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## Editorial: ‘Translating’ God

**B**ishop Beveridge, in his fine sermon of 1681 *Concerning the Excellency and Usefulness of the Common Prayer* (excerpts from which are printed in this issue), comments only briefly on the language of the Prayer Book, commending its ‘plain English, such as we use in our common discourse with each other’. There are, he says, ‘no unusual or obsolete words, no hard or uncouth phrases in it, but everything is expressed as clearly and plainly as words can do it’. Of course, Beveridge is emphasising that ‘the meanest person in the congregation...as well as the greatest scholar’ can be edified by the services; but he is also writing as a contemporary of Bishop Sprat who had praised the Royal Society for exacting from its members a ‘close, naked, natural way of speaking ...bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can’<sup>1</sup>.

Probably few now would say that the 1662 Prayer Book contains no unusual or obsolete words—we are three hundred years further away from it than Beveridge—but perhaps even in his day some words were beginning to feel archaic<sup>2</sup>. The claim that the Prayer Book consists only of such English ‘as we use in our common discourse with each other’ has a rather modern ring, reminding one of the arguments of those who modernised services in the 1960s, and wanted to bring liturgical English close to ‘everyday language’. But though much of the Prayer Book’s vocabulary is plain enough, this being Beveridge’s main point, I doubt if he would have denied the unobtrusive rhetorical effects, the variations in style and register between purely liturgical and hortatory elements in the services, or the other features which contributed to the creation of a distinctive religious language in the vernacular which goes beyond the ‘everyday’.

One characteristic of the Prayer Book, however, could not have been intended by Cranmer—its being in Early Modern English, which is a creation of time and did not exist in the sixteenth century: it is a description which can only be applied and felt in retrospect and as a result of subsequent changes in the language. Something that could not have been foreseen or intended at the time is now certainly part of our

1 Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London* (1667) p.113.

2 In the abortive 1689 revision, for example, ‘impartially’ was substituted for ‘indifferently’ in the Prayer for the Church Militant. ‘With my body I thee worship’ was omitted from the marriage vows—but this had been objected to as early as 1604.

experience, and is part of the character of a whole range of writings from sermons and church services to plays and poems. What difference does this make to worship? On one view it intrudes a muffling veil between us and God, making our worship to that extent unreal and inauthentic. On another view the work of time sacralises familiar words and makes them fit offerings, ever-timely patterns of the timeless.

Perhaps a further point would be worth exploring: Mark Hart, in the first article of this issue, powerfully restates the classical doctrine of God as 'without body, parts, or passions' and suggests that when we realise that all ascriptions to, and descriptions of, God are analogical we are freed from anxiety about the attribution to Him of such feelings as 'wrath'. God is, as it were, both unnameable and omni-nameable, and we can respond to Him by silence ('whereof we cannot speak...'), by a redundant multifariousness of attribution, or indeed by speaking in tongues. A formal liturgy will most naturally employ the language and imagery of Scripture—so in the Collects, for example, God is almighty, everlasting, merciful; a giver and protector, one who feels pity, who is bountiful in his goodness; a refuge and strength; an absolver, a stirrer-up, an instructor, an ordainer, a builder...

Dr Hart's suggestion is that the language we use of God necessarily has a provisional and analogical character which, so to speak, points beyond its inadequacy to Him who precedes and exhausts all language. This implies that when we use of God a word such as 'wrath' we 'translate' or interpret it, treating it as in some sense metaphorical. It has been said that all reading involves translation—'All reading for me' says one writer, 'really is a form of translation, of listening to voices speaking with urgency but which I only partly understand. Or to use another analogy, all interpretation is a form of allegory, a vision which finds alive a meaning now which is also somehow a then'.<sup>3</sup> I wonder whether this is not one of the things that makes the slightly archaic English of the Prayer Book so helpful—by its difference it brings to the foreground our need to translate, and by its element of strangeness invites us to 'find alive a meaning now', when a bald and prosaic utterance will merely bring us up short. The difference between the voice I 'only partly understand' and the one I 'understand' all too well.

John Scrivener

3 Brian Nellist in *The Reader*, No.5, Autumn 1999, p.66.

# On the Worship of a Passionate God Without Passions

MARK HART

James Callaghan was Home Secretary in the late 1960s, when the troubles in Northern Ireland were getting worse, and on a visit to the province he met Ian Paisley. Looking for common ground across the divide, he said, 'You know, Mr Paisley, we are all the children of God'. 'No we are not, Mr Callaghan. We are the children of wrath', Paisley replied. 'That flummoxed me', Callaghan later wrote in his memoirs.

This was neither the first nor the last time that the question of the wrath of God would lead to mutual incomprehension. In recent years there has been substantial debate over the modern hymn 'In Christ alone' written by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty. It is the second most popular hymn in the UK, according to a 2013 BBC survey, yet there is one controversial line: 'till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied'.

It divides people in at least three ways:

1. It is right to speak of 'the wrath of God'; this line does so in an acceptable way.
2. It is right to speak of 'the wrath of God'; this line does so in an unacceptable way.
3. It is wrong to speak of 'the wrath of God'.

The authors refuse permission to change the line, though many people sing their own preferred version, and an English cathedral at a Maundy Thursday Diocesan Eucharist this year printed: 'till on that cross when Jesus died, the arms of love were opened wide'.

It is well known that the Prayer Book is not without reference to the wrath of God, most prominently in the General Confession in Holy Communion: 'Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us'. A *Church Times* feature to celebrate the Prayer Book's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012 included an article by Jonathan Clatworthy (then General Secretary of Modern Church) in which he regarded this line, and the Prayer Book's general emphasis on penitence, as a reflection of sixteenth-century 'anxieties about the afterlife' and inappropriate for today.<sup>1</sup>

He is not alone in his discomfort. There is no equivalent reference to God's anger or wrath in *Common Worship*.<sup>2</sup> The difference in approach is

1 *Church Times*, 27 April 2012, p. 11.

2 Excluding the Psalter, and the versions of Prayer Book liturgy that are placed under *Common Worship*.

illustrated by the *Venite*, which appears only as an option (never set for any day or season), and it is indicated after verse seven that the canticle ‘may end here’, i.e. before the warnings and the final verse: ‘So I swore in my wrath...’ The whole *Venite* is a fixture as the opening canticle of Morning Prayer in the Prayer Book.

If the Prayer Book reflects sixteenth-century anxieties, which twentieth-century anxieties are reflected in *Common Worship*? Perhaps we are not at a sufficient distance to judge properly. However, there is one very significant twentieth-century shift in theology in the UK, especially since the second war, which is interesting to place alongside the twentieth-century growth of an aversion to liturgical reference to the wrath of God.

Between the covers of a standard edition of the Prayer Book we have both liturgy which speaks of the wrath of God, as already noted, and the Articles of Religion, the first of which says, ‘There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions...’

Wrath is attributed to God. Wrath is a passion. God is without passions. All this has been held together for centuries, indeed from the time of the Fathers of the Church.

Everything changed in the twentieth century. Alister McGrath, in his best-selling introduction to Christian theology, said that ‘it has become “the new orthodoxy” to speak of a suffering God’.<sup>3</sup>

A key work which popularised this view is *The Crucified God* by Jurgen Moltmann. It became required reading for Anglican clergy in the 1970s:

...a God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved...He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is a loveless being.<sup>4</sup>

This gives a flavour of the argument, and while justice cannot here be done to Moltmann’s substantial work, it should be noted that the long and venerable tradition of the impassibility of God thereafter came to be dismissible in a couple of sentences by others. A measure of the extent to which people became persuaded is that the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, while trying to respect the established doctrine, effectively rejected the view that God is without passions.<sup>5</sup>

Moltmann’s quote may be found puzzling because it is fundamental to Christian belief that God has become involved in the world and capable of suffering, through the incarnation of the Word. The Son of God suffered. The teaching of Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century is often

3 Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Blackwell 1997, p. 251.

