

THE WEDDING: a shaky liturgical bridge between church and community

Everyone loves a wedding – or so I thought until I spent a decade providing clergy with inservice training in the skills of preparing couples for marriage. The boredom, dislike and especially the anger about presiding at weddings as expressed by numerous clergy amazed me. As one Anglican priest remarked ‘I would rather preside at a funeral than a wedding: the outcome is more certain!’ Similar comments flowed from clergy of several denominations. Of course, there were and are many exceptions. Now, after another decade, this time as a priest, the probable origin of these negative emotions seems clearer. The focus of this article is to clarify some of the dynamics and expectations around church weddings. David J. Rolfe

In the Anglican Church we have two overt and one covert model for marriage. How viable are these as bridges between church and community? The BCP, beginning with the rubric about the requirements for publishing Banns, is well – designed for a community, such as an English village, in which church and community are experienced as synonymous, and both partners are usually known to the church and community.

The purpose of marriage: (a) ‘hallowing the union betwixt man and woman’; (b) the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord’; (c) and ‘for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, in both prosperity and adversity’ (BCP p. 564) is clear. The liturgy – purpose, denial of impediments, pledge, vows, sanctifying and giving of ring (to the woman, p. 566, and as an afterthought, to the man, p. 571 with different words of promise), declaration, blessing, prayers, optional Communion – has the ethos of a very private liturgy. The community is invited by rubric (p. 564) to be present as observers. It is taken as a given that the bride and groom are both Baptized and active in the Christian faith. At times in the history of the Anglican Church in England, this ‘given’ was enforced by fines: the ideal was not attainable.

(see David Underdown. *Fire From Heaven. Life in an English town in the Seventeenth Century.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.)

The BAS expresses liturgically the same Rite in context of a vastly different community from that of the English village. The rubric expects marriage preparation to be provided by the minister or appointee, preparation which will include a Christian understanding of marriage: anticipates that one person may not be baptized; prohibits a solemnization of marriage between two persons neither of whom has been baptized; makes the publishing of Banns optional; and encourages a public signing of the register (BAS pp. 526/7).

The purpose of marriage has changed since the BCP rubric: (a) ‘as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love, they shall grow together and be united in that love, as Christ is united with his Church’; (b) ‘for their mutual comfort and help’; ‘that they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love (and that they may be blessed in the procreation, care, and upbringing of children).’ (p. 528)

The Gathering of the Community goes

(Continued on page 3)

IN THIS ISSUE:

The wedding	1
Gravity	6
Book reviews	10



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interested in the continuing renewal of the Church in both liturgy and mission.

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DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS TO THE NEXT ISSUE: JUNE 15, 1996

LETTERS

The Hoskin Group is a society committed to the ongoing renewal of the Church in worship and mission. Our ministry is to provide resources which focus the debate, inform the practice, and evaluate the experience of our liturgical life.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Membership in the Hoskin Group involves maintaining an annual subscription to *Liturgy Canada* as well as agreement with the Hoskin Group's Mission Statement.

Subscriptions only are available to non-members. **(Subscription rates effective June 1, 1996:** 1 year: \$20.00; 2 years \$35.00; 3 years \$50.00.)

Due to the added expense, the Hoskin Group is monitoring the feasibility of continuing to enclose *Open*. For the time being, however, we will include this valuable publication. Your response is appreciated.

Advance notice: Annual General Meeting, May 2-3, 1997. This event will include devotions and a dinner. Further details will be forthcoming.

THE WEDDING

(Continued from page 1)

on to announce that the couple 'begin a new life together in the community.' The liturgy continues with denial of impediments, proclamation of the Word, pledges, vows, sanctifying and giving of rings (to both partners with identical wording), declaration, prayers, blessing and optional Eucharist.

The major changes from BCP to BAS are in the purposes of marriage. There is now much more emphasis on companionship (less on the priority of procreation); a requirement to proclaim the Word, and a requirement for the gathered community to stand up, give the couple their blessing, and promise to 'do all in your power to support and uphold this marriage.' This is the Rite for a gathered community as distinct from the village church-is-community-is-church as envisioned by Cranmer. It assumes that the bride and groom have stepped forward from the community at large, are participating in the gathered community of the church, and want to begin their new life together in the context of Word and Eucharist.

The covert model for marriages has less influence that one would hope for. Tertullian paints an idealized picture of marriage, from a 2nd century perspective, which included: "How beautiful, than the marriage of two Christians, ...nothing divides them ...side by side they visit God's church and partake of God's banquet; unembarrassed they visit the sick and assist the needy..." (David Mace and Vera Mace, *What's Happening to Clergy Marriages?* Nashville: Abingdon, 1972. p. 97)

This stands in stark contrast to the couple self-absorption which is particularly evident in the prayers of the BCP Rite (p. 570-571) and the Gathering of the BAS Rite (p. 528). The BAS evidences a little more of Tertullian's model than their lives together be sacrament of your love to this broken world ... the strength of their love may enrich our common life ... their lives an example of concern for others ... may those who have witnesses these vows find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed." (p. 533).

The BCP and the BAS Rites could be greatly strengthened in this context by the inclusion of a prayer which specifically highlights the integral nature of service in Christian marriage. In BCP Rite, one could use or adopt the *Collect for Peace* (p. 11); or *A General Thanksgiving* (pp. 14-15); or the *Prayer for Daily Work* (p. 732). In the BAS Rite, the second *Thanksgiving Prayer* (p. 129);

a *Prayer for Strength*, (p. 130); a *Prayer for Peace* (p. 130); for *Guidance* (p. 131); the *Collect for Proper 14* (p. 366); the *Collect for Proper 3* (p. 351); could be used. Better still that the successor to the Doctrine and Worship Committee compose a prayer or prayers in the language of BCP and of BAS, emphasizing the necessity of service to others in Christian marriage.

With or without the above suggested additions, the BCP and BAS Rites are authentic liturgies for a couple who are living the life of worship and work as identified members of the Christian community. However, in their present form, neither liturgy is a real bridge between the Church and three groups in the community who we are called to serve:

- the previously married;
- cohabiting couples;
- the unchurched.

