

The Future of Mattins and Evensong

ANTHONY GELSTON

'MATTINS IS AS DEAD AS A DODO.' So one parish priest remarked to the writer recently, and no doubt his sentiment would be echoed by many clergy. On the other hand there are many parishes where it is still a flourishing service, and many others where its demise is still deeply regretted by some of the laity. This is not the place to discuss the changing overall pattern of Sunday services. But it is encouraging that the Liturgical Commission have sufficient faith in the future of Morning and Evening Prayer to have devoted time and attention to producing Series 3 forms for these services. At a time when great emphasis is being placed on the Eucharist on the one hand, and much freer Family Services are being developed on the other, it is vital that the congregational use of the Divine Office, which has been one of the glories of Anglican worship, should not be lost by default. Naturally congregations who have become accustomed to Series 3 in their Eucharistic worship will need a form of the Office which is compatible with it if they are to continue to use this kind of service, and this is what the Liturgical Commission have now provided for the consideration of General Synod.¹

In order to appreciate and understand Series 3 Morning and Evening Prayer, it is necessary first to set them in historical perspective. These services have in fact received considerable attention from the Commission. Series 1 for the most part simply authorised the variations from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer which had been in widespread use since 1928. Series 2 was a conservative revision, but unlike any other of the Series 2 services, this was followed by a Series 2 Revised order, which introduced much more radical changes. These were inspired in the main by the Joint Liturgical Group's *The Daily Office* (1968), which has clearly governed the thinking of our own Liturgical Commission during the subsequent period. The main features of Series 3 are largely predictable—a recasting of Series 2 Revised in the modern language style, with the use of further ICET texts (Te Deum,

Gospel Canticles and Apostles' Creed), and the addition of the scheme of intercessions from *The Daily Office*. But there is a good deal more to it than that, and it is worthy of careful examination in detail as well as in the fundamental questions it raises about the future of the Office.

The most radical difference from the older forms is of course the modern language style. It goes without saying that if a Eucharistic rite in this style comes into widespread or general use, as Series 3 Holy Communion shows signs of doing, a parallel order must be provided for the Office. But perhaps the disadvantages and hidden implications of this change of language become more immediately apparent in the case of the Office. It is, for example, not a simple matter to delete 'thou' and the corresponding verbal forms. Many of the collects, which depend for their structure on a relative clause addressed to God, can hardly be recast in modern language. Sometimes a convincing alternative can be found, as in the substitution of 'we thank you that you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day' for 'who hast safely brought us . . .'. But this is not always the case, and generally the single-sentence structure of the collect has to be abandoned. The fact that the Commission has not yet provided Collects for the Day in the 'you' form is an indication of the considerable difficulty imposed by the task of recasting collects in a modern language style. It is hardly too much to say that the collect form is in jeopardy, and although it is peculiar to the worship of the Western Church it is surely a form that should not lightly be jettisoned.

The 'you' style also requires a new translation of the Psalter. Clearly the project whose firstfruits appeared in *Twenty-five Psalms from A Modern Liturgical Psalter* (D. L. Frost and A. A. Macintosh, CIO 1973) is intended to supply this need, and the translations of the Venite, Jubilate and Psalm 134 in Series 3 are drawn from it. The Gospel Canticles, taken from the agreed liturgical texts proposed by the International Consultation on English Texts (published in 1970 as *Prayers We Have in Common*), are at times more in the nature of a paraphrase than of a translation, as is already clear from, e.g., the Agnus Dei in Series 3 Holy Communion. Thus the third verse of the Benedictus:

'As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets: which have been since the world began'

becomes

'Through his holy prophets he promised of old,'

and the last verse of the Nunc Dimittis begins

'a light to reveal you to the nations'.

The permission to use the 1662 words for parts of the service 'sung to well-known settings' is not very practicable if congregational singing is envisaged, unless they are printed in the same service-book alongside the new forms.