4 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, SCM 1974, p. 222.

5 *We Believe in God*, Report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, Church House Publishing, 1987, pp. 157ff.

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summed up in the words 'The Impassible suffered', a phrase which is not nonsense because it is understood to refer to the suffering of the divine Son of God as man, not the suffering of God as God.

Moltmann however insists that for God to be loving it is necessary to suffer as God, in the eternal being of God, all apart from the incarnation, and that the suffering of the incarnate Son also involved the suffering of the eternal Father. Cyril would say that the suffering of the Son was experienced by the Son as man, and no suffering was experienced by the Father, who was not made man.

It may be thought that this radical revision of doctrine was limited to the more liberal theologians of the church. They were certainly included, as shown by this quote from David Jenkins, a former Bishop of Durham:

...if God does not suffer, but produces his purposes out of suffering by a divine condescension, proceeding from absolute detachment, then it is exceedingly difficult to see how he can be regarded as other than a cosmic monster.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the influence spread across all traditions, including the twentieth century's greatest opponent of liberalism, Karl Barth:

If it is true...that God is not moved either by anything else or by Himself, but that, confined as it were, by His simplicity, infinity, and absolute perfection, He is the pure immobile, it is quite impossible that there should be any relationship between Himself and a reality distinct from Himself—or at any rate a relationship that is more than the relation of a pure mutual negativity, and includes God's concern for this other reality...The pure immobile is death. If, then, the pure immobile is God, death is God...And if death is God, then God is dead.<sup>7</sup>

'Pure immobile' represents Barth's negative understanding of the classical doctrine of God; it is not a term used by exponents of divine 'simplicity', such as Thomas Aquinas. Whether it is a fair characterisation will become evident later, when 'simplicity' is discussed.

In a rather obscure passage, Barth goes on to explain how God may change in response to the world and yet remain Lord:

There is such a thing as a holy mutability in God. He is above all ages. But above them as their Lord...and therefore as One who—as Master and in His own way—partakes in their alteration, so that there is something corresponding to that alteration in His own essence. His constancy consists in the fact that he is always the same in every change.<sup>8</sup>

6 David E Jenkins, *The Glory of Man*, SCM, 1967, p. 107.

7 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1: 494 [§31.2].

8 *Ibid.*, II/1: 496 [§31.2].

Also, leading British conservative evangelical Anglicans were persuaded against a God without passions. John Stott wrote at some length on the theme in *The Cross of Christ*, considered by many to be his finest book:

It is true that Old Testament language is an accommodation to our human understanding, and that God is represented as experiencing human emotions. Yet, to acknowledge that his feelings are not human is not to deny that they are real. If they are only metaphorical, 'then the only God left to us will be the infinite iceberg of metaphysics'... The best way to confront the traditional view of the impassibility of God... is to ask 'what meaning there can be in a love that is not costly to the lover'. If love is self-giving, then it is inevitably vulnerable to pain, since it exposes itself to the possibility of rejection and insult.<sup>9</sup>

J I Packer is another influential Anglican evangelical, British born, now theologian emeritus of the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA). Long rooted in the Reformed and Puritan tradition, he nevertheless revised the doctrine of God:

This conception of God [as impassible] represents no single biblical term, but was introduced into Christian theology in the second century. What was it supposed to mean? The historical answer is: Not impassivity, unconcern, and impersonal detachment in the face of the creation. Not inability or unwillingness to empathize with human pain and grief, either. It means simply that God's experiences do not come upon him as ours come upon us. His are foreknown, willed, and chosen by himself, and are not involuntary surprises forced on him from outside, apart from his own decision, in the way that ours regularly are... Let us be clear: A totally impassive God would be a horror, and not the God of Calvary at all. He might belong in Islam; he has no place in Christianity. If, therefore, we can learn to think of the chosenness of God's grief and pain as the essence of his impassibility, so-called, we will do well.<sup>10</sup>

Accepted across church and academy, and throughout most traditions, and disseminated through preaching, the new understanding of a suffering God took hold. Richard Bauckham summed up the radical shift with more than a hint of triumph:

The idea that God cannot suffer, accepted virtually as axiomatic in Christian theology from the early Greek Fathers until the nineteenth century, has in this [twentieth] century been progressively abandoned. For once, English theology can claim to have pioneered a

9 John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, IVP, 1986, pp. 331f.

10 J I Packer, 'What Do You Mean When You Say God?', *Christianity Today*, September 1986, pp. 27-31.



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major theological development: from about 1890 onwards, a steady stream of English theologians, whose theological approaches differ considerably in other respects, have agreed in advocating, with more or less emphasis, a doctrine of divine suffering.<sup>11</sup>

Over 30 years on it seems premature to have claimed 'to have pioneered a major theological development'. The *Church Times* ran a major feature throughout Lent this year entitled 'Theology Now', edited by Andrew Davison. Rather than reaping the benefits of this 'theological development', there was no sign of it, only a statement of the classical doctrine of God, most notably by David Bentley-Hart, a prominent American Orthodox theologian and a vigorous defender of divine simplicity and impassibility.<sup>12</sup> In one of the interviews in the series, John Milbank described the change during his career:

Theology is astoundingly different from when I was an undergraduate [early 1970s]. The ancient reasonings behind the doctrines of Creation, Trinity, and Christology are much better understood, and orthodoxy is widely accepted, especially among the young... In consequence, whole swathes of academic twentieth-century theology are now just left on the shelves. Instead, theology has renewed its traditional engagement with the whole of philosophy... So, today, students engage with the Fathers, and medieval or Reformation writers, as if they were still our contemporaries, in the spirit of twentieth-century Catholic *ressourcement*.<sup>13</sup>

To try to understand the reasons for these changes in thinking (in either direction) could be the subject of another article, but it is worth noting that in the middle of the twentieth century, against the tide, two English Anglicans, E L Mascall and Austin Farrer, were expounding the classical doctrine of God.<sup>14</sup> Sometime later, Rowan Williams (who acknowledges the influence of both) rose to prominence amongst a group who would also swim against the tide. Rupert Shortt comments, 'I know from conversations with people like Rowan Williams that orthodoxy in the usual sense seemed subversive at the time.'<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the reasons, it seems clear that it is now far from true that divine impassibility has been abandoned in academic theology in the UK; there are signs that in many places it is being reinstated. It is unclear though that this trend has reached the bishops, clergy or laity

11 Richard Bauckham, 'Only the Suffering God Can help: Divine Passibility in Modern Theology', *Themelios*, 9.3 (April 1984), p. 6.

12 David Bentley Hart, 'We need to talk about God', *Church Times*, 12 February 2016.

13 'Interview: John Milbank, theologian', *Church Times*, 19 February 2016.

14 E L Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*, Longmans, 1943; E L Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, DLT, 1949; Austin Farrer, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay*, Dacre Press, 1943.

15 Rupert Shortt, *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, Darton Longman & Todd, 2005, p. 68f.

of the church to any significant degree. The church has become more theologically conservative in an evangelical direction, which is not the same as a return to classical theism, as has been demonstrated.

II

Having described the swing of the pendulum on divine impassibility, and allowed the voices against it to be heard, I now wish to sketch<sup>16</sup> the case for the traditional doctrine, to outline the concept (or lack of concept) of God it entails, to address some of the objections, and to come back to the question of divine wrath and the wider implications for liturgy.

Earlier it was noted that the Prayer Book and Articles include both the attribution of wrath to God and the statement that God is 'without body, parts, or passions'. This is no contradiction as long as it is understood that the wrath of God is metaphorical, a similar figure of speech to 'the arm of the Lord' or 'The Lord is my rock'.

Aquinas was explicit on this: 'Some things are said of God in their strict sense; others by metaphor... When certain human passions are predicated of the Godhead metaphorically, this is done because of a likeness in the effect... anger is never attributed to God properly, since in its primary meaning it includes passion'.<sup>17</sup>

The point being made is that the judgement of God is such that there are consequences of sin, and that in human terms judgement against wrong is often associated with the passion of anger, therefore that passion can be applied to God, on the understanding that it is a metaphor. God is the judge of the world, but the world does not cause emotional change in God.

