

Review

Appreciating the Collect: An Irenic Methodology. Edited by James G. Leachman OSB and Daniel P McCarthy OSB. St Michael's Abbey Press, Farnborough. ISBN 978-0-907077-61-9. £22.95

We live in an age in which vast numbers of words are used to say very little, or to disguise the fact that the writer has actually nothing to say. You can see this instantly by switching on the television, opening a magazine or going anywhere at random on the internet. Completely at the opposite end of the spectrum, the Roman Collect uses very few words to say a great deal, about matters of depth and significance. How do we, in this age of verbal hyper-inflation, relate to these prayers, spare, succinct, dense with meaning? The answer to this question, and to many others besides, is provided by this book.

First, a few words about the title, and here I am indebted to Dom Cuthbert Brogan OSB, Abbot of Farnborough, writing in *Pluscarden Benedictines* No. 146: 'Appreciating' because 'it endeavours to inform and deepen the liturgical debate vibrant in today's church, but aligns itself with no particular party'. 'Irenic' because it is 'marked by an academic serenity which affords the current missal due respect without the unmeasured criticism of it in our day'. And 'Methodology' because of 'its establishing a critical apparatus by which liturgical texts... may be examined and discussed.'

To clear one important matter out of the way before I attempt to give a sense of this complex and fascinating book, it is plainly a work written by scholars for scholars, and hence it is assumed that the reader will be familiar with a certain technical vocabulary: *koinonia*, *theandric*, *euchology* (not always used in quite the same sense by the different contributors, of whom there are nine), *semiology*, *theophany*, *eschaton*, *redactional*, *asceticism*, *hermeneutical*, *hyperbaton*, *illocutory*, *kenotic*, *semasiological* and so on.

This could present a problem for the interested non-specialist reader, who otherwise could learn a lot from this book, if a handy glossary were included. If the book *is* intended purely for scholars, such a glossary would of course be redundant. But if it is desired to cast the net wider, a subsequent edition might do well to include one. It is true, of course, that

one can resort to the complete OED or to the internet, but I think that most people still prefer to read with just the book in their hand.

Having got that out of the way, I shall sketch out some of the ideas and perspectives in this book, which will certainly reward the careful reader. James Leachman, in his 'History of Collect Studies', draws attention to the fact that mediaeval Latin 'can no longer be considered as a hieratic and fixed language'. This is important, as transient historical influences can affect the sense in which words are used in a prayer, and we need to be aware of the nuances that convey the intention of a collect, in order to translate it in a way that conveys the tone of the original. Not that this book is much concerned with the question of translation, and the fact, to take an example at random, that in the still current ICEL version the invocation *Deus*, 'God', is routinely rendered as 'Father' is passed over without comment. (Actually, as Gerard Moore points out, 'very rarely is God addressed as Father in ancient Latin Collects or in the *Missale Romanum* 2002.')

The text of the prayers considered throughout is that of the Missal of Paul VI. The authors are emphatically not concerned with that of Pius V, though it is noted that the emphases in the later Missal are often much altered, as for example when 'the language of fasting has been excised from the Lenten collects'.

Older Catholic readers will notice that there is very little connection with that small part of the prayer repertory with which they were formed, but one of the collects analysed by Daniel McCarthy is that which is now appointed for the fourth Sunday in Advent:

Gratiam tuam, quaesumus, Domine, mentibus nostris infunde, ut qui, angelo nuntiante, Christi Filii tui incarnationem cognovimus, per passionem eius et crucem ad resurrectionem perducamur.

ICEL 1974: 'Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel the coming of your Son as man, so lead us through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection.'

McCarthy [for study purposes]: 'Pour forth your grace, we ask, Lord, into our hearts, that we, who came to know the incarnation of Christ your Son, as the angel was announcing, may be led through his passion and cross unto the glory of his resurrection.'

This, though, may be more familiar to some of our readers: ‘Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His passion and cross be brought to the glory of His resurrection.’ What is so striking about that is its verbal rhythm and balance: it actually sounds, as the best Latin collects do, as if it were written to be spoken aloud.

Reginald Foster, that illustrious and colourful figure, follows. Although his article is incomplete (he hasn’t space to discuss participles, or the accusative and infinitive construction, for example) this is the first presentation in print of his famous teaching method. It is minutely detailed, sometimes a little eccentric, but always compelling. Renato De Zan’s essay ‘How to Interpret a Collect’ is central to the whole enterprise. It is extremely dense, and undoubtedly tough going for the layman, but here, and with some of the other chapters, one may benefit from reading first the summary of each contribution in the Concluding Synthesis by Ephrem Carr, at the end of the book. Patrick Regan writes on ‘The Collect in Context’: the word ‘collect’, surprisingly enough, was never universally employed, the simple ‘oratio’ being generally preferred. The familiarity to English people, whether Anglican or not, of the word ‘collect’ is partly due its use in the Book of Common Prayer, and there is an Anglican contributor to this book, Bridget Nichols, who examines the Easter Day Collect in the 1549 Prayer book of King Edward VI. James Leachman, in his second essay, also reviews a Paschal prayer in depth, that for the Easter Vigil, and the difference in tone between these two orations is most instructive.

The other author who focuses on one single prayer (that for Epiphany) is Anthony Igbekele. I notice that in his ‘literal translation for study purposes’ he renders *Unigenitum tuum gentibus revelasti* as ‘have revealed your only Son to the nations’; but Reginald Foster, in his scheme of tenses, or ‘verb times’ as he calls them, designates this use of the perfect as ‘T4b’, having the sense of a single event in the past, i.e. ‘revealed’, as opposed to what he calls ‘T4a’, an action begun in the past and continued up to the present time, in this case ‘have revealed’. My money is on Foster here! And if the methodology is to be applied consistently throughout, there will need to be a little further harmonisation of such occasional discrepancies.

The last two essays, 'The Vocabulary of the Collects; Retrieving a Biblical Heritage' by Gerard Moore and 'Between Memories and Hopes: Anamnesis and Eschatology in Selected Collects' by Daniel McCarthy, both offer further insights. It is interesting to read that in the early church 'a polished traditional style could be of service in the conversion of intellectuals to the faith'. Very little danger of that now!

Finally, a word about what is required of the reader linguistically: this varies somewhat from one contributor to the other. Right at the start James Leachman makes it clear that, naturally enough, a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Latin language is essential for anyone working in this field. And indeed Reginald Foster, as one would expect from him, provides no translations for the large number of prayers he quotes – but that is perfectly reasonable. When it comes to translating specific collects analysed, each contributor gives the 'official' 1974 version, in all its threadbare mediocrity, and then offers a carefully qualified 'translation for study purposes only', and these are generally very good. There are a few oddities: on page xix we have a Greek original translated into French and Latin, but not into English; on page 58 there are three quotations in Latin, of which the first two are given in English; but the third is in Italian, because it is the 'official translation of the CEI'. I think the English reader still needs it in English. And actually the next quotation, from the Italian Bishops' Conference, is given in English without the Italian original.

The book is beautifully produced, in the best Farnborough manner, with a most attractive dust jacket. The bibliographies, at the end of each chapter, are exceptionally full and useful. The editors are to be congratulated on this endeavour, and we look forward keenly to seeing subsequent volumes.

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