I believe that much of the frustration and resentment expressed by clergy, and by couples who experience the Church as authoritarian, insensitive and even cruel, has its origin in the clash between two levels of expectation. As clergy we are prone to expect couples in the three above - mentioned categories are coming to the church, already affirming either the BCP or the BAS assumptions about candidates for Christian marriage. Or, we hope to convert (unfortunately this comes avar as manipulate) the couples to come around to our belief. Or, we knowingly participate in the shell of a ritual, knowing from the start that the couple are using the church wedding as if it is a magical rite of passage. Each time we are confronted with a shattering of our expectations, which our own duplicity when we pretend the couple's request is the same as our expectation even when we know differently, we experience anger and the poisoning of our ministry.

The previously married

Four years ago, in the Diocese of British Columbia, the Marriage Commission, under our Bishop's direction, turned away from a mostly legal inquiry in its work, to an almost entirely pastoral focus. The Commission's role is now to support and affirm applicants and the clergy who serve them with the goal of giving each couple the best start possible in their new marriage. This raises the level of what is expected of priest, couple

(Continued on page 4)

"...we knowingly participate in the shell of a ritual, knowing from the start that the couple are using the church wedding as if it is a magical rite of passage. Each time we are confronted with a shattering of our expectations..."

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THE WEDDING

(Continued from page 3)

and Commission, and at times includes face – to – face meetings of all concerned. In this the Marriage Commission has moved from the role of tribunal to that of pastoral advocate; from rubber stamping documents to involvement. The feedback from clergy over four years shows a marked shift from hostility and passive – aggressive sabotage of the process to a mostly cooperative and appreciate stance. For their recommendations, the Commission actually receives written 'thank you' notes from clergy and couples. If a Marriage Commission functions to duplicate the work of Provincial legal system either in intent or in practice, then it deserves the resentment of clergy and couples who see this type of work as merely putting up hurdles to obstruct a couple's hopes for marriage with the Church's blessing. The pastoral functioning is much more demanding of time and effort for Commission, priest and couple, than was the mostly legal model formerly used.

The BAS rubric, in calling for marriage preparation, fails to direct priest and couple alike to consider the special dynamics of the previously married who have experienced divorce. Since it is well known that second marriages are more likely to break up than first marriages, the rubric needs updating to remind priest and couple alike that more preparation, not less, is needed where one or both partners have had a previous marriage type relationship. The revised Marriage Commission application does address this, as does the Foreword to Canon XXI.

The rubric also overlooks the particular situation of the formerly widowed person seeking remarriage. It is not enough for the priest and one partner to have reviewed the past (or for the priest to have ministered to that person through the break-up of a former marriage through death or divorce). The priest needs to work through with the "couple all that both persons bring to this new marriage.

The BCP and BAS liturgies both could be augmented to reflect these special circumstances by addition of an appropriate prayer at the opening of the rite which specifically states that the person (persons) were widowed or divorced, and that in this liturgy, and new life is being begun and celebrated. This would leave symbolic meaning comparable to 'the Minister receiving the woman at her father's or friend's hand ...' (BCP p. 566) but without

the probable super-imposing of a paternalizing connotation. This is a way of acknowledging that a real past is being brought to the altar, and a new relationship in the community is about to be blessed. Without this, we are in danger of appearing to pretend that this marriage is the first and only for both partners. Liturgical honesty in this context can supply a bridge between church and community. In my experience it has been the openness of clergy to the history of partners expressed in marriage preparation, in prayer and sermon at the wedding, which has brought couples estranged from the Church back into the worshiping community. It is not an easy ministry.

Cohabiting Couples

In the Diocese of British Columbia, according to anonymous evaluations of our small group of marriage preparation programs (attended by about 160 couples annually), 80 – 95% of couples are living common law prior to marriage. A similar percentage are at best, very occasional churchgoers. As much as we inside the church believe in chastity before marriage, and can and should uphold this for persons alive in the faith, when we put forward this standard to those outside the church, we function only to drive them away from the Gospel. Demanding that couples split up and live a celibate life in separate households may satisfy us, but it is much too easy for a couple to understand this demand as our way of placing obstacles in their way: inviting them in, but working to keep them out of the church. If liturgy is the work of the people to evaluate the pros and cons – there are both – of cohabitation. Also, why would they want to exchange a perfectly good common law arrangement for marriage in a liturgical tradition that has not been a functioning part of their lives?

I have suggested to cohabiting couples that they could consider how people join the Benedictine Order. This perks their curiosity. After a full year of monastic residence at the monastery, trying out the way of living, the novice vows to become a member for life. The vows cannot be canceled or annulled. I suggest to cohabiting couples that they have tried out liviitment. How about getting married with no possibility of dissolving the marriage?ow about getting married with no possibility of dissolving the marriage? This opens up a very interesting avenue for discussion.

One could suggest that since the

Church has long expected the progressive trying out and eventual life – long commitment to celibacy by those who take the vows of an Order, why can we not affirm a parallel route for those who chose life – long matrimony? Perhaps the church should incorporate a Benedictine – style vow in the marriage liturgy of those who have lived together before marriage which, once taken precludes the possibility of divorce and remarriage within the Church. In her discussion of the Benedictine Rule, Esther deWaal comments that the Church would do well to put as much care into marriage preparation as do the Benedictines into preparing individuals to commit themselves to the Rule for life. (Esther de Waal. *Seeking God, The Benedictine Way*. London: Fount Paperbacks. 1984, pp. 55-56)

The Unchurched

The third group for whom both the BCP and BAS liturgies fail to form a bridge between church and community is the unchurched.

They come to us for a magical rite, like the wearing of a rabbit's foot brooch, to increase their luck in the marriage lottery. One couple, with the man's mother in attendance, demanded to rent the church for a short ceremony. No, they were not church goers, and they did not want any Bible readings at the wedding, and, yes, they were Christian. We were in completely different worlds.

