanctification of the individual and of society—'there is a close connection between dogma and sacred

¹ *Enquiries* (Dawson), Introduction, p. v.

² *Id.*, Introduction, p. x.

³ *Caritate Christi Compulsi* (C.T.S. Ed.), p. 13.

liturgy, and between Christian worship and the sanctification of the faithful. Hence Pope Celestine I saw the standard of faith expressed in the sacred formula of the liturgy. 'The rule of our faith,' he says, 'is indicated by the law of worship. When those who are set over the Christian people fulfil the function committed to them, they plead the cause of the human race in the sight of God's clemency, and pray and supplicate in conjunction with the whole Church.'⁴

The Liturgy, though it is a social act of prayer, is also an act performed by many individuals. It has a sense-image value for every person participating which stirs the latent emotions of the worshipper and so evolves intercommunication between Creator and creature. In other words, Liturgy is to religion what the word is to thought; it is a mirror in which all should see truths of the supernatural order, just as they see truths of a natural order in the visible world. History shows the truth of this; for in the Ages of Faith the number of Holidays of Obligation was about equal to that of the Sundays. Twice a week then, at least, there was the uplifting cultural influence of this congregational singing of the Liturgy; and the effects of this influence are obvious on considering the conditions of that time. To quote Peter Maurin on the same point: 'People who built the Cathedral of Chartres knew how to combine cult, that is to say liturgy, with culture, that is to say philosophy, and cultivation, that is to say agriculture.'⁵ If the word sociology is substituted for philosophy the fitness of this dictum can be appreciated to the full.

It should be made clear here that when Liturgy is used in this essay it is not meant to signify merely greater co-operation of the people in the Mass, in Vespers, and in Compline, by increased congregational singing. That is undoubtedly one of the ends of the liturgical revival; but it is not the end in an exclusive sense. Liturgy, throughout

⁴ *Apostolic Constitution on the Liturgy*, etc., December 20th, 1928.

⁵ *Catholic Worker* (New York), February, 1934, p. 3.

this essay, is used for the Divine Office, for all the seven Sacraments, and for the Sacrifice of the Mass. The reason for this is that the wonderful symbolism of the Liturgy is, in the Mass and in the Sacraments, translated into actions pregnant with spiritual meaning. And these actions, rightly interpreted and rightly understood, are of the greatest value in arousing the sense image referred to above. Nevertheless it must be admitted that a distinction can be made between the Mass and Office on the one hand and the appreciation of the symbolism of the Sacraments on the other. The latter, as it is a purely mental process, cannot be urged with as much force as can the congregational singing of the Ordinary of the Mass, of Vespers and Compline, and also the practice of the Dialogue Mass urged by the present writer recently. A last consideration is that we are concerned here with the Liturgy as prayer—the Sacraments are not *in themselves* prayers. Consequently Liturgy here means *directly* the Mass Office, and *indirectly* the Sacraments.

If it be true that 'Christianity cannot manifest its full efficacy either as a living faith or as an organic social reality unless it heals the maladies of the individual soul,'⁶ then is it even more true that this cannot be done until it also heals the ills of the soul of society. Here again the Liturgy is the acceptable means, and this in two ways. The first of these is the fact that as a social act it makes all men, kings and beggars, employers and employees, tinkers, tailors, soldiers, sailors, equal. 'There is no stage of life that has not its part in the thanksgiving, praise, supplication, and reparation, in common use by the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church.'⁷ In the Liturgy there is a true democracy, and a society which is truly ordered, though the unity is concentration on a spiritual end—the cult of the Most High. Nevertheless this unity in the spiritual order is bound to be reflected in the temporal order, according to the maxim: *Verba movent, exempla*

⁶ Dawson, *Enquiries*, p. 307.

⁷ *Caritate Christi Compulsi* (C.T.S.), p. 14.

trahunt. For in the Liturgy, where all peoples are called to make one family, united by the bonds faith and charity, the ceremonies of the Church cannot fail to convey a sublime meaning. They continually set before the eyes of all a God, sanctifying man; Who, through His Son, has redeemed man from sin and damnation; Who, by endless graces, is providing for all the wants of the soul; Who has established throughout all mankind a universal religious society.

The Mystical Body is the link between the Liturgy and Sociology; and in proportion as men are brought to realise, through the Liturgy, their position as members of that Body, will their actions in the social sphere be affected thereby. That all may be united in the life of the Mystical Body, 'the Catholic Church seeks to bring the political and economic life of man into harmony with their supernatural end. But the tendency to section life is, alas, deeply rooted in fallen nature.'⁸ True enough, for a body which is rarely exercised is apt to grow stiff, and indeed lack co-ordination in its movements. But a visible manifestation of incorporation into Christ, a visible united action on the part of the members, cannot fail to revive and foster in them a determination to carry their Christ-life into the social and economic sphere. This is the first stage in the evolution of a sociology which has to restore the Social Order and 'perfect it conformably to the precepts of the Gospel.' We have seen the lamentable failure of the materialist conception of society, despite all its good intentions, to bring peace. Rather has it tended to divide interests which should be united in harmony, and to oppose class to class. The Mystical Body, however, 'leads one to see and to love his fellows as brothers . . . called to form the one same body of Christ. This makes possible a calm and judicious discussion of opposing theories; it opens the way for a just understanding of all the interests at stake.'⁹

So far we have only treated of the first way in which the

⁸ Fahey, *Social Rights of Christ the King*, p. 124.

