

*'And Shimei . . . cursed as he went, and
threw stones and cast dust'*

2 Sam. 16.13.

The Liturgical Movement has brought many benefits. Its best effects have probably been in the Roman communion, where many a stable has been cleansed; its worst among those who had already a liturgical tradition without knowing it.

Some of these, instead of looking to the pit whence they were digged (by no means exhausted, only covered with a little loose gravel), have tried to get a liturgical tradition by imitation. A pity: for not only does the assumed liturgy sit about as comfortably as Saul's armour, but among the many things needed in these ecumenical days is a *variety* in vigorous churchmanship.

But the movement, like all movements, has created a jargon, and slogans, and clichés, of its own; and clichés are always dangerous, because they give the impression of

unassailable finality. Such a statement is "The Eucharist is the central act of the Church's worship." But what does "central" mean here? What it has *come* to mean is, alas, clear enough. It is stated baldly enough in a recent book on church architecture: "Reduced to its bare essentials, (a church) is a building to house a congregation round an altar".¹

Well, at least they are gathered *round* it. But what have we lost here? The Word, no less; the Word of God read or preached; and no amount of enthusiasm for being "Biblical", or "Primitive" or "Returning to the early Church", can excuse this. For whatever the early Church did, it did not lose the Word. In the New Testament the place of the Word in worship is clear enough to all: it is the "supposed central

act of the Church's worship" that it has recently required clever exegetes to discover in places where nobody saw it before.

The most regular features of worship Pliny found were hymns and solemn asseverations about abstinence from sin. And at Justin's famous Sunday service (remember he describes a *baptismal* Eucharist first) "the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, *as long as time permits*", and "the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things." Who shall say that these are less "central" to Justin's service than the bread and wine which follow? Even in the *Apostolic Tradition* of

Hippolytus (a liturgy without a text, and thus a fitting instrument for theological confidence tricks) what the worshipper is urged to do daily is to attend to the instruction in the Word "especially if he can read".

It is really primitive, or Biblical, or honouring to God or profitable to men to exalt the sacrament (and only one of them, incidentally) by hiding the Word? And are the "bare essentials" of a church really a congregation and an altar?

(1.) P. Hammond, *Liturgy and Architecture*, 1960, p. 28.