

issues should be merged in one great surge of rage and indiscriminate resentment. It is to face the fact that problems of morals and culture, at the practical level, shade off into problems of sociology and politics. It is not to confuse moral with political issues: but simply to put morals back into a political world from which they have been largely banished.

It is the significance of the New Left in Britain to have seen this, and to have combined a scholarly analysis of the social complexities with a radical and morally serious purpose. But, as Professor Cameron has pointed out, the weakness of the New Left is that these concerns have not been adequately supported by a convincing philosophy of man. They have no coherent answer to the question 'What is it for man to live well, both as an individual moral agent and as a social and political animal?'⁵ The purpose of this book will have been fully achieved if it has even begun the task of showing how a Christianity which is grounded on a theological consideration of God's revelation throughout history of his purpose for man, and not just upon an abstract 'Christian philosophy', might provide the answer which the Left, with all its moral seriousness, still lacks—to the detriment not only of its own adherents, but to society generally: for it is in constructive criticism from that quarter that our hopes for a Christian society lie.

⁵cf. J. M. Cameron, *The Night Battle* (London 1962), p. 66.

Congregation or Aggregation?

MONICA LAWLOR

In the collective worship of the Church we have the most profound expression of the life of the Christian community—it is easy to say this but much less easy to feel or observe it. It is widely acknowledged that there has been a drift away from any social significance in, for example, the mass. It is seen as an obligation, a slot machine service for the individual, a collective but hardly communal form of worship. Many people who are aware of this deplore such a state of affairs; others feel that this is the way it should be, it is efficient and suitably formal; still

others feel that all is not well but dislike the proposed remedies more than the disease. Whatever less it has done, the liturgical movement has made us conscious of our attitudes to the liturgy, aware of our likes and dislikes and, even more important, aware of the possibility of changes of one kind or another.

In this paper I do not want to discuss why the present situation arose, or even the liturgy itself, but the social framework in which it takes place, in the hopes that we may, by considering some aspects of group psychology, see more clearly what is happening and what is possible. There are all sorts of possible social groups and it is worth considering what sort of group we really think the Christian community is, or should be. If you think of a group as a mere matter of density, then clearly the London Underground during the rush hour provides us with an excellent exemplar—you can hardly get denser than that. Yet the thing that strikes one so forceably about such a group is its intensely impersonal quality. It is silent, disinterested, each person is wrapt in his own concerns. Occasionally some one breaks the rules by talking, still more rarely someone breaks the rules by angry argument, drunken singing, personal abuse, picking a pocket—or otherwise annoying his neighbours. The rest of the group usually then experience a collective but lonely embarrassment, or if it gets worse, they may actually start commenting on it to one another. This reveals what one might not otherwise have known, that the members of such a group have a definite social attitude to each other. They are not actually attentive or responsive, but they are exhibiting a considerable mutual tolerance; nearly everyone in such a crowd has a sense of the proper social behaviour and keeps an elaborate set of unwritten rules (if this were not so, then the situation would be a very unpleasant one). People push, but in the nicest possible way, they apologize if they put their elbow in your eye or tread very hard on your foot. But it is a group without social significance; its purpose is individual, there is no social interaction, and its social virtues are almost wholly negative, remarkable though they are. If the train stops in the middle of a tunnel then the situation becomes more interesting: total silence takes over for a bit, then you get some unfreezing of the occupants. They may begin to remark on the situation and hence to pay some attention to each other. What happens after that varies; very occasionally you get a panic and in this all social sense and restraint is lost; more often the common plight seems to produce some links between people and they begin to feel a sense of community, to deal collectively with the situation. Once

the crisis is over some remnants of the stirring social warmth usually remains until the group disperses. This shared experience, and the way in which they coped with it, has given the members some rudimentary social relevance to each other. This is a rather long and complicated example, but it may serve my purpose.