It is clear then that to recast the Office in 'you' language is a much

more far-reaching operation than in the case of the Eucharist, and it would be unrealistic to expect wholly satisfactory forms to be produced at once. The enterprise is probably necessary and worthwhile, but the church ought to give careful thought before committing itself irrevocably to recasting its services in this style. Inevitably people will react to this change in different ways. The writer can only speak for himself, but his initial satisfaction with the Series 3 Holy Communion (largely based on the improvements in content) has given way after some months of its use to increasing irritation and dissatisfaction with the modern language style. The introduction to this report recognises the far-reaching implications of adopting the modern language style in its admission that 'at some points . . . we could find no satisfactory modern form, and it seemed best to omit them altogether'. This may be too high a price to pay for modernisation! It would in any case be more satisfactory to produce each new form of service in two versions, one retaining the traditional language style, the other adopting the new. Congregations could then follow whichever version they preferred without being debarred from using the content of new orders of service if they are unwilling also to adopt the modern language style.

This point could be taken a stage further in relation to the different orders of service themselves. Each of the four revised forms has its merits, and few will be totally satisfied with any one order. Could not the code of practice be emended, so that a particular order may be followed in the main, but at any particular point within the service the corresponding section from another order be substituted? One might then reasonably hope that the best elements of each service would emerge from the test of time and experimental use and find their place in an eventual single order. At present each order authorised has to be accepted as a 'package deal' and used in isolation from the others.

The ICET texts in themselves pose a further problem in that they are the result of ecumenical agreement. The desirability of the different English-speaking churches using identical forms of the Creeds, Lord's Prayer and other common liturgical forms is obvious. But the actual forms which have been produced are open to criticism on several grounds, e.g. the tendency to paraphrase rather than translate, and the exclusive adoption of some of the scholarly interpretations currently in fashion. The history of the Lord's Prayer in Series 3 Holy Communion is an indication that all is not well with these texts. It is to be hoped that they will be reconsidered at an ecumenical level in the fairly near future, and that their present forms will be regarded as provisional. In the meantime it is desirable that ecumenical pressure should not be allowed to foster their uncritical adoption.

It is clear that the greatest proportion of new material in this report lies in the provision after the collect(s). As already noted, the scheme of intercessions and thanksgivings for the six weekdays is adapted with

only minimal changes from *The Daily Office*. This is an interesting attempt to provide a basic pattern of intercession with considerable scope for extempore adaptation. No doubt it will be badly used in many cases, but in skilled and careful hands it could provide a healthy balance of liturgical and extempore forms. As the forms of intercession in the Eucharist show, the clergy of the future will need careful training in the preparation of this kind of prayer. In the meantime many would be well advised to use this rather as a scheme of topics for intercession, and to express them by more formal prayers! The placing of the theme 'The Cross of Christ' on Wednesday rather than Friday will seem to many an unnatural break with tradition.

The provision for prayers after the collect(s) is further enriched by an adaptation of the 1928 prayer for the Queen and all in authority, and by five of the 1662 Post-communion Collects recast in modern language style. No adaptation of the Prayer of St. Chrysostom is included. The General Intercession and General Thanksgiving reappear as in Series 2 Revised with minimal changes, but two alternative endings to the Grace are offered—Ephesians 3:20-21, and the familiar:

V. The Lord be with you;

R. and also with you.

V. Let us bless the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

One very welcome feature is the form provided for the Litany. The suggestion that it may be used in place of the prayers at Morning and Evening Prayer, followed simply by the Lord's Prayer, Collect of the Day and the Grace, will foster the illusion that the Litany is an appendage to the Office rather than a prelude to the Eucharist (as is shown by the 1549 rubrics and the 1662 Ordinal). But in practice it may be more likely to be used with the Office, and its return from the oblivion of both authorised forms of Series 2 (though not the original report form) is to be welcomed without reserve. Within the Litany the opening and closing sections must always be used, but 'any one of sections II, III, IV, or V may be used without the other two'. Clearly there is a misprint here; one wonders whether one or two of the middle sections must be used, or whether perhaps section II was also intended to be obligatory. In the detailed rearrangement of topics, the selective use of material from the 1662 Litany, and its supplementation to include new themes which are felt to be desirable in a modern Litany, this is one of the Commission's most skilful products, and deserves to be widely used during an experimental period. The disadvantages of the modern language style are perhaps at their least in the litany form, and its frequent use of responses makes it very suitable for an age which stresses the importance of congregational participation. The only reservation in the writer's mind concerns a certain abruptness in a series of imperatives addressed to the Almighty, without the softening effect of 'we beseech thee'. But at least we have been spared the bana-

lity of 'please' in place of 'that it may please thee'!