When we as clergy chose to ignore this dynamic, and read their request for a wedding as if it is the first step in seeking church membership, we greatly increase the chances that we will be performing a travesty of liturgy. We will have misused our vocation, ourself also, and will end up experiencing cynicism and anger.

One part of the problem is that parishioners and clergy are predisposed to connect with the unchurched as if they are church members. We all act as if the couple has bonded with the faith, or is in the process of becoming bonded. Having surveyed Anglicans, Catholics, Lutherans and United Church clergy I find a common theme. The unchurched come to all of us for a nice wedding that will help them feel married, and increase their chances of avoiding a divorce. Period. Very, very few of the unchurched use our wedding liturgies as the entry point into active Christian living. In this context, a wedding is not outreach, not evangelism, but a community social service.

The engaged couple come to the church for a wedding, and 'bond' with the priest, the building, or the congregation. A couple

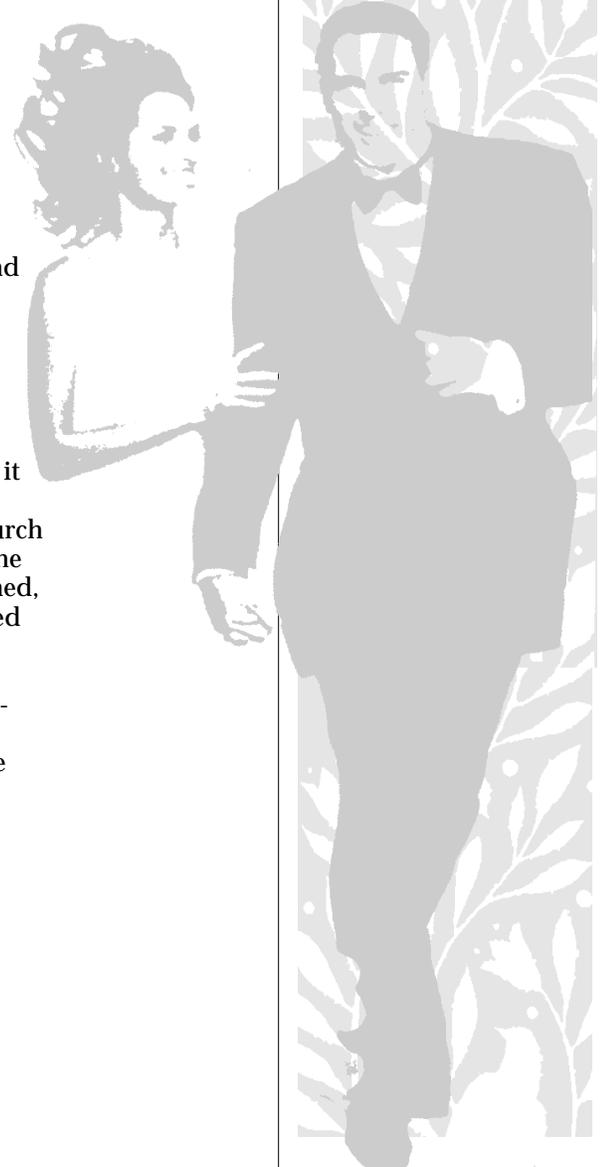
bonds with the priest or the building for a wedding. Once the wedding is over for that couple, the contract has been completed and they disengage. If they return later to have a child baptized, it is again for a social service, not for faith and community roots. When we encourage a couple to have their wedding in the church, sensing that they have bonded only with the priest or building firming a relationship which is grounded only in outward form and is really one of non – involvement. In doing this, we make it harder for such a couple to bring their children for Baptism and be open to the living of the promises of the Rite of Baptism. By our acceptance of their form without substance as if it is substance expressed in form, we have participated with them in a hollow action. We have given the couple another experience where they say words, but conclude that a change of heart and behaviour are not essential.

If clergy want to connect with the unchurched, we have to resist our urge to grasp onto them. We must appoint a young couple or team to handle all the marriage preparation and wedding planning, and identify a sponsor couple for the engaged couple. Where this cannot be arranged by a smaller parish, then it has to be done on a deanery or inter-church regional basis. For the already really attached, congregation-bonded couple, this is not necessary.

When a congregation embraces their ministry of marriage preparation, and functions as the bond between unchurched engaged couples and the liturgy, we will have far fewer weddings in church. The

(Continued on page 4)

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THE WEDDING (Continued from page 5)

few we have will have much higher potential for being Christian celebrations, the liturgy coming to life. No doubt, some of our members will be very annoyed that we will not 'perform' the wedding for their completely unchurched children. We will lose some hardened members through this stance.

In the twentieth century, the Church is a gathered community within, or on the edge of, the larger social community. I believe it is healthy and honest to face this fact, to stop pretending that we are the whole community as pre Cranmer's idealized framework in the BCP. We must stop playing liturgy for those who want a charming ceremony: instead we must help such couples get in touch with a cheerful marriage commissioner and book themselves into a rose garden. We can concentrate our energies on equipping congregations to reach couples before we do, so that a couple has bonded with the congregation before starting to make arrangements with the Rector. This will not happen until we have worked to equip a

congregation, sharing this vision of their ministry with them, and then releasing them to flourish.

If we believe that our marriage liturgies, both BCP and BAS are authentic living liturgies, springing from our Anglican experience of the way of Christ, then we must take courage and celebrate them with honesty. Some will not understand this. Others will not want to walk across this bridge from community to church. We must allow them the freedom not to take this bridge. If we do not allow such freedom, then they are not free at all to choose the bridge and we are not free to be honest. For those who are searching for spiritual life, this will be very appealing. This level of commitment and discernment is hard work: the real work of the people. Liturgy. ☒

The Rev. David J. Rolfe, Ph.D is Rector of church of the Advent, Victoria, Diocese of BC.



GRAVITY

The Ash Wednesday services are over for another year. We have descended into the season of Lent, the season of lamentation, of wailing and the gnashing of teeth, the season of remembering who we really are. No other season gets to the heart of the matter quite like Lent.

by Brian E. Pearson

This year Trudy, our student assistant, begged me to give her a chance to update the symbol of ashes with something moderns could better relate to. It seems the concept of sin is on the wane these days in academic circles.