It seems that if a congregation participating in the mass behaves just like a rather less densely aggregated rush-hour crowd, and emerges at the end of that service just as it might emerge at Tottenham Court Road tube station, then we must consider it no more than an orderly aggregate exhibiting mutual tolerance. The communicant murmurs an apology as he treads on the feet of the non-communicating member, the drunk produces covert interest, some embarrassment and the profound hope that someone else will cope. Such a group is socially conscious only in the negative sense that it recognizes obligations not to interfere with or annoy other people. If that is the Christian community then the word 'community' is somewhat of a misnomer. It is clear that in such a situation the members lack social meaning for one another, the worried man sits by the happy man, the grief-stricken next to those that rejoice, and they each keep themselves to themselves, in mutual respect perhaps, but hardly love.

But whatever points of resemblance a congregation at mass may have superficially to a group of commuters, they do differ in one very obvious way. They have all met for an approximately similar purpose. So in a sense have the people in the train, only in their case they are usually implementing rather than fulfilling a purpose; and their purposes in so travelling are likely to be extremely diverse. Only the very young, the very cold, the very bored or lonely will be on a tube for the sake of being on a tube. The liturgical congregation is for the most part gathered together to attend the liturgical function. This means they are a group with a common purpose. Further they all know in some degree at least one person present in the mass. At whatever level they may appreciate this they have come to the physical presence of Christ. Groups which share a common purpose in this way may show all degrees of association with each other. When something that a lot of people want is available only in certain places, then a lot of people will be at those places, but this grouping is to some extent both accidental and incidental. The audience at a cinema or theatre is of this kind; they have come to be entertained, and so enjoy a common purpose, although here the presence of the other people has a certain value which it does not necessarily have in all aggregates. The majority of people would

enjoy a film or a play rather less without the rest of the audience, unless they find their own response to the drama very much out of key with everyone else's. Students attending a lecture are another version of the same sort of group. It is an actor-audience situation, and unless the lecture is particularly poor they will probably pay more attention to the speaker than to the fellow-members of the audience.

The extent to which what are essentially audience groups enjoy any degree of solidarity will be highly variable, running on a rough scale from those in which some closely-knit community invites some outsider or one of their own members to speak to them and then listens to him, to the situation in which the audience is assembled purely because a particular speaker is talking and they come together just to listen to him. What needs to be made clear here is that just because a group is an audience listening to a speaker you cannot tell quite what that means in more complex social terms. It may be a single facet of a group's activity or it may be the only one. Taking it by and large it is not a situation which by itself promotes much meaningful social interaction. Audiences in the proper sense of that word are pretty passive: they are spectators but not participants. Once an audience starts joining in what is going on, then we get a different state of affairs; the aggregate may start to be a more coherent group or degenerate into a mob.

A mob differs from an audience because, though it may start as an audience, it acts in some way. The participants share enough in the way of common beliefs and values to be aroused to undisciplined collective action. From the crowd that yelled for Barabbas to the lynching mobs of our own time such groups show the facilitating effects of shared emotion and the swamping of rationality by emotion, which can give very sinister overtones to the notion of social group.

The relevance of these distinctions to what we might call the liturgical group is that there are inherent possibilities in the gathering together of people for worship, that they may be an audience or even at times a mob. Strictly speaking a liturgical gathering is such that it is unlikely to be a mob, for a variety of reasons. But it is worth bearing in mind that any vast concourse of people is liable to become a mob unless it has some internal and meaningful social organization. Mobs demented by religious fervour are not unknown and are quite as unedifying as any other kind of mob, hysterical, unreliable and dangerous. It is possible to gather large numbers of people together occasionally for liturgical purposes without any sense of impending riot. But this requires two conditions; first that they know what is going on and

what they have to do, and second that they are organized into smaller units which make sense socially. But this is an extraordinary rather than an ordinary situation. Pilgrimage centres which attract very large numbers of people are faced with this sort of problem, but these vary from intensely moving gatherings to nasty scrums.