⁹ Anger, *Mystical Body of Christ* (trans. Burke), p. 286.

Liturgy is the acceptable means of healing the diseases of society. The second, which is far more important, is the united, augmented and earnest prayer of the faithful for society. 'What a spectacle for heaven and earth is not the Church in prayer! For centuries without interruption, from midnight to midnight, is repeated on earth the divine psalmody of the inspired canticles; there is no hour of the day that is not hallowed by its special liturgy.'¹⁰ The Holy Father, again extolling the Liturgy, says: 'By it we are raised to God and united to him, thereby professing our faith and our deep obligation to him for the benefits we have received and the help of which we stand in constant need.'¹¹ While society finds a certain unity in the natural order in prayer, it is for God to give the increase and by the workings of His grace bring peace to a groaning world.

And what of the future? There are only two alternatives before civilization to-day. Either right order must be re-introduced and universal peace result, or civilization must decay and men return to barbarism. Strong in our belief in the effectiveness of prayer and the infinite goodness of God, we may look forward without presumption to a coming era of leisure. In the Ages of Faith, as we have said already, there were at least a hundred days in the year when no work was done. These days were to honour saints of the Church, and fitting honour was paid to them. Now we have a beggarly three or four public holidays throughout the year, and these are to honour the Banks! But a change is coming, and coming soon, unless, of course, some neo-Luddite movement arises and carries all before it in its policy of despair. For it is clear that, as machinery is perfected, more and more time will have to be killed by more and more people. We are on the threshold of an age of leisure. Indeed, we have crossed the threshold. Even the Government has now officially recognized that, whatever our future prosperity, there must always be hence-

¹⁰ *Caritate Christi Compulsi* (C.T.S.), p. 14.

¹¹ *Apostolic Constitution on the Liturgy*, etc., December 20th, 1928.

forth a considerable amount of unemployment. From being what it now is, an unmitigated disaster, this enforced leisure may be converted by a judicious redistribution of wealth into a potential (and indeed actual) blessing. 'Consequently it will once more be the rôle of the Church, as in the Middle Ages, to teach men how to use their leisure, and how their holidays, just as much as their work, can be lived for God. Already, as if by some divine instinct, the mind of the Church has been feeling its way in that direction. The movement for frequent and daily communion, for instance, is one which could never come to its full fruition under the pressure of industrial conditions of life. The liturgical movement, too, is gathering strength in preparation for the days to come when men will have time for God in their social life, and when Christ shall be King indeed.'¹² While admitting that this relation between Liturgy and Sociology is only of secondary importance compared with the issues that face us at present, it must be asserted that it is not an aspect which we can afford to neglect. The work must be begun now, and the foundations firmly laid, for 'nothing great had great beginnings *crescit occulto velut arbor aevo.*'

It is obvious that all cannot take an active part in the reconstruction of the social order. All are not fitted for it; in fact, it must be the work of comparatively few men. These few, born leaders and be it said born saints, must be supported by the suffrages and prayers of the faithful. Then will the active participation of the greatest number possible in the Liturgy be seen in its proper orientation. For it will be at once the generator and the reservoir of vast quantities of spiritual energy which the rank and file of the Church Militant has accumulated by its prayers, by the Liturgy—the prayer of the Church. Thus Christopher Dawson, explaining the sociological significance of the saint, has said: 'The saint, like every other great man, is the organ of a social purpose, and the success of his mission depends on the reserves of faith and spiritual will

¹² Drinkwater, *Money and Social Justice*, p. 51.

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that have been accumulated by the anonymous activity of ordinary imperfect men and women, each of whom has made an individual contribution, however minute it may be, to a new order of Christian life.¹³

The Holy Father in that stirring call to prayer, the encyclical, *Caritate Christi Compulsi*, declares outright that before the body Catholic begins to teach the world its sociology it must teach it how to pray. For, in a cry wrung from the heart, he exclaims: 'Nothing remains for Us, therefore, but to invite this poor world that has shed so much blood, has dug so many graves, has destroyed so many works, has deprived so many men of bread and labour, nothing else remains for Us, We say, but to invite it in the loving words of the sacred Liturgy: Be thou converted to the Lord thy God.'¹⁴ It must teach it how to pray by showing itself at prayer—in the Liturgy with all united in common prayer, common sacrifice, and mutual love in the charity and the peace of Christ their Head.

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¹³ Dawson, *Enquiries*, pp. 309-10.

¹⁴ C.T.S. Ed., p. 21.