Most recent discussion of the wrath of God refers to C H Dodd's commentary on the epistle to the Romans where he argued, on the basis of the use of the word 'wrath' in Greek literature, that 'to Paul "the Wrath" meant not a certain feeling or attitude of God towards us, but some process or effect in the realm of objective facts'. Paul used the word 'not to describe the attitude of God to man, but to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe'.<sup>18</sup> This is similar to the position of Aquinas in that it removes the passion of wrath from God, but Aquinas would not worry if Scripture attributed wrath as passion because to him it is metaphorical and therefore can be full-

16 For fuller accounts see for example: Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Oxford, 2004; David B Burrell, *Aquinas: God & Action*, University of Scranton Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2008; E L Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*, Longmans, 1943.

17 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.19.11.

18 CH Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Fontana, 1959 (first published by Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), pp. 48ff.

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blooded wrath. That Dodd felt the need to excuse Paul suggests that he didn't himself hold to the impassibility of God.

Engaging with Dodd, John Stott maintains that the wrath of God cannot be dismissed as wholly impersonal in the New Testament: 'Perhaps the reason for Paul's adoption of impersonal expressions is not to affirm that God is never angry, but to emphasize that his anger is void of any tinge of personal malice... To speak thus of God's anger is a legitimate anthropomorphism, provided that we recognize it as no more than a rough and ready parallel, since God's anger is absolutely pure, and uncontaminated by those elements which render human anger sinful'.<sup>19</sup> Stott is conscious of the potential embarrassment in applying wrath to God, given the negative associations in human behaviour, so cools the passion—the *change*—'God's [anger] is a continuous, settled antagonism, aroused only by evil, and expressed in its condemnation.'<sup>20</sup>

On the face of it this amounts to an attractive doctrine of God. On the one hand, full of love, God is moved passionately by the pain and suffering of the world, on the other, full of holiness, God views the evil in the world with a righteous anger which is settled, but none the less real.

By contrast, the God of the first Article we have heard described as loveless, proceeding from absolute detachment, in a relation of pure mutual negativity with the world, a cosmic monster, a pure immobile, dead, an infinite iceberg, and a horror.

Before answering these charges directly it is necessary to step back and ask what it means to speak of God. When young children are presented with the answer 'God' in response to their relentless ultimate questions, they inevitably and instinctively ask 'But who made God?' It is natural to expect an explanation for the existence of each thing we encounter. But God is not another thing. He is that on which every thing depends. God is uncreated, dependent on nothing other than God for existence.

It is for this reason that God must be without body or parts. To have a body or to be a composite is to depend on that which is not yourself. I am not water but I need it to make up about 60% of my body. There is nothing that is not God that is needed for God to be God.

For the same reason, God does not have a context or an environment, other than God. To speak of 'Our Father, which art in heaven' is not to imply that God has a location or a habitat where divine needs are supplied. The same must be said of time as well as space. 'Begotten of his Father before all worlds' does not imply we can imagine a timeline as a backdrop to God's life such that at one point the world was created. Neither can God be 'in time' in the world, as we are, since God is that on which everything, including time, depends.

19 *Op. cit.* pp. 105f.

20 *Op. cit.* p. 106.

What is true of time and space must also be true of every concept and category of human imagination, even the category of 'things that exist'. Suppose a circle is drawn representing everything that exists, so that into it should be entered the world, the universe, every universe there may be, all angels—the whole of creation. Should God be included in the circle? The atheist will say no, and place God outside the circle, in the category of things that don't exist, along with unicorns and hobbits.

The Christian should also say no, and refuse to place God in either the category of things that exist or the category of things that don't exist. For to say that God is one of the things that exist is to claim to know a category which contains God and which is therefore logically prior to God. Instead, it must be insisted that God is the source of the truth and reality of every concept and category, including existence.

It follows that God and the world are neither separate things (the way theism is popularly perceived) nor the same thing (as in pantheism) nor overlapping things (as in panentheism). That exhausts our options for placing God on the map, which is precisely the point. God cannot be placed on any map.

Incidentally, to speak of God in this way is the proper response to 'new atheists'. Their target is a God who is on their map of things that exist, and therefore, with some justification, given their starting point, they demand that such a God's existence be demonstrated in the same manner as that required for everything else in the universe. That is one reason why it is important to recover the traditional doctrine of God. Often, atheists don't realise that it is an ancient doctrine, and imagine it is a novel theory created in response to their arguments, a half-way position between theism (in their terms, i.e. God as a being) and atheism; or they dismiss it as sophistry.<sup>21</sup>

All that has been insisted so far is that God is truly God, i.e. the source of everything that is not God, and logically prior to everything that is not God. Pushing this further, consider how for every kind of thing that is in the world we may identify both *what* it is and *that* it is. We can define what a unicorn is in as much detail as we like, but until one is born, no-one has ever pointed to one and said *that* it is. Or to put it in other terms, we can discuss the essence of unicorns separately from the question of their existence. So with everything in the world.

Can the same be said of God? Surely not, for to identify what God is, the essence of God, apart from the question of existence is to regard deity as a category. To define a god as, say, someone who has the ability to create universes out of nothing, is to make God, the creator of our universe, one of a kind. That is true even if we go on to say that God is

21 e.g. A C Grayling, *Against All Gods*, Oberon, 2007, p. 10.

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the only god who exists. When we say 'I believe in one God', we mean that God alone is to be worshipped. We don't mean 'I believe the set of gods contains only one member, God'.

God is not an instance of anything, not a countable item. Unlike everything we encounter in the world, God is not one of a kind, a being who may or may not exist. If God were, then we could ask about the origin of this category, and God would not be God.

It is such thinking that leads to the assertions that God is necessary (not contingent) and that no distinction can be made between God's essence and his existence. That God is necessary means that God cannot not be. It is of God's essence to exist, to be. Or as David Burrell puts it with great care, 'To be God is to be "to be"'.<sup>22</sup>

Consider then the beauty, love, goodness, holiness and truth of God. Are these attributes all aspects or features of God, in the way we normally use the terms in the world? The difficulty is that beauty, for example, cannot be regarded as a property which God possesses, as if it were a reality which could exist apart from God. Nor can beauty literally be an aspect of God, for that implies the possibility of an analysis of God, a division into parts.

Hence the doctrine of divine simplicity, held by Augustine and Aquinas, amongst others, which affirms that there can be no distinction between God and the attributes of God. God is love, beauty and goodness. Similarly, because it is of the essence of God to exist, as we have seen, it can be said that God is existence itself.

This is extraordinarily difficult, and it is tempting to say it is nonsense and reduces God to an abstract concept. That would be true if all that we said were 'God is goodness'. We also say 'God is good', which again, on its own, has the problem of suggesting that God possesses properties like any other being. The way of speaking of God being summarised here stretches us to the edge of our language and carefully notes how each statement has its limits. It recognises that God cannot be contained in our language and concepts.

The objection is sometimes made that this doctrine over-defines God, compared with the Scriptures. But it isn't a definition of God; it is a clarification of the fact that God cannot be defined. It is not an explanation of God but an intensification of the mystery of God. It is a clarification of how all our normal speech about God must work if it is to be God of whom we speak.

When it is said that God is love, we shouldn't imagine that an exhaustive study of the meaning of that word in human terms will get us to what it is like for God to be love. Our washing machine at home plays a tune from Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet at the end of each cycle (I'm

22 David B Burrell, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

not making this up). You could rightly describe the machine as musical, but if that were all we understood musical to be, we would have only the faintest glimpse of what it meant for Schubert himself to be musical.