The audience situation is one with which we need to be more actively concerned. There is no need to repeat all that has been said on this point. The inaudible mumbling in a foreign tongue by the priest on a far-away altar (which you cannot see because you are behind a gothic pillar) palpably encourages the actor-audience situation. The extreme result is a pattern in which a quiet passive congregation, sharing a few ritual changes of position, kept in touch with the action on the altar by a series of bells, witnesses the mass. They may share a certain measure of emotional response, reverence, awe, relief, but they look on rather than participate. Their presence or absence makes no essential difference. Again if the community of Christ is a mere audience at the Christian mystery, it may be very hard for the faithful to feel that the mass lies at the very heart of their communal life. The social life of the community is then a thing apart from its liturgical life. Within the context of a stable parish the extra-liturgical community life may be strong enough to bear this non-participant attitude to the liturgy. Particularly when that stable community is an essentially Catholic one, the liturgical life is just part of the close-knit group life of the community, in which everyone knows more about everyone else than there is to know. The social function of church-going may then become, from a religious point of view, corrupted. The fine new hat is shown off in church, the prominent pew denotes good social standing, correct behaviour reflects respectability and prestige, absence is scandalous, presence essentially a conformity to the pressure of opinion. Such a group can so to speak 'carry' a very ill-appreciated liturgy and remain in some identifiable sense a Catholic community.

In a diaspora situation this becomes much more problematic. The parish may still be a recognizable locality, but since the members of the Christian community are dispersed among other people they will exist as a community only if they have some sort of focus. Now we all belong to groups which are essentially of this kind, since most of us in a complex society are members of many groups. But we have to have some reason for gathering together; commodity in short supply, a job to be done, common kinship, particular interests to be satisfied, a meeting with people who share our interests and values. It is as well to

come to terms with the fact that the diaspora situation is really the typical one, the state of the Church as a whole (just as it is for any other Christian group). Specifically religious communities apart, we live in a mixed world, one in which social mobility is common and mobility of labour an accepted thing. In large urban settlements the social situation differs radically from that in small settled rural communities and it differs in so many ways that it is difficult sometimes even to begin thinking about it. Under such circumstances parish life is not inevitable, it is an achievement which must be worked for. The Christian community becomes self-selecting rather than obvious. If the significance of the liturgy weakens then the life of such a parish rests more and more in parish groups of one kind and another; and desirable as these are they are unbalanced unless they spring from the liturgical life of the parish, which should surely be its spiritual centre. If prayer is private and even ideosyncratic, typically non-participant in its collective forms, then the community is essentially secular and the ghetto mentality, with all its attendant perils in the closing of class and racial frontiers, a real threat. The community if it exists will in some sense be secular in essence.

There are several ways in which liturgical life assumes a real degree of significance; all demand that the liturgy be meaningful. Without this it seems hard to see any way in which it can have a proper place at the centre of the life of the Christian community. In the past such significance was probably achieved in a large measure through symbolism, part of which was in its turn based on the pattern of the agricultural year in western Europe. What seems to have happened is that with changes in the western way of life, and with the spread of the Church in other continents, where even seasonal changes bear not the slightest resemblance to our own, the natural symbolic significance of the liturgical year and even of the liturgy itself has been weakened and even totally lost. The problem that faces us is that either we must understand it at first-hand for its own sake, or be left with little more than the traces of a ritual cult. With the growth of literacy and even of leisure this should not be an impossible task. But it won't just happen—we have to see the problem and have enough faith in the dramatic reality of the liturgy to realize this as an opportunity to widen and deepen our theological understanding, rather than as an attempt to patch up a regrettable failure. To regret the passing of a state of affairs where the best one hoped was that some of the meaning brushed off through the widest use of symbolism is a pity, when this could be

replaced by an intelligent and theocentric grasp of what the liturgy is actually about. Sprinkling holy water on a potted plant in a rogation service isn't really the best that we can manage.

