

## BIBLE, LITURGY AND FAMILY<sup>1</sup>

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**T**HE title of Bible, Liturgy and Family seems at first not only forbidding but fantastic. Scholars throughout the centuries have devoted their lives to the study of these subjects and will continue to do so till the end of time, so what of value can I say in a short talk?

After a little thought I was able to answer my own question. I think that no family should be without ideas on the subject of the Bible and the Liturgy and also that the future of Christian society is being strongly influenced, if not shaped by such ideas as they have. It may also be true that at present, too many people have too few ideas and too few people too many, in which case we shall all benefit by a pooling of resources.

I must admit at once that I am conscious of large gaps in what I have to say, and I hope that these gaps will be filled by those whose learning and experience and vocation have fitted them to do it. All I can hope to do is to draw some sort of picture of the necessity, to every family, of education in and through the Bible and the Liturgy and to show why religion becomes dead if it is preserved in any other way. What seems to be needed is a clearer understanding of the difference between the Faith lived and the Faith taught; while scholars and educators teach it, families must live it, and I want to show that a living faith grows most surely from the living word of the Bible.

Every Catholic child is born as co-heir with Christ. He is received into this relationship at his baptism and the duty of his parents is to train him to be able to take his own individual place in the Eternal Kingdom he has inherited. In many ways this point of view will cut right across that of the world; the values will be quite different.

When we look at Christ's inheritance in this world, we see a deprived child born to poverty, persecution and obscurity; a brief time of popularity which led to disgrace and execution; and after this nothing less than complete triumph over death through the Resurrection of the body, then the confirmed con-

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version of the first apostles and preachers and lastly the mysterious Ascension of the visible Risen Christ into the Eternal Invisible Kingdom. Clearly the 'happy ending', so to speak, is the most important part of the story from the point of view of inheritance. Through the external events of his life on earth Christ became one with the prodigal children who had lost their true inheritance and, with its glorious close he opens for them the way of return.

Humanly considered, Christ also received as his inheritance the Jewish tradition of religious faith and practice, and as we all know he did not destroy this Old Law but fulfilled it; the struggles and gropings of Jewish Mysticism were brought out into the light of history, and given a measure of rational certainty. Christ, the person who combined in himself perfectly, Divinity and Humanity, gave to the Jews and to mankind the one truly Divine-Human religion. He lived a finite life of infinite significance, he used finite words to signify or point towards the path to the Infinite Truth with which we shall be happy for eternity. He united in his earthly life, and offers to us still in the Church, his Mystical Body, that integration of reason and faith which can alone satisfy our human nature. He gives himself, and through himself the Holy Trinity.

Once we see that this Christ is the brother of our children, that he is one of the family from the moment of the child's baptism (he is so before really) then it may be necessary to revise our ideas of the kind of world in which we and our children live. It is no longer a world of walls and pavements, of mere duties and pleasures, of good and bad, right or wrong, it is one where the physical limitations of mere facts fall off, and by faith and sometimes by experience, often by imagination we all step out into the infinite life of Heaven.

Christ is never absent from this world of significant signs; it also contains the whole Church, the suffering, the militant and the glorious members, and thirdly, it includes the whole of humanity in need of salvation, for Christ was heir to the sins of the world and our children share that inheritance as well.

The greater part of Christ's time on earth was spent in the Hidden Life, and this is a true pattern for the normal family. Each group according to its nature evolves its own patterns of behaviour, occupations, recreations, interests, and its own degree of intellectual emphasis in secular education, but underlying

these and most important of all, is each family's growth in the knowledge and love of Christ, and its friendship with its neighbours in the Kingdom of God, its supernatural development through the sap running in it from the vine of which it is a branch. For this development the Bible, the Liturgy and the Mass are all essential. I am concerned here not with educational theories or biblical learning in themselves, but with the development of the supernatural life in each family. The depth and vitality of this will depend on the degree of union of each member with Christ. It is this union which must be fostered from the very beginning.