Similarly, the words love, beauty, goodness etc. are used of God by way of analogy. They give us some very limited insight into what is true of God. It is not as if the 'love' applied to God and the 'love' applied to humans are as different as 'bat' applied to cricket and 'bat' applied to a certain flying creature. The doctrine of divine simplicity is only nonsense if it is insisted that all the words are being used according to our understanding, and not analogically.

So far it has been claimed that God is uncreated, has no context, is neither the same thing as the world nor a separate thing, exists necessarily, and is indistinguishable from existence, love, goodness, truth and beauty.

This leaves our heads reeling and God inconceivable; not in the sense that we are left denying God's existence, but that we are left without any notion of the kind of being God is, and without any idea of what it is like to be God.

We should be more troubled if this were not the case. If the analysis of our speech about God doesn't bring us to this point then we are speaking of an idol, that which can be constructed and understood using the conceptual materials of the world. It isn't sophistry, for that which is the ground and source of all our thinking and speaking surely cannot be contained within it. In a profound sense, God is unknowable.

This can be spoken of as the 'otherness' of God, or described as an 'ontological gulf' between God and the world, i.e. God and the world are different kinds of being (or better, God is no kind of being). It is the distinction between the creator and the creature. It is of God's essence to exist. It is not of the world's essence to exist. The act of creation is the granting of existence to the world.

This kind of action is off the map of all actions in the world. Just as God cannot be mapped by us, nor can God's action. God is not a player in the world, another force or influence alongside everyone and everything else. God does not exert power over the world but brings into existence a world in which there are powers and causes, and where there is an integrity to the way everything works together. God's action can therefore never be in competition with or in opposition to any agent in the world.

This gulf is one reason why it is impossible for God to be changed by the world. There cannot be any causal connection from the world to God. To think otherwise is a little like imagining that Sherlock Holmes is the mind behind a crime being solved in the real world, or that the colour blue has moved my car keys to be out of place.

If God could be changed by the world then there is an identifiable system which contains both the world and God. If it is thought that

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events in the world cause sorrow in God, as they happen, then God is in time. This may solve the problem (not yet addressed) of being an 'iceberg' but it creates its own problems.

Firstly, rather than being fundamentally 'other', God becomes just a very much more powerful and less limited version of us. Even if God did create us, are greater power and size sufficient to make someone the proper object of worship? By contrast, in traditional thinking, God has no power which is in competition with ours, which can be measured on the same scale.

Secondly, God would need the world to be fulfilled. If the world is capable of causing sorrow, it is capable of relieving it and causing joy. God has an interest in the world as a place from which to derive pleasure. This puts into question whether grace is the fundamental ground or source of the world. God may be gracious, but also a toxic combination of need and power, giving a foothold to the worship of power at all levels in the world.<sup>23</sup>

Instead, the tradition has held that it is sufficient for God to be God. Nothing other than God can add to God's fullness or wellbeing; and there is no potential in God, no lack of fulfilment. We are beings with the potential to act or to become something different. But God's essence is to exist, 'to be'. Strictly speaking, 'God' is a verb, not a noun. God is fully in act. Potential implies the possibility of something becoming actual, but God is wholly actual.

It is therefore necessary to be careful when speaking of God's act of creation. It is not that God has the potential to create the world and initiates an activity additional to the act of being God. We most naturally imagine God deciding to create in the way we decide to create change in the world. But the act of creation is not a change in anything, since it is a giving of existence. To speak of creation is simply so speak of God as the one on whom the existence of the world depends. It is not to point to an action by God which is distinct from that act which is the being of God.

Here many claim that God therefore had no choice but to make the world; it exists necessarily by virtue of God's existence. In response it must simply be restated that the world is not necessary for God to be God, nor is the creation of the world caused by anything that is not God. This is sufficient to establish God's freedom in relation to creation. And it establishes the world's freedom, not in the sense of independence, but as that which exists by pure gratuity and not as a means to an end.

### III

Having described God as fully in act and therefore unchanging it is necessary to answer the charge that this implies that God is static, or

23 For a fuller argument of this point see the essay 'On Being Creatures' in Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Blackwell, 2000, pp. 63-78.

inert, or a 'pure immobile', or dead. In this world, the only way we can conceive of something as unchanging is for it to be static, for to act is to change and to be in act is to be changing. That is, everything is part of an environment on which it depends, and which it changes and is changed by if it acts. God has no context other than God, and is fully in act without changing. It is the constancy, not of total inaction, but of being so infinitely active that it is not possible to be more active.

Again, this is about accepting that our imagination has no access to what it is like to be God. A similar point can be made about God not being in the time of the world. Often this is understood as God seeing everything across all time simultaneously, but 'simultaneous' is a temporal term. All we can say is that God knows the world—and that this is not additional knowledge, changing God from what God would be without the world, by adding to divine memory banks. God knows the world by knowing God.

J I Packer speaks of 'the chosenness of God's grief and pain' and Karl Barth argues that God as 'Master and in His own way—partakes in their alteration [i.e. that of the creatures]'. This does seem to avoid the problem of the world causing change in God, but it raises the question of why it is felt necessary for God to change.

One reason that may be proposed is that God's love in response to a particular situation in the world needs to be activated. Yet God is fully in act: the infinite, eternal, self-giving love which is before all worlds and sufficient for all worlds. Whatever the world may become, no matter how terrible its pain and suffering, God, by being God, not by becoming something in response, is the love it needs and infinitely more besides. (A faint analogy is found in the concept of infinity itself, which is such that it makes no sense to imagine that the addition of a finite quantity to infinity makes any change.)

It is more likely however that Packer and Barth (along with all the other critics of divine simplicity) consider it necessary for God to *feel* pain in sympathy with the world, i.e. to be subject to passion. Aquinas is clear that, while passion is essential to anger (and therefore in God it must be considered as a metaphor), passion is not essential to love. He distinguished between the 'intellectual appetites' (governed by the will) and the 'sensitive appetites' (relating to the body).<sup>24</sup> The latter concern the emotions, and it seems right to see them as essentially connected with the body.

The criticism has often been made that divine impassibility is inherited from a Greek philosophical tradition which regarded suffering as a sign of weakness.<sup>25</sup> God, it was thought, must be above all this. The result

24 See Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, T & T Clark, 2000, p.126. The whole book is the most thorough modern exposition of this tradition.

25 e.g. Bauckham, *op.cit.* p. 7f.



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is to make God remote, and to diminish the value of the body and the emotions. It therefore seems odd that many of the critics agree to regard God only as passionate, and not as bodily.

It is wrong though to regard 'without body, parts or passions' as implying that the bodily and passionate are alien to God. This is a statement of the lack of any limitation on God, rather than a statement about the nature of God. W Norris Clarke explains well how it is the otherness of God which makes possible the likeness:

On the one hand it is clear how God, as pure Subsistent Act of Existence... with no limiting essence, transcends his creatures as composed of existence and limiting essences, and yet, on the other, why there is a deep similarity to God running through all creatures as all participations in the one central perfection of God himself, so that they can all be truly called 'images of God'. (To get hold of this insight into existence as the central perfection of all real beings, containing all other modes of perfection within its all-encompassing fullness, which is so unique in the history of Western philosophy, it may help to reverse our way of speaking for a while and say, not 'This horse exists, a man exists,' etc., but rather 'Existence here is found in a horsy mode, a human mode, a rose-bushy mode...' Or: 'There is an existent here in the horsy mode, the human mode, the rose-bushy mode...')<sup>26</sup>

Here creation is seen not as an arbitrary construction by God which is not necessarily similar in any way to God's own being, but wholly a participation in God. It is not God, nor a part of God, but creation exists because God who is existence gives existence, albeit in a finite form. This is closely parallel to God's self-giving which is a giving of God, in the eternal begetting of the Son. Creation is not necessary for God to be God, but given that God is triune, it is 'of God'; both that it exists and the form of its existence are consonant with the being of God. The relevance of all this to the incarnation is obvious—or rather, that all this thinking is underpinned by the incarnation is obvious.<sup>27</sup>

Returning to the question of love, is Aquinas right that passion is not of its essence? If he were not, we would have to measure love by the degree of passion, by the change taking place, denying all that we see of value in steady, settled self-giving. And we all know that it is possible to be moved emotionally without any response of self-giving love. Authentic love is not measured by emotional change in the lover but by

26 W Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*, Notre Dame, 2001, p. 89.

27 The Hulsean Lectures 2016, 'Christ and the Logic of Creation' by Rowan Williams (January/February 2016) are very much on this theme. Available online: <http://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/events/the-hulsean-lectures-2016-christ-and-the-logic-of-creation>

the response towards the loved. God is an unlimited 'response' of love to the world by being God without change, though of course this is not strictly a response.