The real meaning of Ash Wednesday, she argued, is that within our basic human condition of mortality and frailty, are planted the seeds of our divinity, seeds that produce flowers and fruit, seeds of pregnant possibility that are the very antithesis of the lifelessness we behold in ashes. The word 'human,' she reminded me, shares the same root with the word 'humus,' that organic matter made from the decomposition of living stuff from which new organisms are given life.

It did make a certain amount of sense. It anticipated the death/resurrection connection of Holy Week, to which Lent points, and promoted a more hopeful view of the human condition. But then, I have been out of school for a while now and find myself a bit overwhelmed by abstract thought. I didn't want to appear out of touch.

So Trudy preached about the soil from which we come. We are dust from the ground, she said, into which God breathes life. We are compost, rich with possibility. We are dirt in which God has planted a divine seed. It was not a bad sermon, and really quite fascinating in its own way.

I invited the congregation to observe a holy Lent and then called them forth to receive the sign of ashes, an ancient sign

denoting our human frailty and sinfulness. And forward they came in a line up the centre aisle, kneeling reverently before me as one by one I anointed their foreheads with potting soil, pinched between my thumb and fingers from a clay flower pot held by Trudy. "Remember you are dirt," I intoned, "and to dirt you shall return." The dirt fell in clumps on their noses, sprinkling onto their white shirts and blouses.

I hear things went smoothly for Father David again this year, back in my old parish of St. Jude's. Of course things could only improve year by year from his first Ash Wednesday there. For him each Lent represents a kind of rising from the ashes of his own frail humanity.

Father David is a bit of a purist when it comes to liturgy. This does not mean he is a traditionalist, quite the opposite in fact. He could not afford to be a traditionalist in any case. Beverley, his wife, with her boundless enthusiasm, leading the startled congregation in sing-along folk songs, her guitar strings buzzing, her bountiful hips swaying, leaves no room for him to be stuffy.

But he does insist that worship be intentional - even their dated sixties style folk mass - that it be well thought-out and principled. Father David is nothing if not a man of principle.

There are limits to principles however. They are fine in the high billowy realms of theory. But brought down to the muck of every day living principles are inclined to

slip and slide around like the rest of us. This was a lesson that had not been available to Father David when he served his curacy at the cathedral.

There, disconnected from grass roots in the usual sense, and hoisted up instead by a congregation of prominent VIP's who expected their worship to be lavish and grandiose, the clergy swished about in their cassocks doing pretty much as they pleased.

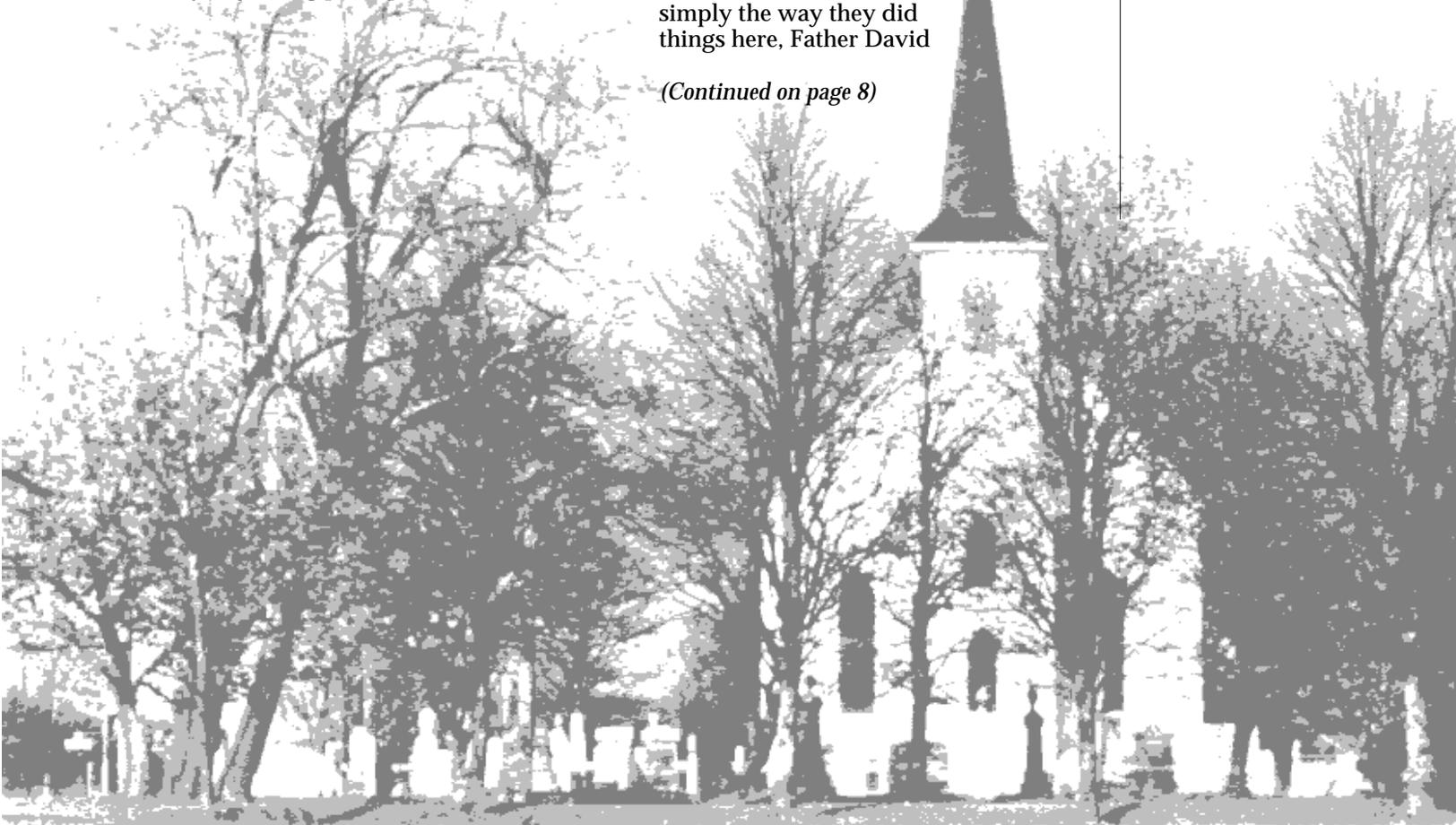
Father David was in his element at the cathedral. The magnificent pipe organ would sound a brassy fanfare as they entered in procession down the long aisle. The paid choir offered complex canticles and titillating motets on behalf of the worshippers. The incense wafted up through shafts of tinted light toward the high vaulted ceilings. This was worship as God intended it, exultant and full-bodied.

