

## THE MUSIC OF 'SERIES II': THE HOLY COMMUNION SUNG

THE form of the Holy Communion service, known as Series II, has been authorized for experimental use in the Church of England. It provides musical opportunities which should be fully realized by all concerned with its arrangement, when they are planning how it should be used. Contrary to a widespread misapprehension, there are more musical possibilities provided in this form than in any previous proposal.

Clearly the first important points to grasp are the underlying principles which should be adopted. But before discussing these, it should be noted that Series II provides for a great number of alternatives. In the rubrics the word *may* occurs with bewildering frequency, indicating that the possible permutations and combinations of the various alternatives are almost numberless. This again means some hard thinking at the start of the planning. It is not for a pamphlet like this to try to judge between one alternative and another. We are concerned with the musical possibilities, but evidently it is necessary for those responsible to make up their minds as to alternatives which they want to adopt before going into the musical side.

The Measure, which has been passed into law authorizing the use of Series II, puts strong stress on the co-operation of the laity. The consent of the Parochial Church Council is needed before it can be brought into use in any parish – that aspect too is outside our consideration here, but it raises a point about those who are engaged in the music of the Church. They have a ministry which has to be exercised in cooperation and agreement with the priestly ministry of the clergy, and their own particular contributions are required as part of a joint operation of all concerned with pastoral, ceremonial, theological, and musical aspects of the liturgy. All should have a clear vision of the purposes of the liturgy and of what it should aim to achieve within the limits of each particular church and its resources.

Limitations are a necessary part of life, and in musical things, as we know, the worst possible experience is to have to listen to a performer who is not aware of his own or of his choir's limitations. It is always much better to do a simple thing well than a more complicated thing badly. When considering musical performances, therefore, the important questions are (a) what is within our or my capacities? and (b) where can I find the best quality of music which falls within that category?

We have to face facts, and some of them may be difficult. We know that the ability of the clergy to sing varies greatly, but in this as in other aspects of the service we have to do the best with what is available and to be as realistic as we can. We cannot content ourselves with never singing the chief service of the Church. Very few people are unable to intone: most failures are due to inhibition or to lack of confidence. It is the duty of the priest to sing as well as he can. No more than this can be expected, but in some cases singing is obligatory for him. The following hints may help those who are unsure of themselves:

- (1) practise rhythmically in short phrases;
- (2) use a comfortable note if you have a choice, (some people have only one note and so there is no choice – or difficulty!) but make it very slightly higher than normal so that the effort will help to sustain pitch;
- (3) do not worry about conforming to the choir if you find it difficult – a change of key will not kill anyone!

The Communion service itself can be divided into two quite different strands:— there is the text of the liturgy itself, containing such things as the Creed, Gloria, Lift up your hearts and Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei: that is one strand; the other consists of the provision of hymns, psalms, anthems, and canticles, which can vary according to the requirements of the situation, namely, the season of the year and the resources of the church. These variables are provided for the first time officially as part of the service itself, and they are meant, of course, to be used so as to enhance the meaning of the whole.

In deciding what should be sung and who should sing it, certain vital principles should be kept in view. The first is that the Holy Communion service is an act of the whole People of God, of the congregation of faithful coming together to do something in common. Their musical part should therefore express this basic truth for, if it does not, the whole service will be greatly weakened in its Christian impact, both for them and for the visitor who comes in from outside. In practice this means that the fixed parts of the service should be mainly, and usually totally, congregational in character. The choir should see its own ministry in the liturgy as an essential part of helping the People, of whom the choir too is part, to make its service as near as possible to what it should be. But it should not overdo it by 'nursing' the congregation too much, for that will take away the People's sense of responsibility.

In some circles there is the mistaken idea that when something is sung by the congregation it is 'taken away' from the choir. Nothing could be further from the truth. The *main* function of a choir is to lead the congregation in its singing and to help it to make a better musical offering to God in its song. Pieces sung by the choir alone are strictly liturgical extras, and should be seen as such. They too have their part to play, but it is not the most important part. The minister is leading the People in prayer, the choir is leading the People in music, the servers are leading the People in making the responses and assisting with practical details – all are 'ministers' with the one overall object – to make the worship of the People more united and better performed, so as to give God a *total* worship as good as possible.

There are a number of good settings of the fixed part of the text of the service, the best known of which is Merbecke. It will be noticed that in Series II there are a number of minor changes in the words of the sung parts, correcting mistakes which crept into the 1662 text. These include the omission of one clause in the Gloria, and the insertion of the word 'the' before 'most high': in the Creed 'the Lord, *the* Giver' instead of 'and Giver,' and the restoration of the word 'Holy' before 'Catholick.' These may easily

be adapted in any music such as Merbecke, and examples of how this is done are given later. An order set to Merbecke with the amendments is available from the usual publishers.

How much of the fixed text should the people sing if we adopt the liturgical principles already mentioned? They should certainly sing the Creed, the Gloria, the Sursum Corda and Sanctus, and the Our Father. It cannot be too strongly stressed that the *common* singing (or saying) of the Our Father is the climax of prayer of the Holy Communion service and everything should be done to encourage maximum participation by the people, for it is the prayer in which we approach God in unity with Christ whose prayer it is.

