

Editorial

Ministry Today 25: June 2002

By Paul Beasley-Murray

Since *Ministry Today* is a journal devoted to the practice of ministry, I thought in my editorial to raise the issue of church collections or offerings. What does one do with them? How does one manage them? Is it not perhaps time that we abolished them?

Let me explain. Many moons ago, when I was young, the church collection or offering was the opportunity for a natural break - the organ played, the plate was passed round, and often quiet conversations took place. In those days very few people paid by standing order - cash was the name of the game. But today things are very different. We are living in an increasingly cashless society. Like many others I rarely have any cash in my pocket - instead my wallet bulges with cards. Most of the serious giving in my church - and I guess in most churches - comes through standing orders. The result is that those who put money in the offering bags are a minority - for the most part they are either the elderly, who feel that church is not church unless they put money in the offering, or the less committed who wish to give God a 'tip'. The result is that when the gifts are brought forward, the prayer of dedication tends to have little relevance for the majority, unless one specifically mentions the money given through banker's orders!

Some churches have adopted a 'Pay-As-You-Enter' scheme. A receptacle is placed at the door so that people can give as they come in. But I am uncertain as to how effective this scheme is. My church treasurer assures me that by passing the plate or bag round people are more likely to give than leaving it at the door. And any rate, there is still the problem of the prayer of dedication.

We have tried to be a little more creative in the way in which we take up what is known in our church as the offering. In the first place the offering is no longer part of a natural break, instead it is taken up in the singing of a song of praise - in this way we seek to underline that the offering is our response to the grace of God. We also ensure that in the offertory prayer we present not simply the gifts, but the givers - and dedicate to God the week that lies ahead. But if the truth be told I still find the offering an unnecessary embarrassment.

I would love to abolish the offering. It would certainly make it much easier for my church treasurer and her team if they didn't have to count money immediately after the service. On the other hand, I happen to know that my church treasurer still appreciates the offering, for it still yields a tidy sum. So what do we do? Ideas please on a post-card!

PS: From a York Minster order of service: "I heard the voice of Jesus say: The collection is taken during this hymn"!