So far answers have been given to most of the names thrown at the God of this theology: loveless, monster, pure immobile, dead, infinite iceberg, horror. Only implicitly has an answer been given to the accusation of 'absolute detachment', so more should be said. Creation is a participation in God, and while not the same as God or a part of God, neither can it be regarded as separate from God. In the case of the alternative, where God and creation share an environment, God can be more or less present to parts of the world, depending on circumstances. Here though, God is present to the world as the giver of existence, free from its environment, a freedom which allows a presence 'more intimate to us than we are to ourselves', as Augustine put it.<sup>28</sup>

It is very tempting to think that God is closer to the world if divine action is conceived as episodic, temporal and local; a set of specific interventions in response to circumstances—and intercessions. All apart from the conflict between science and faith which this necessarily generates, it misunderstands the nature of prayer. To use a crude image, intercession is not a lever to move God, for on what fixed point would it rest? (The laws of the environment? Immediately we see that it is no longer God whom we are talking about.) Rather, intercession is a lever to move the world, and it rests on God.

In the words of Rowan Williams, God creates the world such that we must talk about divine action or particular providence...

Only... in terms of the character of the finite system as a whole. If there are moments when the act of God is recognised more plainly than it is in others, or when the subject senses a closeness to the underlying act of God that has the effect of prompting, warning, reassuring or guiding, we are not to think of the fabric of the finite order being interrupted, but rather of the world being such that, given certain configurations of finite agencies, the texture of the environment is more clearly transparent to the simple act of divine self-communication.<sup>29</sup>

Or, as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.' Far from being left to its own mechanical devices by a distant God, the world is here envisaged as having a potential for surprise, freshness and miracle which is as unlimited as God. Yet it is a surprise which is neither

28 Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.vi.

29 Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton, SCM, 2007, pp. 268f.

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intrusive (as if God had to become more present) nor random (as if it interrupts the order). The world has a deep logic (i.e. an imbuelement with 'logos') which is beyond the reach of science, such that the surprise is both of God and opened up from within itself. By such thinking creation and redemption may be seen together as part of the one act who is God, utterly present at every moment to every part of the world.

### IV

It was previously noted that a recovery of interest in the Fathers has led to a wider understanding and acceptance in theology departments of God as 'without body, parts, or passions'. However, while both the academy and the Church of England have become less liberal, the academy's centre of gravity has shifted in a Catholic direction, while the Church's has shifted in an Evangelical direction. That is a gross generalisation, but there is good reason to think that the doctrine of God outlined by David Bentley Hart under the heading 'Theology Now'<sup>30</sup> is far from representative of the current thinking of many clergy and laity. There are three main sticking points.

Firstly there is the widespread attribution of passion and change to God in the Bible, especially throughout the Old Testament. Richard Bauckham, drawing on the Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel, says, 'The "anthropopathisms" of the Old Testament, in which God is represented as emotionally involved with and responding to his people, are not to be set aside as rather crude ways of speaking of God which are not really appropriate to the reality of God, but should be seen as a central hermeneutical key to the prophetic theology.'<sup>31</sup>

However, it is not that such representations are crude, for figurative and metaphorical language certainly need not be. The question is whether, for example, when Hosea speaks of the Lord's heart being turned or changing, and his compassion growing or kindling, it is as figurative as a few verses earlier, when Israel is lifted as a child to the Lord's cheek (Hosea 11.1-9). John Stott speaks of God's compassion in this passage as an example of real feeling in God in response to the world.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the threads running through the Old Testament which inform our reading of God's cheeks, eyes, legs, arms, wings etc. are the prohibition against idolatry and the description of God as that on which everything depends. The two go together, for that which lies before all things cannot be represented by those things. The fuller implications of this (including 'without passions'), developed above, are not found explicitly in Scripture, but are that to which Scripture as a whole points. And it is in

30 David Bentley Hart, *op. cit.*

31 Richard Bauckham, *op. cit.* p. 9.

32 John Stott, *op. cit.* p. 331.

Scripture where God is first named as a verb: 'I AM THAT I AM' (Exodus 3.14).

Secondly, for God to be described as essentially unknowable can be hard to accept in a tradition which emphasises God's full and clear revelation, but the two are opposite sides of the same coin. God is unknowable by being prior to every category and descriptor that may be used to give us a handle on him. This is negative or apophatic theology, which as Denys Turner puts it, is 'that speech about God which is the failure of speech'.<sup>33</sup>

By contrast, positive or cataphatic theology is verbose, and follows from Norris Clarke's point about all creatures being 'images of God'. Denys Turner again, writing on Denys the Areopagite:

God is the cause of all things and so the names of God may be, indeed must be, derived 'from all the things caused'. Anything that God has brought about provides a potential source of imagery for the description of God, so that only that which names a respect in which something is evil cannot serve as a name of God... Therefore we may say, without qualification, that any name which names a property of creatures can also be a name of God, for evil is not a property of anything at all.<sup>34</sup>

Or as Rowan Williams puts it,

Eckhart's Latin writings famously ascribe to God the simultaneous descriptions *esse innominabile* and *esse omninominabile*, being-without-name and being-named-by-every-name. Nothing tells us what God is, yet everything speaks to us of God, and the specific thisness and thatness of all things can be traced to the fecund life of the one source which—in another well-known image—'boils over' into the manifold life of this world.<sup>35</sup>

So negative theology is not about hiding behind a mystery, refusing to believe that anything can be known about God. Nor is positive theology about delineating God, even in Scriptural language and imagery. Negative theology does not leave us practically atheist, but leads us to silent contemplation. Positive theology does not leave us practically fundamentalist, but leads us to speech which by its abundance expresses itself as limited and unfinished.

Thirdly, a tradition with a strong emphasis on God as a person with whom we may have a relationship often struggles to accept God as

33 Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 20.

34 Denys Turner, *op. cit.* p. 23. The point about evil is that it is the lack or loss of some good, not a thing in itself. So nothing is essentially evil (cf. the Ash Wednesday collect: 'Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made...').

35 Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement*, Darton Longman & Todd, 1994, p. 269.

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simple, pure act, unmoved by the world. That doesn't make God sound like a friend with whom you may have a conversation.

What cannot be said, given all the earlier argument, is that God is an instance of the category of 'person'. That is not to say we cannot call God a person. As Augustine said, when writing on the persons of the Trinity, '...they are certainly three... Yet when you ask "Three what?", human speech labours under a great dearth of words. So we say three persons, not in order to say that precisely, but in order not to be reduced to silence.'<sup>36</sup>

That God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not contradictory to saying that God is without parts. God is not composed of the persons of the Trinity, as if there were three individuals in God. Here again the language of 'person' can be seen to break down. Since God is fully in act, to speak of God as Trinity is to speak of this act as relational: love in its eternal and infinite fullness.

Negative theology doesn't stop us from speaking of having a relationship with God as with another person. It stops us from settling for this and speaking only this way. If God is that by which and in whom we exist, the one to whom we pray, the one in whose place we stand as we pray, and the one who enables us to pray or makes intercession for us, then the friend-to-friend model is just one of a myriad images for the unnameable. The life of contemplative prayer is predicated on this mystery, the truth that prayer is happening before we speak, the prayer which is God, the prayer which happens in us and through us as we make ourselves present and open.