Curiously enough the return of the Litany is balanced by the loss of the *Quicumque Vult*, a revised translation of which was provided for optional use in the original Series 2. The real problem here is of course the damnatory clauses, but it would be possible to adapt the canticle for liturgical use simply by omitting verses 1, 2, 28, 29, 41 and 42 (perhaps substituting the 'Furthermore' of v. 29 for the 'For' at the beginning of v. 30). Its use in worship would have to remain optional in view of differing pastoral situations, but the clergy and small weekday congregations at least might well find its occasional use a stimulating variation from the Apostles' Creed. A list of suggested occasions (in preference to the haphazard approximation to monthly use in 1662) might consist of Trinity Sunday and the festivals in which the incarnation is prominent—Annunciation, Christmas, Epiphany, Transfiguration and Ascension.

At this point it will be convenient to mention briefly a number of smaller details. There are a few additions to the Introductory Sentences, and those provided for the Sundays after Trinity are no longer arbitrarily limited to particular groups of weeks. The Annunciation and Transfiguration are still without sentences, and could easily be included respectively under Christmas and Epiphany. The new provision for Dedication and Unity is welcome, as is the form which may be taken by one of the Easter Sentences:

V. Christ is risen.

R. He is risen indeed.

Another matter which could well be considered in this connection is a distinction between sentences which are suitable for use as part of a penitential introduction, and those which lead naturally into 'O Lord, open our lips'.

The responses have received more attention than in the earlier revisions. 'O God, make speed to save us' has disappeared as one of those points where the Commission could find no satisfactory modern form. 'Praise ye the Lord' has become

V. All praise to the Lord.

R. Let us praise his name.

In so radical a reworking one wonders why a return to the medieval Alleluia appended to the *Gloria Patri* was not considered, especially since Alleluia has been introduced into two of the Introductory Sentences. The suffrages after the Lord's Prayer have also been changed in several cases, generally for the better, though one may have reservations about 'and let your servants shout for joy'. The closing verses of the *Te Deum* are restored to their original form as a series of suffrages for optional use at the end of the canticle: it might have been worth taking a leaf out of the Anglican Franciscans' book, and providing them as alternatives to the suffrages after the Lord's Prayer at Mattins, thus making possible some variety between Mattins and Evensong at

this point.

The canticles are deployed much as in Series 2 Revised. The permission to use the whole of Psalm 95 as a Venite in place of the hybrid of 95, vv. 1-7 with 96, v. 13 is welcome, but would be more convincing were it printed as a parallel alternative form. 'Hail, gladdening Light' may be used in other translations, but is now an alternative to the Nunc Dimittis, so that there is no alternative to Psalm 134 before the Psalms at Evensong. Even in the shorter Evensong, where only one canticle is used, the hymn now has to share Thursday with a new canticle, The Song of Christ's Glory (Phil. 2:6-11). On the whole the hymn seems more suitable as an invitatory before the psalms.

The Report makes no new proposals for the psalter or lectionary, except for the provision of a Table of Lessons for Holy Days in Appendix 1. This provides Old and New Testament lessons for Mattins and Evensong for each Holy Day listed (virtually the 1928 Red-letter days). The principle of Gospel readings in the morning and Epistle readings in the evening is here abandoned. When the shorter Evensong is used the Old Testament lesson may be omitted, but when two Evensongs are observed 'extra lessons may be chosen from those which are provided for any service of the day'. It is difficult to see how this may be done without some repetition, especially when the Eucharist is celebrated with three lessons. This is an indication of the influence of the new suggestion that either the first or the second Evensong may be observed, but not normally both.² It suggests that realistic provision is not to be made for those who wish to continue the traditional practice of observing both Evensongs of Holy Days (which has the advantage of enabling them to be observed in parish churches on Sunday evenings when they occur on Mondays, and thus twice as often as if they are observed only when they actually fall on the Sunday). No mention is made of the possibility of reading a second non-biblical lesson at shorter Evensong on weekdays, despite the publication and actual use of collections of such readings in the two volumes of *The Fourth Lesson*.³ This perhaps indicates a healthy reluctance to embark on such formal reading of these extracts as might be thought to confer on them a semi-canonical status, though their optional use as 'homilies' to supplement the full complement of Scripture readings, and to some extent corresponding to the Sunday sermon, would be an experiment well worth making.