It was an intimidating environment for others, though. Even the highly paid wedding consultants and funeral directors instinctively knew their place. They "floated suggestions" or "presented an alternative view" but the final say belonged to the clergy, a responsibility that extended even to young Father David.

So when he was new to St. Jude's, and Mr. Whittaker of the Oldham and Whittaker Funeral Home told him that this was simply the way they did things here, Father David

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(Continued on page 8)



“Eva Norstrum’s remains would be removed from the vault beneath the church and taken to their final resting place in the church cemetery. He certainly expected the congregation to be present.”

GRAVITY
(Continued from page 7)

received the news as if the man were speaking in a foreign language. “Excuse me?” he said.

“Well you can’t have a burial in the winter, the ground’s too hard. And you can’t do a public interment in the spring because of the run-off. And you can’t wait until the summer because there would be a stench. So the vault is the way we do it, always have with every minister before. You wait for a good day and then move the casket out of the vault and into the plot. The families don’t want to be there. It’s just the way it’s done here.”

“Well, I don’t think so,” Father David replied evenly. “People need to attend to every step of the grieving process or they don’t move through it. And that includes being present at the interment. Now that’s my understanding, and I am after all the rector of this parish.”

So Eva Norstrum’s interment became an occasion of considerable public interest, more interest in fact than she had ever garnered while living. She was a spinster who had lived all her life in the family home, tending her crotch-

ety father well into his old age and far past her own prime. She was a nervous person and people felt a little sorry for her, cooped up there with the old man until he died, only six years before her own death.

But she became the subject of several sermons as Father David hammered home the point that, having gathered around the font at her baptism, the Church had an obligation to be present at her interment, especially as Eva had no known living relatives.

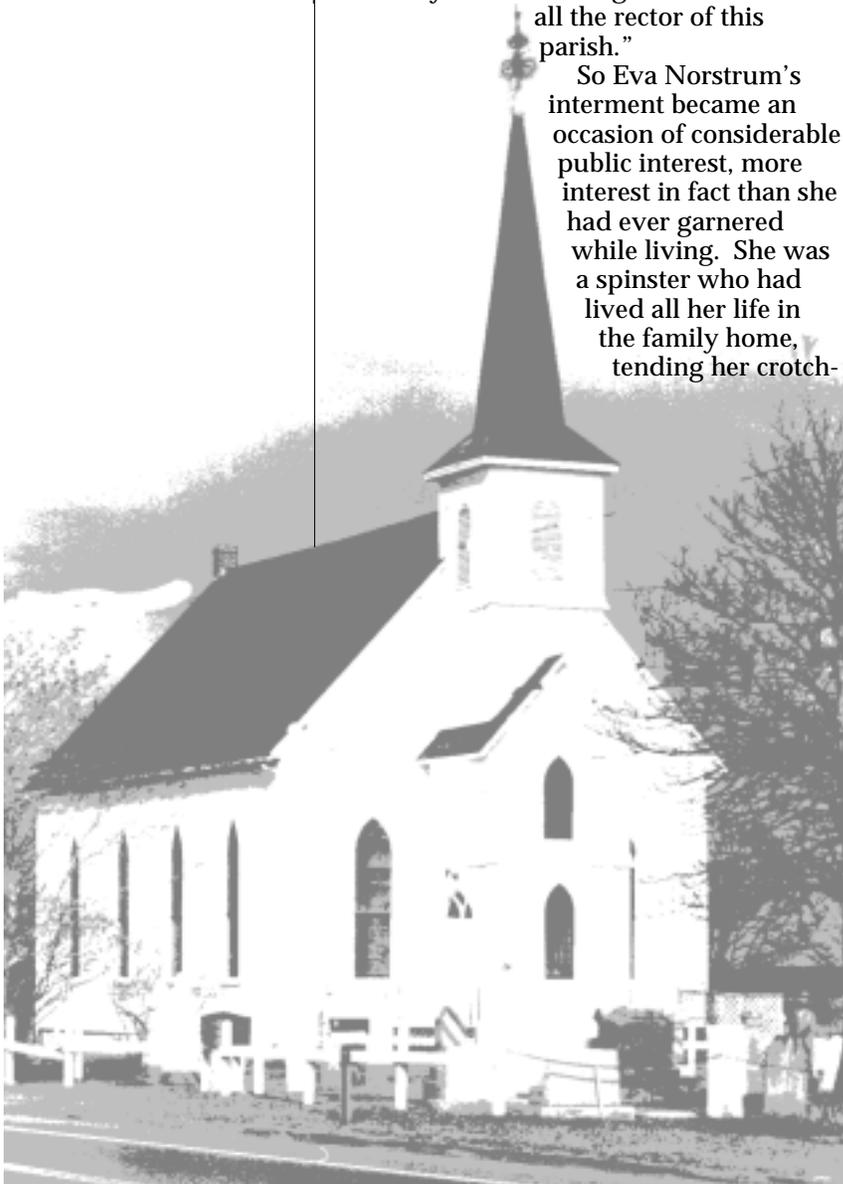
The Church, he said, had given far too much away to secular institutions and needed to reclaim its central role at the crossroads of life. Like death, for instance, where grieving had been given up to paid professionals who, after all, were running a business. Taped music, electronic curtains, fashionable limousines (none of which the people of this town had ever seen) - what did these have to do with Christian burial, he asked?