### V

Acknowledging that God is simple, 'without body, parts, or passions', not a thing, not one of any kind, has many implications. Significant difficulties are created when this understanding is lost, and wide benefits are yielded when it is gained, for example in the following areas: the Bible—by a clarification of how language about God works; prayer—by pointing towards both contemplation and liturgical excess; atheism—by denying that God is an item, capable of being evinced like any other; science—by removing God's action from competition with natural causes; free will—by denying any competition between divine and human agency; the environment—by seeing all creation as 'charged with the grandeur of God'; salvation—by understanding it as integral with creation; inter-faith dialogue<sup>37</sup>—because of the common ground in the Abrahamic traditions.

And it is this understanding which grounds worship as that which is due to God alone, since only the worth of God is not derived from

36 Augustine, *Trinity*, V.9.

37 See David B Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas, Notre Dame*, 1986.

another. As soon as God is made part of the system in any way, this changes, and God becomes the most worthy on a scale of worthiness.

So after a very long detour we come back to the liturgy and the appropriateness of speaking of God's wrath or anger. While this is a narrow question, it is illustrative of more general principles.

God is unnameable yet all things name God. Even icebergs, which are majestic and largely hidden, and call for the most respectful navigation in their proximity. The danger is to identify a limited, correct form of prose which thereby appears to be defining God. The more excessive, self-contradictory and poetic our speech, the more the form of speech is itself pointing to God as that which escapes our speech. The less there is the risk of particular words, like wrath, being used by people to create an image of God. Denys Turner again:

In a pious vocabulary of unshocking 'appropriate' names, lies the danger of the theologian's being all the more tempted to suppose that our language about God has succeeded in capturing the divine reality in some ultimately adequate way. Tactically preferable is the multiplicity of vulgar images which, because they lack any plausibility as comprehensive or appropriate names, paradoxically have a more uplifting efficacy.<sup>38</sup>

It is true that there are words we can use formally of God, and not figuratively, such as love, truth and beauty, where by analogy they speak of that love, truth and beauty which God is and of which we cannot conceive. But no-one would argue that it is helpful to restrict ourselves to such words and lose out on all the imagery provided by creation. Scripture is full of it, and everyone loves to hear of God's heart being moved with compassion. So we draw on human relationships, but if we only use warm images, neglecting the challenge and conflict of life, then we portray a God who is naïve in the face of evil and incapable of judgement. It is selectivity which creates the problem. Good liturgy will not tell the whole story of grace in comfortable words nor will it allow the use of wrath and anger to be such that it becomes image forming.

It has been argued that God is indeed without passions and therefore 'the wrath of God' is metaphorical. This makes it unnecessary to redefine what is meant by wrath when applied to God, as some wish to. As we have seen, C H Dodd interpreted wrath in Paul as impersonal. C F D Moule<sup>39</sup> and Stephen H Travis both want to retain the personal nature of wrath but read Paul as speaking of an attitude, with the focus on God's

38 Denys Turner, *op. cit.* p. 24f.

39 '...for Paul... [wrath] relates not to a feeling (*affectus*) in God, but to his action (*effectus*).' C F D Moule, *Essays in New Testament Interpretation*, 1982, p. 237. Quoted approvingly by Stephen H Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought*, Paternoster, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2009, p. 54.

actions, not feelings (the opposite of how Aquinas understands it). It is true that Paul is drawing attention to God's action, but why is it necessary to redefine wrath, which is by definition a feeling? It is rather like saying that when the Psalmist speaks of God as a rock, the word doesn't really mean something made of stone. 'Rock' does mean something made of stone, but it is here used metaphorically.

If wrath is not interpreted metaphorically then writers such as these, sensitive to the overall picture of God, have to find an acceptable way to interpret and use the word. In the hymn 'In Christ alone', N T Wright, for example, prefers to sing: 'And on the cross, as Jesus died, the love of God was satisfied'<sup>40</sup>. He regards the wrath of God as real, but objects to the original line, claiming that it divides the Trinity, for the wrath of the Father is calmed down by the sacrifice of the Son. Such are the difficulties which arise when speech about God is considered to apply in the same manner as if we were describing items in the world. It is possible that the hymn writers had in mind literal wrath, but anyone who believes that God is without passions may sing it as a metaphor with a clear conscience.

Furthermore, this richer understanding of how we speak about God, long held in the tradition, might have helped James Callaghan and Ian Paisley to recognise that the contradiction between each other's words was not something which need divide them, but a sign of the infinity of God which stretches our speech to breaking point. The world suffers enough division because of people who hold onto precise formulae for their God. The Church's liturgy should not domesticate God by being reduced to homely, functional, exact and prosaic language, but should reach into strange, excessive, contradictory and poetic speech, thereby pointing to the God whose name is above all names.

(The Revd Dr Mark Hart is Rector of St Peter's, Plemstall and St John's, Guilden Sutton in the Diocese of Chester. His publications include *Straight to the Pointlessness*, Continuum 2010.)

40 N T Wright, 'The Cross and the Caricatures', Fulcrum website, 2007. Available online: <https://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/the-cross-and-the-caricatures/>

# ‘Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea’

MICHAEL BRYDON

The hymn ‘Eternal Father, strong to save’ is popularly known as the Sailors’ Hymn. It serves as the hymn for both our own Royal Navy and the American one. The author of the words was William Whiting, a nineteenth-century choirmaster from Winchester College, who legend suggests wrote it as a gift for an anxious choirboy about to set sail for America. Its tune is by a nineteenth century Durham clergyman with the splendid name of John Bacchus Dykes. Dykes’ music conveys a wonderful sense of the flow and ebb of the sea at the end of every verse. Dykes named his tune *Melita*, or, if we were to anglicize it, *Malta*. Malta, of course, is the place where the Bible tells us St Paul was shipwrecked on his way to Rome and it also has a famous naval port with the grand harbour at Valetta.

St Paul’s shipwreck reminds us that the sea is dangerous. That is probably one reason the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 came to provide a whole series of ‘Forms of Prayers to be used at Sea.’ You will find them right after the psalms. They begin with two prayers ‘to be used in her Majesty’s navy every day’ and then offer a whole series relating to storms, battles, safe deliverance and the famous burial words where the body is committed ‘to the deep’ in confidence of the day ‘when the Sea shall give up her dead’. The Prayer Book certainly provides plenty of material for the Royal Navy, but none specifically for the army. This is probably because it was firstly felt that the Prayer Book already covered everything that needed to be said about problems encountered on land. Secondly among the Prayers and Thanksgivings there was already a petition for peace and deliverance from our enemies. Finally it is worth remembering that in 1662 the reputation of the army, unlike the navy, was not brilliant. The army had helped maintain Oliver Cromwell in power and there was a strong desire to avoid the potential ‘tyranny’ of a standing army.

More positively the business of praying for those at sea is an ancient one. There are Greek prayers for storm at sea and one for the building of a ship, which commends Noah’s skills in constructing the ark. Some ancient hymns draw a clear link between the storms at sea and the challenges of life. This is very clear in John Mason Neale’s translation of the fifth century hymn by Anatolius.



## 'Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea'

Jeus, Deliverer!  
Come Thou to me:  
Soothe Thou my voyaging  
Over Life's sea!  
Thou, when the storm of Death  
Roars, sweeping by,  
Whisper, O Truth of Truth!  
'Peace! It is I!'<sup>1</sup>

Although the Prayer Book did not make explicit provision for prayer at sea until 1662 it has been suggested by Ian Curteis that it shows a powerful awareness of 'water and of the sea.' As Cranmer penned it in his study he would have heard all the sounds of the Thames with 'the creak of oars and cry of boatmen as well as the ceaseless water.'