Considerable group solidarity may be achieved through a common way of life and a shared pattern of natural drama, high-lighted in the liturgy; but it is not the only way in which a group can have a sense of unity and coherence. Groups exist for all sorts of other reasons, one of the most critical of which for our purposes is a joining together not to watch something but to do something. The members of an orchestra do not express social feeling by chatting idly while they are playing, but rather by each contributing whatever is proper as best they can to the common goal of playing some piece of orchestral music. This is the paradigm of the co-operative group, much nearer to the heart of the idea of community. Any sort of skilled team-work has a fascination because such groups seem to 'know' themselves together rather than feel; to an unskilled outsider this at times can look quite uncanny. Such a group makes or does something together which they could not do on their own. It is a platitude, oft-repeated in little books on how to build cosy social relations, that people who have something to do in a group feel part of it, the idle may feel painfully surplus. One could argue, I suppose, that the liturgy is concerned with the worship of God, not with making people feel cosy, but it is an argument which it is difficult to push far and one which seems singularly out of key with both the spirit of the gospels and with the whole of Johannine and Pauline thought. If the central Christian commandment is that we 'love one another', and this 'not in word or speech but in deed and in truth'; it is hard to believe that God wants us to worship him in circumstances which virtually exclude any human sense of value and participation. If one may take Charles Davis¹ as a guide here, liturgical circumstances which militate against a sense of social integration and community, a gathering which is individually meaningful but socially dead, is quite out of key with the purpose of the liturgy.

While it is possible for a silent gathering attending a service it can follow only in translation to exemplify a bond of love and mutual interdependence, such a situation does load the dice rather heavily against it in all but the very good. The popularity of Benediction (even if its popularity is waning this is still the most widely attended extra-obligatory devotion) can I think be accounted for at least partly by the opportunity it affords people to sing together, and even to sing part of

¹*Liturgy and Doctrine* (London 1960), especially ch. 4.

the time in their own language. The hard fact is that it is easier to learn sense than nonsense, but that if you are going to learn nonsense it is easier to learn and pleasanter to sing when it has rhythm and rhyme. One of the observable things about people is that all but the most inhibited or very sophisticated enjoy singing hymns (why else the 'Abide with me' of football matches?) and hymns only go really well when sung in groups.² Not so very long ago Benediction offered the average parish congregation its only real chance to participate actively in a church service.

The dialogue mass and the sung mass go a long way to fulfil the same need but with the great importance that they provide a form of participation which is at the centre of the liturgy rather than the fringe. Here the participation of the people is theologically meaningful in a strong sense. It would be even more meaningful if they knew what they were saying in some easier way than they can at present—but in a sense even that is a difficulty which patience may overcome.³ What really matters is that people should move from an audience-attitude to the liturgy to a realization that they have something to contribute which is important. The mass then becomes not an episode witnessed but a shared experience which, since it is essentially dramatic, serves to enhance their sense of community, just as the incident in the tube may start to precipitate a real social situation. A Christian community which grows out of a liturgical experience is much less likely to deteriorate into an exclusive club than one in which liturgical experience is individual and peripheral. Here in a sense is the heart of that shared purpose and shared experience which is the only solid basis for an elective group. This should be what makes it real, the social and sacramental realization of the mystical body of Christ.

²It is easy to come upon discouraging reports of people who will not or cannot sing even if you let them during mass. There are obviously those who want to be left alone to say their prayers but there are others who probably feel that it is not quite right to sing during mass (you are supposed to be *quiet* in church). Still others may feel acutely self-conscious about breaking into song with no practise, no certainty of moral support and a feeling of grave uncertainty about the tune. Much of this reluctance would probably disappear if such singing were carefully nurtured and properly organized rather than expected to happen. It is noticeable that whether people are able to dialogue successfully seems to relate not to literacy or knowledge of Latin so much as to felt enthusiasm and intelligent help and encouragement.

³This may be easier said than done but is certainly not impossible. With the right kind of teaching a lot more people could learn Latin and nearly everyone