So they would have the opportunity next week, it being Ash Wednesday, to reclaim the burial rite. Eva Norstrum’s remains would be removed from the vault beneath the church and taken to their final resting place in the church cemetery. He certainly expected the congregation to be present.

Wayne, the Rector’s Warden, took Father David aside and tried to reason with him. “Look,” he said in as friendly yet firm a manner as he could, “You are new here. You have to let people do things their own way. Lloyd charges double for digging a grave in the winter on account of the wear and tear on his back-hoe. And if we should get some warm weather like they’re calling for and there’s run-off, well the cemetery’s not the place you want to be.”

But Father David stuck to his guns. Eva would not be denied a proper Christian burial. And besides, Ash Wednesday would be an ideal time for the parish to be reminded of its mortality. Even Beverley held her tongue. Her husband had a right to establish himself as the rector of his parish, even if his obstinacy did seem to be a little extreme.

So Father David drew upon his prerogative as liturgical officer of the parish and combined the Ash Wednesday service with the service of interment. It was all thought out and meticulously planned. The service would begin in the church with the readings and sermon. Then the congregation would move in procession to the cemetery that adjoined the church to the east. Mrs. Goode would remain at the



organ so that while the congregation processed out of doors they would hear the music and be reminded that they were still engaged in worship. They would then return solemnly to the church to receive the imposition of ashes.

Father David was feeling quite pleased with himself when the day came. He was already thinking of writing up the service and submitting it to "By What Rite," a quarterly journal for modern liturgical reformers. When Wayne called at breakfast time to draw his attention to the unseasonable thaw that was causing quite a run-off, Father David simply thanked him for his concern and said he would see him later at the service.

At 10:45 Father David stepped from the rectory and made his way across the street to the church. It was an uncommonly spring-like day. Birds chirped from the overgrown lilac bushes at the edge of the driveway and dropped greetings from the telephone wires overhead. At the road a small river, gurgling wildly, rushed past his feet toward the storm sewer traps further down the hill. He sucked in the fresh country air and noted with satisfaction that all seemed in readiness for the service.

Two Oldham and Whittaker part-timers stood outside the vault door, ready to assist in the removal of the casket when the time came. Norm greeted Father David in the narthex and offered him a pew bulletin and a hymn book, something he did by force of habit, even though Father David typed the order of service himself and always used his own copy of the hymn book, a special music edition.

Mr. Whittaker was seated in the back row of the church and gave Father David a slight nod as he entered. Mrs. Goode was getting ready at the organ, flipping through her music book and pressing the pages open at the right spots. Father David went up into the vestry and robed, feeling triumphant.

At 10:55 he emerged from the vestry in his cassock and surplus - an appropriately sombre choice, he thought - and knelt reverently at the prayer desk to say his prayers. The church was beginning to fill. At 11:00 Norm tolled the bell and Father David got up, kissed his stole, put it round his neck, and made his way down the aisle to join the choir which had gathered at the back. Mrs. Goode looked up to see that all was ready and then launched into the processional hymn, "Forty days and forty nights." The congregation rose and the service began.

During the sermon Father David laid the foundations for what was to follow. In a

few minutes they would be going out to commit Eva's body to the ground. This is all we are, without God. We are dust, and to dust we shall return. Yet they would do so joyfully because they knew that Eva's soul resides with God, eternally. This is God's gift. And so we must all remember at this, the gateway to our Lenten observance: without God we are nothing; with God we have eternal life.

I wish I had had such confidence in my own early days as a preacher. I had certainly never offered the people of St. Jude's such authoritative teaching while I was their young rector. So I can understand with envy that Father David felt a certain sense of pride in the proceedings. Everything was going just as he had planned; he was making his mark in their midst.

He donned his funeral cape and led his flock out the main doors and around the side of the church to the vault. There the two Oldham and Whittaker part-timers were joined by four men of the congregation as they entered the vault and emerged with the casket containing Eva Norstrum. The mud at the entrance sucked at their overshoes and their feet slipped, but they were able to make it up the slight incline to where the snow lay melting in dirty mounds.

They proceeded up the narrow path that had been cleared to Eva's grave. Above the whistle of the wind in the trees and the screech of the transport trucks gearing down as they entered town, they could hear Mrs. Goode at the organ back in the church. They could also hear the sound of water trickling.

When they got to the grave it was already half-filled with water. Mr. Whittaker looked anxiously over at Father David. But Father David, calm and self-possessed, assumed his place at the head of the grave while the pallbearers manoeuvred the casket onto the planks that were extended across the hole. "All of us go down to the dust;" Father David read, "yet even at the grave we make our song: alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."

The pallbearers reached for the straps that were laid out beneath the casket and, lifting it slightly, removed the planks and began lowering it into the grave. A few feet down the casket slapped the surface of the water and came to rest, bobbing slightly. Father David was just about to pronounce the

(Continued on page 10)

"...Birds chirped from the overgrown lilac bushes at the edge of the driveway and dropped greetings from the telephone wires overhead. At the road a small river, gurgling wildly, rushed past his feet toward the storm sewer traps further down the hill. He sucked in the fresh country air and noted with satisfaction that all seemed in readiness for the service."

“The ground beneath his feet had given way and down he went into the hole. He hit the casket with three mighty thuds...”

GRAVITY

(Continued from page 9)

blessing. But suddenly he disappeared.

The ground beneath his feet had given way and down he went into the hole. He hit the casket with three mighty thuds, the first with his feet, then with his backside, and then with the back of his head. The casket tossed as if at sea and he slid off sideways into the muck. Rolling over, scrambling to keep from sinking beneath the casket, he found the handles and held on for dear life.

All this happened in about three seconds. When he had stabilized his position, wedged lengthwise between the casket and the dirt wall, half submerged in the watery grave, he looked up into a ring of horrified faces peering down.

Then from the throng a hand emerged from a dark sleeve. Wrapped around it was one end of a strap. Father David reached up and caught hold of the other

end and was pulled up into the arms of Mr. Whittaker. Off in the distance Mrs. Goode swelled the strains of “Abide with Me.”