As a child grows we show him familiar objects, a sock, a watch, a shoe, an egg-cup, or pictures of these things, and he learns to name them; we teach him to say in his own way 'thank you' for his crust, and at this stage, too, we can show him pictures of our Lord, our Lady and some of the Saints, and teach him their names; he can learn to say thank-you to his Heavenly Father for his crust, and to Christ for his special happinesses. As soon as the child begins to like stories he can be introduced to these in the Bible, and when he can learn by heart, the Gospels, the Psalms and the more interesting historical and prophetic books should provide much of the material to be stored in his memory. Speaking from my own experience, I can say that King David, Sampson, Isaiah, and others are real and significant to me today because they were my companions as far back as my memory goes; this is more significantly true of our Lord. He was made a real person to me from the beginning of my life; so was Alice in Wonderland, but with what a difference; Alice has stayed comparatively the same, while our Lord has grown considerably and should continue to do so.

It is this fact of organic growth towards Christ and with Christ which is so important; the Christ of the child's picture-book is the seed which should grow into the great mustard tree; the love planted in the child's heart can become the pearl of great price for the sake of which he may one day suffer martyrdom. The significance of the Bible stories and pictures, read, learnt, and loved by the child, can only grow as the child grows, and the whole secret of introducing the child to them lies in suggesting this greater reality in a way that he will recognize. Thus the moral aspect must not be emphasized at the expense of general interest,

or emotional appeal exercised to the loss of common sense, curiosity or rational enquiry. And here something must be said about religious art; it is not mere critical superiority which condemns religious pictures which are atrocious when considered as art, it is an awareness that a bad picture conveys absolutely nothing except perhaps an emotional reminder that such a person once existed; a good picture in illustration of a Bible story or a saint's life need not be a work of genius; it should contain truth; the facts it shows can be correct; the clothes, the landscape, the type of figure, and the degree of naturalism or symbolism can be related to the vision of each artist, but these pictures are *important* as they either help or hinder religious development, and in my opinion it is *worse than useless* to present to a child a childish idea of Christ or our Lady or the angels; the pictures we show them should be as splendid and glorious and mysterious as we can find; they must be theologically *true*.

Once the young child has accepted Christ, our Lady, the Saints and the greatest figures and lessons of the Old Testament as a part of the life he lives—in my own experience they had a place in the programme of each day—then the Sacrifice of the Mass follows or fits in naturally; surely this is the truly indispensable preparation for first Holy Communion. When it is said that a child must know the difference between ordinary bread and the consecrated Host, it must not be thought that this knowledge can be acquired quickly, it must be a knowledge of Christ which belongs to the whole seven years of the child's life, and which has grown with him.

There is much learned theology about the Mass, the truth it contains is infinite, the end will literally never be reached, so ordinary people like myself, and children, too, have to take refuge in the words of the Gospels; we cannot go wrong if we start by taking our place round the table at the Last Supper and listening to our Lord speaking; his words themselves do the rest; the essential preparation is enough knowledge of our Lord to be able to love him, and also knowledge of what he did once in his human body and is continuing to do now in his Mystical Body.

If children grow up familiar with the most significant parts of the Old Testament and New Testament, then the Missal will not be strange to them. I once knew a boy who was given a Bible

for his twelfth birthday, and he wrote home to say he was starting at the beginning and intended to read it through. We ordinary people are dependent on the scholars to save us from that labour. But given this properly selected knowledge of the Bible, the liturgical rites will appear as what they are, a formalised public use of words already familiar, and the older we grow the wider and deeper becomes the meaning for each of us. In this programme there is, I feel, very little room for being side-tracked into what one may call popular devotions; we must never turn aside into the shallows where it is so easy to get bogged down in emotions and the merely human aspects of divine things; instead we must plunge deeper into the ocean of infinite truth, one tiny step with each Mass we offer, loving God and his whole creation, praising him in the very words of the psalms sung by Christ himself, allowing the Divine Word to lead us further and further out of this world, towards Heaven.

