

Liturgy Remains At the Heart of the Church

By Religious News Service

"Christianity is a liturgical religion," Father Georges Florovsky, a prominent Eastern Orthodox theologian, wrote in his book, *One Church*. "The Church is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second."

While not everyone may agree with the importance Father Florovsky gives to the place of liturgy, it is true of a growing number of parishes that liturgical renewal is of greater interest — and sometimes greater controversy — than matters of doctrine and discipline.

Liturgical experimentation has always been a part of church life. But it has become increasingly so in recent years, arising out of such developments as the impact of Vatican II, the Charismatic Renewal, and the ecumenical movement in general.

For Roman Catholics, post-Vatican II changes have led to a growing variety of worship forms. Although these have been warmly received in many churches, they have also produced a reaction from traditionalists who prefer the Latin Mass they have known and loved from childhood.

In the Anglican Communion, prayer book revisions have produced major controversies in the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the U.S. But liturgical reforms are also leading to Christian unity, particularly among the major Lutheran denominations in America.

Ecumenists have cited liturgical renewal as a major force for Christian unity in the past decade. In 1965 John Mannion, then executive secretary of the National Catholic Liturgical Conference in Washington, D.C., went so far as to say that Protestants and Catholics working together in the liturgical movement could produce a "more authentic Christianity than the world has seen for centuries."

Along these lines, a modified version of the Lord's Prayer was proposed in 1972 by the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET), a group that has representation from the Roman Catholic Church and all major Protestant bodies except the Baptist denominations.

At the same time, the Consultation made several suggestions for changes in the Christian calendar, including the use of the term "after Pentecost"

rather than "after Trinity," and calling the Sundays after Easter "Sundays in/of Easter" rather than "after Easter."

In the United States, the Interdenominational Committee on Worship, which has Protestant and Roman Catholic members, has developed a new version of the Nicene Creed. In a move to make Eastern Orthodox use of the creed possible, the Committee placed a controversial phrase in brackets, so that one sentence of the creed would read:

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son)." The phrase set off in brackets, the so-called "filioque clause," has never been recognized by Orthodox Churches. Disagreement over its presence was a factor in the split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy in the Middle Ages.

For Protestant denominations, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) has prepared "An Order of Worship for the Proclamation of the Word of God and the Celebration of the Lord's Supper." Intended for experimental use in congregations of the nine Protestant Churches in COCU, the document includes texts of the Lord's Prayer, Apostles' Creed, and the Nicene Creed.

A new lectionary (series of Scripture readings) and a new baptismal liturgy were approved for use in North American Lutheran churches by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship in 1972. According to the Rev. Stanley Schneider, secretary of the Liturgical Texts Committee, the lectionary is "overwhelmingly" in agreement with the Roman Catholic system.

Roman Catholics have been debating liturgical changes since the Second Vatican Council. Among the historic changes that were instituted by Vatican II were the use of English and the placement of altars so that the celebrant faced the congregation.

Although those changes have generally met with approval, some Catholic traditionalists have refused to accept them and still use traditional Latin Masses even in the defiance of their bishops.

Pope Paul has recommended a return to traditional Latin and Gregorian chants, a move that was welcomed by conservatives. A booklet issued last Spring by the pontiff and sent to every Roman Rite Catholic bishop and major religious superior in the

world contains a minimal repertoire of Gregorian chants for use in the Eucharistic liturgy.

It was accompanied by a document of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship, signed by Cardinal James Knox of Australia, that emphasized the importance of promoting "common singing by the faithful" to express "the festive feelings of the community and the fraternal character of the sacred celebration."

Since the late 1960s, the Church of England has been arguing over three trial series of revisions of the Anglican Prayer Book. Evangelicals have been in the forefront of opposition even to the Series I version, which contains the fewest changes, on the grounds that they represent a break with tradition and in some cases a change of meaning of the rituals.

In the Episcopal Church in the U.S., revision of the existing 1928 prayer book has also been a subject of debate. Presiding Bishop John M. Allin recently asked the House of Bishops to approve a compromise under which the Church would "give birth to a new book without burying the old one."

He expressed the hope that "we are sufficiently versatile to continue indefinitely providing services from the present Prayer Book for those who desire them, as well as more contemporary services."

In the enthusiasm for liturgical renewal, some church leaders have felt compelled to warn against what Episcopal Bishop Thomas A. Fraser Jr., of North Carolina has called "an excuse for the introduction of electronic guitars, balloons, and dancing in the aisles."