Father David was sick the following Sunday and a replacement had to be called in for the services. Around three in the afternoon Mrs. Bunting came by with a chicken casserole, and Wayne phoned to see how Father David was getting along. Fine, Beverley told them, it was just a bug and she was sure he would be back on his feet in no time.

The next morning Mr. Whittaker dropped by and asked if Father David was receiving visitors. Beverley knocked softly on the study door and let him in. Father David was sunk deep in his high back wing chair, a book closed on his lap.

“So,” Mr. Whittaker said with a smile as he took a seat opposite Father David. “How do you want to do things next year?” ☒

BOOK REVIEWS

Ormonde Plater offers a very practical guide for North American Anglicans who have, or are developing, the gift of intercession in their community liturgies. A well-organized and comprehensive format - thanks to the editorial assistance of Cowley Publications - makes this book a workable study text for parish groups as well individuals.

The book consists of three sections: Theology and History, Practical Guides to Intercession, and Resources. Section one, Theology and History, sets out an orthodox trinitarian foundation for Christian community prayer while addressing issues of individual piety. The theological polarities: the imminent and transcendent aspects of God as they relate to prayer and worship are considered in terms of how they affect the balance necessary for meaningful liturgy.

Addressing, by inference, the plethora of New Age “spiritualities” in the context of these polarities, Plater points out the importance of avoiding, on the one hand, a minimalism which regards the divine as “transcendent and disengaged from all the creatures God has made”, and, at the opposite extreme, the danger of intercession being subsumed under a theology of an “excessively imminent God ... swallowed up within creation”.

Plater presents a strongly trinitarian

concept of prayer, as a complex relationship of engagement between God and creation which holds the transcendent and immanent together particularly as the human community meets in liturgy and intercession. He presents a theological summary of the faith in which we offer intercession in an initial chapter entitled “A Song of Remembering”. This preliminary statement is an important setting of the stage for his summary of Christian intercession through history and reflections on the purpose and importance of intercessory prayer:

When three natures co-exist in one being and human and divine natures in one person, we have within God a model of total engagement and total communion; each member (each person of God or nature of Christ) respects the integrity and individuality of the other. The God who took on human flesh cares profoundly about human beings, yet does not rearrange matter every time it bends out of shape. (p.5)

In the chapter entitled A Song of Offering Plater gives a brief overview of communal prayer from the days of the early Church, to the Middle Ages, the Reformed Churches and the twentieth century. This summary touches on such aspects as the medieval development of including intercession for the living and the dead within the canon of the mass which accompanied a shift in theology and the growth of individual piety.

Pointing out the three-part sequence for

Intercession: A Theological & Practical Guide

Author:

Ormonde Plater

Publisher: Cowley

Publications,

Cambridge, MA

1995

ISBN 1-56101-115-0

(ALK.PAPER)

Reviewed by

John Hodgins tssf

“...the author notes that Christians make three offerings in the liturgy: prayers for the whole world (creation), the kiss of peace (reconciliation), and the gifts of bread and wine (for the meal of the Spirit-led community).”

the Sunday morning liturgy envisioned by Cranmer (matins, litany and holy communion) Plater notes how much intercessory material was eliminated from eucharistic rites. While the Great Litany of 1544 (which recalls the intercession of the ancient Syrian Church) was officially the principal locus of public Anglican liturgical intercession, its weekly usage was gradually dropped. With the virtual loss of Cranmer's three-part sequence in the 18th and 19th century, intercession became a largely private affair for Anglican Christians.

Plater notes how Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical private piety increasingly filled the need for intercessory prayer during the past century for Anglicans. A transition in this century is traced from the 1960's when many churches of the West began to provide again for a stronger and more comprehensive intercessory element in the Eucharist, particularly as the parish Eucharist reclaimed its place as the centre of Sunday worship in Anglican and other Western Christian traditions.

Summarizing his review of the theology and history of Christian intercession, Plater uses as his outline the second-century liturgical sequence of Justin Martyr. In keeping with his trinitarian model, the author notes that Christians make three offerings in the liturgy: prayers for the whole world (creation), the kiss of peace (reconciliation), and the gifts of bread and wine (for the meal of the Spirit-led community).

The second part of the book: "Practical Guides to Intercession", is quite a comprehensive survey of the forms, outlines and rubrics of Canadian and U.S. Anglican liturgical books, including both the American Book of Common Prayer (1979) and Book of Occasional Services (1991), as well as the Canadian Book of Alternative Services (1985) and Occasional Celebrations of the Anglican Church of Canada (1992).

Emphasizing the importance of a praying community, Plater states: "If they pray daily,

they will have the materials to pray on Sunday." Emphasizing the importance in the process of preparing and presenting intercessions of using such communal gifts as discernment, writing ability and voice he also encourages the appropriateness of deacons taking a leading role in this ministry, where they have been raised up in the life of a diocese.

Seasonal and special occasions are addressed in separate chapters with useful comments on the formulation of appropriate intercessions for catechumenate, baptism, confirmation, marriage, the birth or adoption of a child, death or burial, etc..

Part three is a section of Resources offering a chapter on subjects for intercession under the six categories detailed in chapter 4. Included for consideration with; this material are some collects from the various North American prayer books. This final section includes two chapters on ancient and sample litanies for various concerns and occasions. There is a chapter on music and suggestions for the introduction of musical settings for intercessions and litanies in the parish.

A concluding Guide for Study and Practice suggests that congregations study intercessory prayer in small groups of deacons, readers, lay eucharistic ministers, and others and a means of renewal in liturgy.