The Benedictus and the Agnus Dei can also be sung by the people very properly, but they are not so necessary to the congregational side of the service, and it would be equally acceptable for them to be sung by the choir to some setting. They are set after the great prayer of Thanksgiving and before the Our Father and the sharing of the bread and wine. In choosing the choir music simplicity should be aimed at, so that the sequence of action and prayer is not unduly interrupted by an obtrusive musical performance (however good in itself). We may observe that these principles apply as much to cathedrals and churches with professional choirs as to the simplest parish churches.

For the part which the people and choir sing together familiarity is important. This does not mean that there cannot be a suitable amount of variation, but it should be limited so that the people get to know well the settings which they will use throughout the year. If there are three or four, one of them may from time to time be changed as new congregational settings of merit are composed, for certainly one hopes that new unison settings for the people will be an outcome of the new form of service. Although such variety and the introduction of new settings should be welcomed, the old should not be altogether abandoned for we have to consider also the participation of members of the church when they go to other churches than their own. It is not easy to lay down hard and fast rules as to how these principles can be put into practice, but they should be given due weight by clergy and musicians when making their decisions. But one clear principle is that the best known setting should *always* be used at major festivals when maximum participation is specially important.

There remain the parts of the service which are variable and in which those responsible have a wide choice. They cover the following items, the numbers of which are taken from the text of Series II: 1. Introit - psalm or hymn; 7. A psalm, or portion of a psalm, or canticle, or hymn (after the Old Testament reading); 9. A psalm, or portion of a psalm, or canticle, or hymn (after the Epistle); 23. Hymn during the preparation of the bread and wine; 33. Hymns and anthems while the people are receiving. This provides no less than five occasions on which special items may be sung either by choir or People or both. It should be noted that the word 'may' appears in all the rubrics, and that this means that not all need be used, but that what is convenient and most appropriate should be chosen. Two other points ought also to be noted here: first, that during the preparation of the bread and wine (23) a hymn is definitely specified, and the implication is that this occasion

at least should be one in which the People can join. Hymns are an important part of congregational worship, though they have often been allowed to displace the singing of the text of the liturgy. But we should not go from one extreme to the other and abolish hymn singing altogether. The aim must be to integrate the hymn singing with the liturgical text so that it supports and does not displace the action of the People in doing the liturgy.

The second point to notice is that there is no hymn at the end of the service. The omission of this is deliberate, for the aim of the order is to make the end of the service the point at which the People are sent out into the world to carry the Gospel to those among whom they live. To have a hymn at this point would weaken the force of the ending by turning it into a congregational devotion. The principle therefore needs clearly stating that, although in Series II the options should be used in omitting music where it does not fit in, *nothing should be added* in places where there is no provision for hymn or other singing. Instrumental music can be used with good effect at the end.

The alternatives allowed in 1, 4, and 9 give great scope for music and words. Although this short leaflet does not attempt to go into the liturgical side of the service, some of it overlaps with the purely musical questions and should be mentioned. If one looks at Series II Communion Service up to the end of the Creed, it will be noted that it could easily include the main elements to which we are accustomed in Matins. It provides for psalms and canticles, as well as adding a lesson from the Old Testament. Although we do not recommend it, it would be *possible* to go as follows:— 1. O come let us sing unto the Lord (which is a psalm); 2. Prayer for purity; 3. Sung form of Kyries; (4. Gloria in Excelsis if wanted here); 5. Collect; 6. Old Testament Lesson; 7. Te Deum; 8. Epistle; 9. Benedictus; 10. Gospel; 12. Sermon; 13. Creed. This shows that there is nothing essential to which we are accustomed in Matins which need be omitted from Series II Communion service. But it would make it heavy and overlong and somewhat unbalanced to keep such a programme, though there may be rare occasions when it would be suitable. But the important point to notice is that the principles which underlie Matins, the essential features of it, can be included in Series II Communion to the enrichment of the People's worship with a new chance of variety which has never before been permissible.

What then would be a suitable way of solving the problems in an ordinary parish church (if there is such a place)? Here we should note the freedom to use a *portion* of a psalm. This gives a choice of magnificent passages of six or eight verses which we can make to fit in with the celebrations of the season, whatever that may be. No doubt some of them will be used to the traditional Anglican chants which the People know and can sing. Anglican chants can be effectively used when sung in unison at a pitch suitable for the lower voices. Sometimes such portions could suitably be sung by the choir alone to some setting not of a congregational nature. But we might like to encourage the exploration of more unison simple tones for singing such passages. The Gelineau tunes may appeal to some, and there are some admirable and very simple tones which are being used for the new liturgy in French in Belgium and France, which might well be adapted to our use.