We are an island people. None of us is ever very far from the sea, whether geographically or inside our heads, and Cranmer is always fully conscious of that. Our literature is soaked in brine, the North Sea wind blows through its topsails. Such images pervade his most glorious work with their disturbing and uncanny capacity to engrave themselves, not only on the mind, but on the heart.<sup>2</sup>

This is stirring romantic prose, but it remains indisputable that the navy used earlier forms of the Prayer Book and helped it to travel around the world. From the 1550s onwards it is clear that there was a determination to ensure that ships' companies were familiar with the new Prayer Book worship. The instructions written in May 1553, by Sebastian Cabot, for an expedition to Russia, demonstrated his loyalty to Edward VI by emphasising the obligation to attend Prayer Book worship. Item thirteen of the instructions is worth reading in full, since it very much set the tone for the next century.

Morning and evening prayer, with other common services appointed by the Kings majestie, and the laws of this Realme to be read and saide in every ship daily by the minister in the Admirall, and the marchant or some other person learned in other ships, and the Bible or paraphrases to be read devoutly and Christianly to God's honour, and for his grace to be obtained, and had by humble and heartie praier of the Navigants accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

1 W. M. Campion and W. J. Beaumont, Eds, *The Prayer Book Interleaved*, (London: Rivingtons, 1880), p.327.

2 I. Curteis, 'Introduction' in *A Prayer for All Seasons. The Collects of the Book of Common Prayer*, (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1999), p.8

3 V.V. Patarino, 'The Religious Shipboard Culture of Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Sailors' in *The Social History of English Seamen, 1485-1649*, C.A. Fury, (ed), (141-192) pp. 156-57

G.M. Trevelyan in something of a purple passage described how the Elizabethan Prayer Book was a 'golden mean', 'a chameleon' that could satisfy both Catholics and Protestants 'on board Drake's ships'.<sup>4</sup> Whether this was truly the case is hard to say, but the Privy Council was certainly anxious to ensure that God was to be duly honoured by instructing that morning and evening prayers should be recited, as set out in the Prayer Book.<sup>5</sup> Like today, of course, there was some variety in the way this was interpreted. With regard to the Psalter the crew were more likely, in line with most English parishes, to have been singing one of the innumerable available metrical versions than to have been reciting the Coverdale version.<sup>6</sup> Modern congregations would probably also find the collective repetition of prayers tedious although vestiges of it survived into the twentieth century if the footage of a Sunday service in the 1958 war film, *Dunkirk*, is to be relied upon.<sup>7</sup> With so much riding on religious solidarity, in England, with the war against Spain taking place, it is not surprising that the government wanted to be confident that naval services mirrored those back home. 'Certaine Articals Sett Downe by the Captaine and Master Necessarie for Any Shipp' stated that any sailor who slept at the time of divine service, after being 'sufficently caled' was to be punished. Sir Richard Hawkins, on his voyage to the South Sea, noted that anyone caught swearing at morning or evening prayers was to be given three blows by the captain or master.<sup>8</sup> Punishment for unwarranted absence from prayers remained severe into the Caroline period. The 1627 Orders of the Constant Reformation specified twenty-four hours in the bilboes, which were the naval equivalent of the stocks.<sup>9</sup>

The increased naval activity of Elizabeth's reign also helped spread the remit of the Prayer Book, such as when Martin Frobisher's expedition to North America was accompanied by the Revd Robert Wolfall. During August 1578, almost within the Arctic Circle, Wolfall was able to go ashore and celebrated the first known Prayer Book service of Holy Communion upon North American soil at what was named Winter's Fornace by the sailors. Sadly we now have no idea where Winter Fornace is.<sup>10</sup> When Wolfall was with Frobisher another chaplain, Francis Fletcher, was with Drake circumnavigating the world. Fletcher's own account shows that he conducted Prayer Book services on board the ship, and on

4 G.M.Trevelyan, *History of England*, 1942, p.328.

5 G.Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains. A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy*, (Oxford: The Oxford Illustrated Press, 1978), p 36.

6 Patarino, 'Shipboard Culture' p.160.

7 *Ibid*, p.175

8 *Ibid*, p158.

9 *Ibid*, p.158.

10 G.Taylor, *op.cit.* p.27

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shore, including the first known celebration of Holy Communion on the west coast of America.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly on one occasion in line with the first Exhortation of the Communion and the form of absolution in the Visitation of the Sick the whole ship’s company, on Drake’s orders, was sent ‘to confesse’ to Fletcher.<sup>12</sup> Fletcher was very definitely a convinced Protestant as shown by his frank comments about preferring the sun-worshippers at Cape Blanco ‘before the Papists in their religion’, so he clearly regarded this as both a biblical and primitive practice of the church.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless one suspects that many a nineteenth-century opponent of ‘creeping Popery’ in the church would have been shocked to find that Drake, a doughty defender of Protestant England against Catholic Spain, promoted private confession in line with a then neglected part of the Prayer Book. On the other hand they might have been reassured by the survival of late sixteenth-century examinations of English seamen before the Spanish inquisition, which showed that they, at any rate, did not recognize the worship of Elizabeth I’s sailors as being Catholic. Rumours that one of Sir Francis Drake’s captured Portuguese pilots had prayed with the ship’s crew was enough to have him, following his release, brought before the Inquisition.<sup>14</sup> It is also true that when English ships arrived in Spain they found it prudent to hide their Prayer Books, or even toss them over the side.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that by the seventeenth century Prayer Book worship was a normal part of life at sea. Books of seafaring prayers began to appear at the end of the sixteenth century, but most sailors living before the outbreak of the Civil War, seem to have been content with the Prayer Book. Samuel Page’s *Divine Sea Service* was published in 1616 and swiftly followed by John Wood’s *Holy Meditations for Seamen* from 1618; since neither made it into a second edition it does not suggest a popular market.<sup>16</sup> Even more compelling regarding the firm establishment of the Prayer Book were the protests when the Long Parliament abolished it in 1654.<sup>17</sup> These protests may have been more to do with practicality, than theological anxieties, since its replacement *A Directory for the Public Worship of God throughout the Three Kingdoms* was merely a guide to the conduct of worship. This clearly caused a problem for many sea captains who did not feel equipped to lead worship in the absence of a chaplain. In response to this need, one year later, Parliament, produced *A Supply of*

11 *Ibid.* p.32

12 *Ibid.* p 30.

13 *Ibid.* p.30

14 Patarino, *op cit.* p.160.

15 *Ibid.* p.181.

16 *Ibid.* p.181-82

17 *Ibid.* pp.175, 182-83.

Prayer for the Ships of this kingdom that want Ministers to pray with them; agreeable to the Directory established by Parliament. In the preface it is stated:

Whereas there are thousands of ships belonging to this Kingdom which have not Ministers with them to guide them in Prayer, and therefore either use the old Form of Common Prayer, or no Prayer at all; the former whereof for many weighty reasons hath been abolished, and the latter is likely to make them rather Heathens than Christians (the Lord's day being left without any mark of Piety or Devotion). Therefore, to avoid these Inconveniences, It hath been thought fit to frame some Prayers agreeing with the Directory established by Parliament.

The Supply of Prayer was clearly a product of the Long Parliament with its petition for the 'the Solemn League and Covenant' and that the king might be saved from 'evil counsel.' The prohibiting of the Prayer Book funeral service meant that there was to be no funeral at sea either and that the body was to be interred without any ceremony. However for the first time some official prayers for those at sea had been produced, which did recognize the challenges of maritime travel and the threats from storms.<sup>18</sup>

Under the Commonwealth seafaring certainly became more dangerous, with numerous battles against the Dutch, but it is impossible to say how widely the Supply was used. Samuel Pepys, the great diarist and naval enthusiast, commented after the Restoration that there was no 'form of Public Prayer provided for the Sea, till since the King's return' which may suggest that the Supply had received scant use.<sup>19</sup> It might equally, of course, reflect Pepys' disparaging attitude towards anything produced by the Long Parliament.