Here arises the thorny point of liturgical language. All I can say is that in my opinion, as long as the Canon of the Mass is in Latin every Catholic child should learn the prayers at the first moment that he is capable of it, and that the sooner the rest of the Mass is in English the better, because otherwise the children must learn that too. I think the Psalms and the chief hymns of the Liturgical year should be put into English and taught to our children as soon as they learn anything; they are part of Christ, part of the Catholic child's inheritance, a nourishment for the child's soul that will grow as he grows and continue to feed him. How can a strange church language compete in his development with his own language which is assailing him from every side in comics, radio, television, papers, cinemas, advertisements and talk? This seems to me a question of plain commonsense. Christ, together with the Bible and the Liturgy, which contain him and are contained in him, must be enshrined deep in the total nature of a Christian child—only then will he possess the true water of life, always springing up.

Before this can begin to happen in this country there is a lot of work to be done by scholars and teachers. To begin with, a child's Bible, together with his prayer book and first Missal, must be his most precious possession; it must be an attractive book with gold edges and richly coloured pictures, bound in black leather to single it out from other books. I should also like

to see brought out a series of books with short passages for daily reading from:

- (i) the Bible,
- (ii) the Missal,
- (iii) the lives of the Saints, following the Calendar and including when appropriate passages from the missal and the breviary. These could take the form of parallel series which would take two or three years to work through; personally I should put on the cover 'Not to be taken to school'.

The Bible shared and lived with Christ is the chief inheritance of the Christian child but equal to it in importance, building it up, completing it, is the totality of Christ in his Mystical Body, which means the whole Church. The Holy Souls in Purgatory belong here: prayers to them and for them widen the horizon into a spiritual world of real people as well as introducing the idea of death apart from any morbid connections; then there are the Saints: from them come the heroes and heroines, the human proofs of the power of supernatural faith and the efficacy of God's love. Once a child realizes that holiness changes history his religion is less likely to die. Thirdly there is the Church Militant in which the child learns to share with Christ the great work of salvation.

Here the Sacraments of the Church find their place, those great sources from which Divine life flows into the world and overflows outside the Church to save the whole of mankind. In so far as this Divine life is springing and developing in the Christian family, each one will learn to love both God and his neighbour; to belong to the Catholic community and to love those outside it.

So far I have tried to put forward some sort of picture of the place in, and significance to the family of the Bible and the Liturgy of the Church, I have emphasized that the teaching must be alive and significant, that worship should be as real and important as any other activity, that Christian children should, as far as possible, from the beginning be shown a Christian world inhabited by Christ, our Lady, and the Holy Souls and the Saints; a world both physical and spiritual, and almost with boundaries. Obviously the one real boundary is that between what may lawfully be done and what is sinful; but familiarity with our Lord's life and those of the Saints teaches a lot about sin, a hatred of it and an awareness of it. I am certain that in giving

children a rigid moral code of behaviour and religious observance, bristling with venial sins and always threatened by mortal sin, we are causing great damage. Guilt is a crippling emotion and it is vital to guard against planting that in a child's heart instead of love and trust. All parents find it a great puzzle how to teach a child to follow Mass. It seems to be the obsession of the moment, a fact which is hardly surprising, for, as now conducted in most parish churches, the Holy Sacrifice is bound to come a very bad fourth in attraction and interest to the comic, the cinema, and television. If, however, parents can attempt to follow a little of the programme I have suggested, I think there will be less attention left over for these rivals; also, I believe they would cease to be attractive.

The tragedy just now seems to be the delegation of the responsibility for religious teaching by parents to schools. Religion has become a subject taught by specialists instead of a life lived by families. How many of those rows of model Catholic school children, doing outwardly all the right things at the right moment in church, scrap the whole thing and begin to live when they go out into the world?

But the boys who *play* at David and Goliath will have less time for Davy Crockett, and in the future they are more likely to tackle the Goliaths of sin and suffering than the Davy Crockett fans.

Perhaps the root of the trouble and perplexity now is the over-rational and over-active life of our days. We want to see our children's religion taking effect in a stereotyped pattern of behaviour. This seems to be the opposite of Christ's example; he told stories, and made promises, gave warnings, and suffered everything a human being can be called to suffer, but he never forced any man to do anything, except when he drove the money-changers out of the Temple; in all this he is the great Exemplar for parents and educators.