It has already been observed that new Collects for the Day have not yet been provided in the modern language style, and according to note 10 those appointed in the Book of Common Prayer or any others approved by the General Synod are to be used. It would surely be worthwhile as an interim measure to sanction the use of the collects in the report, *The Calendar and Lessons* (1969), particularly when the new liturgical year is in fact being followed in the themes of the lectionary.

After the Collect of the Day 'one or more' of the second and alternative third collects are to be said at Mattins, while at Evensong the second collect may be used, but 'Lighten our darkness' is mandatory. It is unfortunate that some of the evening collects from Compline ('Look down, O Lord' and 'Be present, O merciful God' particularly come to mind) have not been allowed as alternatives. Another idea that would be worthy of consideration is the retention of a fixed pattern of three collects, the first being always that of the day, the last a morning or evening collect, and the second a commemoration collect where appropriate (e.g. that of Christmas on St. Stephen's Day), or otherwise the ordinary Collect for Peace.

Finally, attention must be drawn to two wider issues which arise out of this report. Throughout the series of revisions since 1966 there has been a growing flexibility with many alternatives and more and more parts of the services becoming optional. It may be questioned whether this principle has not been taken too far. There should be a clear basic structure to the Office, and it is difficult to see that this can be said of the shorter Evensong, where even the Lord's Prayer is not used. It is reassuring that the Commission themselves do not feel that this Office is suitable for combination with Holy Communion. A local incumbent remarked at a recent chapter meeting that it took longer to open the church, put on the lights, etc. than to say a service that lasted barely more than five minutes! While either form is 'available for use on any day of the week' it is clearly intended that the full forms are for Sunday use, and that the shorter forms (corresponding more closely to *The Daily Office*) are for weekday use. It would have been better to print a single form, simply marking as optional those elements which are not used in the shorter form. Perhaps fewer of them would then in practice be omitted! The argument that the two services of the day form a single complete unit of worship breaks down in view of the fact that these services are used by a number of people who cannot join in both; each service should be reasonably self-contained. The Series 2 Revised provisions for the psalms and lessons, which are here presumed to continue in use (though the Prayer Book Psalter may be used), have also made the transition from the use of substantial selections of psalmody and scripture to what are often no more than snippets. This question is not immediately relevant to the report under consideration, but it has probably done more than any other single factor to change the character of the Anglican Office. The Church ought to give serious thought to this matter of the erosion of the content of the services, as well as to the proposals of this report.

The other question which ought to receive urgent consideration is the blurring of the distinction between the Office and the Ante-Communion. Naturally they have much in common, but the essential nature of the services is different (in particular the element of praise and thanksgiving is less important in the Ante-Communion in view of

the Eucharistic prayer to follow), and the Office suffers from too great an adaptation to use in connection with the Eucharist. One can see obvious pastoral advantages in a common lectionary to parishes where Mattins and Holy Communion alternate on Sunday mornings, and the replacement of Ante-Communion by Mattins on ferial weekdays has a natural attraction to clergy who celebrate a daily Eucharist. The provisions of note 15(a) for the combination of Mattins or Evensong with Holy Communion are reasonably satisfactory, and guarantee that in the total service all the essential elements of Eucharistic worship are included. But it is desirable that these instructions should be carefully followed, since it is currently possible to find such combined services in which intercession or penitence are totally absent. Care must also be given in framing future lectionaries to provide for those who wish to retain the traditional pattern of Mattins, Holy Communion and Evensong as three separate services. It is good to see that these forms of Mattins and Evensong are clearly distinguished from 'Family Services', which the Commission rightly urges should be specially designed for particular situations.

How then are we to assess the report as a whole? If it is intended to be the Commission's final word on these services for the foreseeable future, it must be regarded as inadequate and unsatisfactory. If however it is seen as a contribution to an on-going process of experimentation, there is much here for which to be grateful. But the time has clearly come when larger issues of principle must be brought into the debate, for it is here rather than in the detailed proposals of this report that the real future of Mattins and Evensong is at stake.

¹ *Alternative Services Series 3: Morning and Evening Prayer*. A Report by the Liturgical Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England (GS 215) (SPCK, 1974, £0.75).

² See *The Calendar and Lessons for the Church's Year*. A Report of the Church of England Liturgical Commission (SPCK, 1969, pp. 19f.). See also the *Rules to Order the Service*, approved by General Synod, 1973, Rule 8.

³ Ed. C. Campling (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973 and 1974).