In all, this a comprehensive contemporary resource book very much in the mainstream of Anglican liturgy and worship. Ormonde Plater brings together and compares many diverse elements in the theology, history and current practice of communal prayer and presents some useful suggestions which can bring freshness and vitality to this important aspect of Anglican liturgical worship. A very worthwhile offering for Anglicans and other Christians on both sides of the border and beyond. ☒

A Tactful God:
Gregory Dix - Priest,
Monk and Scholar
by Simon Bailey
Gracewing, Fowler
Wright Books, Hert-
fordshire, U.K. (1995)
Distributed in Canada
by Meakin and Associ-
ates, Ottawa, ON
& in the USA by
Morehouse,
Harrisburg, PA

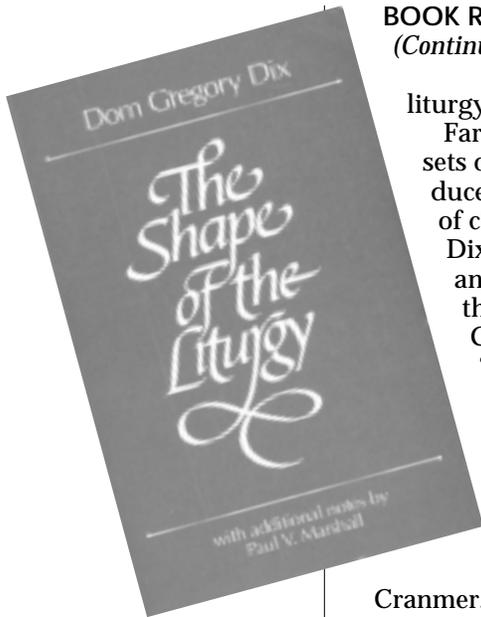
The most brilliant mind in the Church of England" is how Dom Gregory Dix was described by the renowned Bishop of Oxford, Kenneth Kirk (no mean scholar himself).

At long last we have a biography of this remarkable Anglican Benedictine (1901 - 1952) who, though cut down by cancer in his prime, is arguably the most influential liturgist of the century. Simon Bailey provides us with an engagingly readable account of Dom Gregory's life as well as much background to his scholarship on the fiftieth anniversary of Dix's

groundbreaking 1945 work *The Shape of the Liturgy*. The importance of *The Shape* may be illustrated by a single fact: the book is still for sale and has never been out of print since it was first published over 50 years ago.

Known as "the bishops' gadfly" Bailey notes how Dix's writings generated strong reaction and debate on both sides of the Atlantic. Whatever people think of Dix, however, few would question that *The Shape of the Liturgy*, set the terms of discussion about Western

(Continued on page 12)



BOOK REVIEWS
(Continued from page 11)

liturgy like no other book.

Far from being uncritical, Bailey sets out in *A Tactful God* to introduce the reader to the complexity of character which made Gregory Dix one of the most outstanding and controversial Anglicans of the century. A convinced Catholic - he eschewed the term 'Anglo-Catholic'. He was an accomplished linguist, devoted to uncovering the Jewish roots of Christian history, sympathetic to Mediterranean culture and hostile to Germanic emotionalism, Luther and

Cranmer. An unabashed advocate of disestablishment for the Church of England and re-union with Rome and Orthodoxy, he became a ferocious controversialist with what he termed the NRE or National Religious Establishment.

Though a close friend of such Catholic-minded bishops as Michael Ramsey and Kenneth Kirk in one particularly heated exchange Bailey reports Dix saying that one could identify the liberal Anglican hierarchy by their symbols, "a crook for a bishop and a double-cross for an archbishop."

Dix strongly opposed the Church of South India unity scheme as a pan-protestant sell-out, fearing that it would jeopardize 'the big picture' i.e. reclaiming catholicity in the Anglican Communion and ultimate reconciliation with Rome and Constantinople. Interestingly, Bailey notes Dix's thoughtful reflections upon ministry of women in some unpublished papers, opening speculation that he was considering the question of holy orders for women as early as the 1930's.

Bailey, like Dix, has the gift of presenting issues of church politics and scholarly matters in a style which is designed for a general audience. Aware that liturgical scholarship needs to be made accessible to all members of the Body of Christ, Bailey maintains that the reason for Dix's success is found in his ability to understand and communicate with the *plebs sancta Dei* - the common holy people of God. "This breaking out of the scholarly coterie of liturgical reflection was the major impact of the [*The Shape*] and entirely consistent with Gregory's feelings about liturgy ... (p.191)"

A Tactful God gives us a personal view of the humanity and spirituality of the

monk and scholar who, in the late 1940's, with his deep commitment to the Church as the "organic" Body of Christ, sacrificed his health for the fledgling American Benedictine priory, St. Gregory's at Three Rivers, Michigan by embarking on grueling fund-raising lecture tours. Reading the account of Dom Gregory's lectures and presentations to *Associated Parishes* and many other church groups in Canada and the U.S., one senses his unwavering commitment to the nurturing and shaping of Catholic faith in the Anglican Communion.

"[Dix] said in a letter... 'I can't do the hot gospel stuff the way that brings the crowds in' but in actual fact 1,300 people turned up, in the rain, for a day on the liturgy, and in the evening 1,050 people witnessed his demonstration of the primitive liturgy." (P.228)

Dom Gregory went on to demonstrate the fruit of his research in Britain and Sweden using his imaginative format: the re-enactment of pre-Nicene liturgies. This became a kind of prototype for the involvement of the laity in liturgy which was later mandated by Vatican II and developed by the liturgical movement in the Anglican and other communions.

All of this was done at a time when non-communicating attendance at mass was widespread. Dom Gregory himself celebrated daily what was then the normative liturgy of the Western Church - the Tridentine Latin mass. This seeming paradox between scholarship and spirituality arose from Dix's deep sense of organic attachment and obedience to the "one Church" (p.68). He lived out his understanding that the Eucharist sustained the "living organism, the divine creation, the Body of Christ" (p.160) which, for all its defects, was built and renewed by a common liturgy. As a priest and Benedictine he was committed to the common Western use until it was changed by the magisterium of Church and accepted by *sensus fidelium*.

A Tactful God deserves a place on the shelf of anyone who has read *The Shape of the Liturgy* as well as in seminary and theological college libraries. This first biography of Dom Gregory Dix should spur on further study of the work of this remarkable Catholic, a priest, monk and scholar who made his home in the Anglican Communion and who, like no other, helped to change and restore the shape of the liturgy. JH ☒

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