If psalm selections are going to be used, guidance might be sought from other Anglican Prayer Books such as the Canadian, which has suggestions for the different seasons, but this is more a liturgical than a musical question. If, however, there is a choir capable of performance on its own, then it would seem quite appropriate, if items 1, 7, and 9 are all used, that it should sing one of them to some sort of simple setting. Similarly during communion of the People (No. 33) there is another obvious opportunity for the choir to make a special contribution towards the devotion of the People.

What of the priest's musical part? In view of the wide variety of musical ability to be found among the clergy, it is difficult to generalize. If an officiating Minister is not much good at singing, he ought to be aware of the fact and restrict his singing to what is absolutely essential. It is perfectly possible to say, rather than intone, the Lessons and Gospel, and this is to be preferred where there is doubt. He need not even intone the Creed, which could be done by someone in the choir. He does need, however, to sing the Sursum Corda if he can manage it (No. 24) and intone the preface as far as the Sanctus. It has been maintained by some notable liturgical authorities that the whole of the Thanksgiving (No. 24) should be sung (e.g. the official publication suggests that there is no alternative to this). This idea seems to the present writer to be ill-judged, and to be discouraged, however good the clergyman may be at singing. The prayer is a long piece of liturgy, and will be wearisome if sung, even in the best possible way. Moreover many will feel a loss of solemnity if the words of institution are sung. This may be mere sentiment or prejudice, but it is deeply rooted and should be taken account of. If it is desired to have a sung *Amen* at the end of the great prayer of Thanksgiving, the priest could quite properly intone the final doxology, from "through the same Christ our Lord, by whom, and with whom . . ." to the end. The priest should also lead the Our Father.

In choosing motets or short anthems for the choir the potential in the hymn books should not be overlooked. There are many hymns (for example, some of those harmonised by J. S. Bach) which are not suitable for congregational singing, but which make charming and moving little anthems, and indeed are often used as such in cathedrals.

Although not strictly a musical matter, the greatest care should be taken over the said parts of the service, both by priest and People, and here too the choir has a rôle in leading. Rehearsals for everyone involved should be carefully arranged before the new service is introduced, so that uncertainty is reduced to a minimum.

The organist's part is crucial to the success of the sung service: that goes without saying. In particular, robust support needs to be given to the congregational singing, not only in hymns but also in such settings as Merbecke.

The new service of Series II gives great scope for bringing alive the Communion for the People, and this must be the guiding aim of musicians and clergy alike. They both share a ministry in leading the worship of the People of God in which simplicity, familiarity, and variety need to be balanced in a lively and inspiring combination.

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*The advice of Mr. Allan Wicks, organist of Canterbury Cathedral, has been much valued by the author in preparing this paper.*

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## APPENDIX I

### (1) Simple unison settings of the liturgical text.

The RSCM issues a list of some simple settings of Holy Communion. Many of the unison settings recommended in this list are quite easily adaptable for Series II use.

### (2) Simple settings of Benedictus and Agnus Dei.

The above list also mentions some simple 'choir' settings which include these parts of the service.

### (3) Simple motets and hymns for choir use.

The collection "Music for Holy Communion - Motets" contains a selection of 16 short motets for mixed choir. Another collection - "Music for Holy Communion - Settings and Hymns" includes a selection of 15 Communion hymns. Both these collections are published by the RSCM.

### (4) Psalm selections.

A list of suggested Psalms or portions of Psalms for use at Holy Communion for all major Festivals and each Sunday of the Church's Year appears in the full music edition of *The English Hymnal Service Book* (OUP). Those who would like a fuller list (to include Saints Days, lesser Festivals and other occasions) are referred to *Common Prayer, Canada, 1959*, the Canadian Prayer Book, which is obtainable through the SPCK.

### (5) Musical emendations for the new text set to Merbecke.

The SPCK publish a congregational booklet - "Holy Communion, Series II, with the melody of Merbecke" (ref: AS. 225). The accompaniment for the music in this booklet is to be found in "SPCK Church Music No. 61" (Merbecke, ed. Hunt & Knight) with which is issued a sheet of the musical amendments for Series II.



## APPENDIX II

Adaptation of Merbecke's music for use with Series II wording.

The following examples are taken from *An Order for Holy Communion, with melody of Merbecke* (SPCK). The text and music of this service are copyright and are here used by permission.

### KYRIE

(Three times)



Lord, . . . have . . . mer - cy.  
Ky - ri - e e . . . lei - son.

(Three times)



Christ, . . . have . . . mer - cy.  
Chri - ste . . . e . . . lei - son.

(Three times)



Lord, . . . have . . . mer - cy.  
Ky - ri - e e . . . lei - son.

### GLORIA

- (1) The petition "Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us" is omitted.

(Clef and key as above)

- (2)



art the Most High,

### CREED

- (1) "... the Lord, the Giver of Life . . ."

(Clef and key as above)

- (2)



And I be - lieve one ho - ly ca - thol - ic

### SANCTUS AND BENEDICTUS

These are sung separately.

### LORD'S PRAYER

- (1) "Our Father, who art . . ."
- (2) "... on earth . . ."
- (3) "... forgive those who trespass . . ."
- (4) The passage "For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever" is omitted, but "Amen" is sung.

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