Conservatives have sometimes contended that too much change too soon has been responsible for a decline in church attendance. But Father Andrew Greeley, the priest-sociologist at the University of Chicago, has cautioned against using liturgical reform as a scapegoat on which to pin dropping attendance figures.

He wrote in a recent newspaper column that "one could think of a number of other causes of erosion of Church attendance — dissatisfaction with quality of sermons, skepticism about whether God would really send one to hell for missing Sunday Mass, and a lack of confidence in clerical and hierarchical leadership. Why there is so much eagerness to pin

the blame on the new liturgy is a fascinating question."

Liturgical education for laypeople has been suggested as a means of avoiding such controversy over changes in worship forms. The Rev. William H. Willimon, a United Methodist pastor in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., reported after conducting a program and study of liturgical change in one congregation that "worship innovation and true lay participation in worship must be preceded by solid, conceptually adequate education."

He cautioned that "the danger of the contemporary church, especially its laypeople, is not that we should become so theological that we intellectually abstract ourselves from the life of faith, but rather that we should wander about aimlessly in the endless circles of our own limited contemporary expressions of faith."

How to make liturgical renewal meaningful, and not simply change for its own sake, is a problem faced by all religious groups. Rabbi Jules Harlow, a Conservative Jewish leader, humorously pointed this out at a 1965 meeting of the Rabbinical Assembly.

In discussing a new rabbi's manual, he noted that prayers for special occasions are not "announcements." For example, the rabbi said, "God does not need to be informed that this is the anniversary of the United Nations, or a significant milestone in the life of our congregation, or that Sam and Bessie have been married for 15 years."

But Rabbi Harlow has advocated the use of topical prayers and readings for use during the Jewish High Holy Days. This year, a new version of a prayer book produced under his editorship contained readings that focus on such subjects as Arab terrorist attacks and public morality.

As Churches tackle the problem of "relevance" in making liturgical changes, they are seeking to develop new forms that represent a continuation of tradition in some ways and a departure from tradition in others. Roman Catholic editor Philip Scharper has summed up the challenge.

"The liturgy cannot simply be restored, as Williamsburg was restored. The liturgy must be reinserted into the center of Christian life in the twentieth century. It is not a question of making that life relevant to liturgy; the liturgy must be relevant to that life."

New Dominican Prioress Elected

Elmira — Sister Mary Margaret Hammerl, OP, was elected prioress last week of the Dominican Monastery of Mary the Queen. She succeeds Mother Mary Terence, formerly of Rochester, who held the office for two three-year terms.

The new prioress is a sister of Msgr. Leo E. Hammerl, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Buffalo. She entered the monastery from Sacred Heart High School in Buffalo and last May celebrated her Silver Jubilee here.

COURIER DEADLINE

The Courier-Journal deadline is noon Thursday for articles intended for the following Wednesday edition.

The house vote was taken Dec. 5. Auxiliary Bishop John E. McCafferty celebrated Mass and presided over the election, in accordance with the community's rule. Tellers were two local pastors, Fathers Francis R. Davis of Our Lady of Lourdes, and Stephen A. Chomko of St. Nicholas Ukrainian Church.

The Dominican house, which is autonomous, has 15 members and expects soon to receive a new postulant, Mother Mary Margaret reported.

In a telephone interview, she spoke of the life of the contemplative nuns, who sing the liturgy from time to time during the day and pray during the pursuit of their everyday tasks. They are dependent on alms and their own efforts for food and shelter.

During the past few years, they have developed an off-set printing shop as a means of self-support "well suited to our life," Mother Mary Margaret said.

With the bishop's permission, six members of the community served a two-week apprenticeship in the shop run by St. Joseph's Hospital, and now the nuns turn out holy cards, novena cards, newsletters and bulletins. This year they printed Christmas cards for the Trappist Monastery of Our Lady of the Genesee, at Piffard. Those not involved in the shop make vestments and banners.

"We are doing very well," the prioress observed. "Besides the new postulant that's coming, there are two or three others getting interested."



Activities Day

Mrs. Caligiuri shows these pupils from the Church of the Annunciation School how to make Christmas wreaths out of cotton and cloth on Activities Day. The day was set aside as a break from the traditional 3 R's of education in order to let the first to fourth graders try their hands at cooking and designing Christmas decorations.