Another important relationship between Bible, Liturgy and family is that they are the best source of family unity. However outwardly disunited a family may appear, it is bound together by invisible truths at all levels. The union between parents should be fruitful mentally and spiritually as well as physically; their union with the children is physically a fact and mentally and spiritually there is a unique relationship which should be fruitful too. But

in a state of sin what is best can become what is worst, and the closeness of family ties can lead to more bitterness and misery than happiness; what seems obvious to the parents is not so to the children, who cannot remain for long content to mirror their parents; so that in spite of the actual ties, the family must find its true source of unity, its real fruitfulness outside itself, in Christ and in the Church. Together they form one branch of the vine which is Christ, his life-giving sap runs through them all, and it is his supernatural life which brings to fruition the family relationships; for this reason it is so vitally important that families should be nourished on the Word of God in the Bible, in the liturgical rites and offices of the Church, and especially the Mass. These words, the stories, the psalms, the Gospels and so on, have in themselves an infinite significance, they come to mean to each soul at any particular moment just what that soul is capable of receiving; in this way a daily reading of the Bible can feed all sides and stages of natural development. The job of parents is not to chisel out a wooden puppet and say: 'Look, Lord, what a beautiful Roman Catholic I have made for you'—rather we have to keep on showing God and all truth to the child, teach him to love Christ and to desire the water of life. We have to prepare the good soil on which the sower's seed will fall.

The great problem remains as to how and in what form the seed is to be prepared and sown. To return to the subject of Christian art, if our children, the Christian artists of tomorrow, were truly nourished on a biblical understanding of the truths of faith, how much richer and more alive our Christian art would be. If the great stories of the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament had been basically entwined with the child's imagination in those days when the boundaries between dream and non-dream are faint, how vividly seen and felt might be his pictures and carvings; and if the significance had been there in embryo at the start, what blazing and inspiring signs would the fine flower of his work give us. The articles of the creed, the events of the liturgical year, the needs of the stricter liturgical ceremonies, can all be a source of the most lively creative inspiration provided they contain a living significance for the artist. The great doors of the early medieval Cathedrals, much of the glass and some of the great Byzantine Cathedrals could almost be described as Bibles in stone and glass. It is hard to imagine a



better way of teaching the truths of Faith. For that truth which is Christ is neither as dry as mere words and statements nor as mushy as the plaster statue, it belongs to the realms of experience at a multitude of levels from the joy of the baby in his tinkling rattle, to the ecstasy of a Saint who has been carried beyond any common experience but is granted one personal to himself. The world into which we may step as heirs of Christ is a world of that freedom wherewith Christ has made us free. This is the infinite world of life in abundance, given to every Christian family in the Bible and the Liturgy.



## THE LITURGY IN A LAY COMMUNITY

GEORGE INRSON

**T**O discover the meaning it is sometimes better to walk round the city like the children of Israel round Jericho than to attack the walls directly with battering rams and force of arms. So we shall be talking about the subject rather than on it, about the growth and effect of the Liturgy in the daily life of a particular lay community and the personal experiences of some of its members.

For many years we lived our life together with no accepted religious beliefs and our background was therefore opposed to anything in the nature of a liturgical action—we believed that a gesture or a word which did not spring from our own personal need or experience was a measure of our insincerity and was to be avoided if at all possible. Yet, strangely enough, it was from this very soil that the Liturgy grew, making itself felt, in the first case, as an emptiness in our life; we wished to express something together which seemed inexpressible, like a man without legs might wish to dance or a dumb man sing.

There was also the growing need to relate ourselves in some way to the hidden sources of life beyond the narrow sphere of individual consciousness; not to an impersonal abstraction but to that which was more deeply personal. We wished to enact together our hope of wholeness, in the intuitive awareness that this would predispose us to its realization. When we met the Mass and the psalms of the Divine Office the meeting was