On balance it seems likely that the Parliamentary provision of prayers must at least have offered a precedent for the compilers of the 1662 Prayer Book to find, as the Preface puts it, that it was now 'convenient' to include a section for 'those at Sea.' Robert Sanderson, the Bishop of Lincoln, who wrote the Preface<sup>20</sup> is also considered to be the primary author of the Sea Prayers. Izaak Walton, his seventeenth-century biographer, described how 'he did also, by desire of the convocation, alter and add to the forms of prayers to be used at sea—now taken into the service-book.'<sup>21</sup>

18 Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, pp71-72.

19 J.R. Tanner (ed), *Samuel Pepys's Naval Minutes*, 1925, N.R.S., Vol LX, p.76.

20 P.M.Criddle, 'Robert Sanderson and the Prayer Book', pp 46-47, in *Faith and Worship*. Number 72, Easter 2013, p.46.

21 I.Walton, *The Lives of Doctor John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr.Richard Hooker, Mr George Herbert and Doctor Robert Sanderson*, (London: Methuen and Co., 1895), p.280.

## ‘Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea’

Fans of Gilbert and Sullivan will recall the unsubtle digs against the First Lord of the Admiralty who had never actually been to sea. Sir Joshua Porter enthusiastically sings:

Of legal knowledge I acquired such a grip,  
That they took me into the partnership,  
And that junior partnership, I ween,  
Was the only ship that I ever had seen.<sup>22</sup>

Something similar might have been said of Sanderson. He may have occupied the See of Lincoln and felt at sea ecclesiastically, under the Commonwealth, but he had never actually been to sea. Pepys certainly moaned that the prayers were clearly produced by land-loving bishops, who had never been to sea, since there were no prayers for ‘a fair wind or for any wind at all, nor a calm, nor any other of the evils existing at sea’.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of such quips the prayers seem to deal with all the likely problems a sailor might encounter. Alan Jacobs in his biography of the Prayer Book comments that to ‘read these prayers is to be immersed in a drama, almost as happens to the reader of Patrick O’Brian’s novels about the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars—novels in which we hear these prayers said many times, with fervour corresponding to the demands of the moment, or lack thereof.’<sup>24</sup> A ship in the midst of a storm would certainly appreciate a quick end to the distress of ‘raging winds and the roaring sea’ and in a world of pirates and hostile foreign navies a request to the Almighty to ‘be a defence unto us against the face of the enemy’ would have been heartfelt. Sanderson showed additional realism in his recognition of the need to provide other ‘Short prayers for single persons that cannot meet to join in Prayer with others, by reason of the Fight, or storm.’ This pastoral provision also seems to be marked in the understanding that in the midst of a frightening storm there would be a need for everyone to examine his conscience, make a collective public confession and feel the relief of a public absolution from the chaplain. Most sailors would be familiar with the idea that Jonah nearly brought disaster upon his ship, because he turned away from God, so the opportunity to turn back to Him in a storm must have been welcome.

Cranmer would also have approved of these additions to the Prayer Book, because they are all deeply scriptural. As well as the inclusion of psalms 66 and 107 with their maritime references the two hymns of

22 W.S.Gilbert, *The Savoy Operas*, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1994), p.75

23 Patarino, ‘Shipboard Culture’ p,183

24 A.Jacobs, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p.87

praise and thanksgiving after both a tempest and a victory are effectively compilations of scripture too. John Blunt in his magisterial work, *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer*, noted twenty-five parallels with the psalms and one with a passage from 1 Samuel.<sup>25</sup> The victory hymn speaks of how 'The Lord hath wrought: a mighty salvation for us' which expands upon King Saul's words of celebration after his victory over the Ammonites in 1 Samuel 12:13

The sea prayers became very much part of life at sea with many sailors owning their own Prayer Books and Bibles, as demonstrated by the frequent references in wills to them.<sup>26</sup> Charles Wheatley, that scholarly writer upon the Prayer Book, briefly praised them, in 1710, as being 'so very well adapted to their several occasions that any one that observes them will see their suitableness without any illustration.'<sup>27</sup> Thomas Pocock, a naval chaplain on the *Ranelagh*, kept a diary of his voyage in 1704, which makes reference to the reading of prayers.<sup>28</sup> Even pirates seem to have had a streak of piety, since, in 1721, when the pirate Captain Bartholomew Roberts captured a clergyman he asked him to become his chaplain. He declined and Roberts released him, but not before he had robbed him of a corkscrew and three Prayer Books!<sup>29</sup>

Sailors were not necessarily always as pious, of course, as the official forms suggested they should be. Some of the more devout passengers travelling on board ships to the Americas were often scandalized by their behaviour. In the early 1680s, for example, a law suit was filed in Essex County, Massachusetts, against a Captain Penny who was accused of yelling at his passengers that he himself was 'God and Lord of that Wooden World'. It is no longer possible to say what exactly motivated Penny. Clearly the complainants felt he was guilty of irreligion. On the other hand some of the ridicule was clearly meant humorously and it could be that Penny was a staunch supporter of the State Church, its Prayer Book, and was simply irritated by the self-professed exclusive piety of some of the passengers!<sup>30</sup>

The navy which had played a vital part in bringing Prayer Book worship to the American continent was certainly equally important in ensuring its preservation. In the late eighteenth century when the American war of independence began the loyalist clergy who continued to pray for the king, as mandated by the Prayer Book, found themselves to be under

25 J.H.Blunt, *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer Being a Historical, Ritual and Theological Commentary of the Devotional System of the Church of England*, (London: Longman, Green and Co, 1892), pp 653-654

26 Patarino, 'Shipboard Culture' p.178

27 C.Wheatley, *A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1810), p.517

28 Taylor, *Sea Chaplains*, pp 137-138

29 *Ibid*, pp 144-145.

30 Patarino, 'Shipboard Culture' p.188

## ‘Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea’

attack. After independence had been declared the clergy who had not fled and continued to use the Prayer Book were regarded as being guilty of treason. Prayer Book worship effectively ceased throughout the thirteen states and the English Church was viewed with hostility. Samuel Seabury, the rector of the parish of West Chester, in the Province of New York, was among the suffering loyalist clergy. Like some of his other colleagues he became a naval chaplain for a while, although he eventually returned to West Chester.

When it became clear that the colonists were likely to win, the surviving Connecticut clergy sent Seabury, on the *Chatham*, the flagship of the Commander-in-Chief, to seek episcopal consecration in England. Seabury’s nineteenth-century biographer, E.E Beardsley, writes that as he sailed ‘many prayers went up to the “Eternal God who alone spreadeth out the heavens and ruleth the raging of the sea” that He would keep him under his protection, and conduct him in safety to the end of his journey.’ Gordon Taylor, in *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* suggests that this allusion to the words of the Naval Prayer may well come from an eyewitness account of Seabury leading the prayers as ship’s chaplain.<sup>31</sup> The English hierarchy was unable to assist this Prayer Book loyalist, due to the constitutional impossibility of the archbishops consecrating anyone for what was now a foreign country. Thankfully the non-juring unestablished Scottish Episcopal Church had no such constitutional problem; Seabury was consecrated on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1784, in Aberdeen, and both the apostolic succession and the Prayer Book were saved for America.<sup>32</sup> The 1789 American Prayer Book preserved the sea prayers, but obviously adapted them to pray for the United States of America rather than the monarch.

Within the Navy, itself, there was a clear association between loyalty to the Prayer Book and loyalty to the country. When Nelson wrote to the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge he commented on how ‘good to our King and Country’ had arisen from ‘seamen and marines having been taught to respect the established religion’.<sup>33</sup> The growing strength of the Evangelical party within the Navy also strengthened the position of the Prayer Book for more religious reasons. For example the importance attached to divine worship was underlined in 1812 when an order in council improved the standing and conditions of naval chaplains and required that a copy of the Prayer Book and a New Testament should be provided for each mess in a ship.<sup>34</sup> In 1814

31 Taylor, *op. cit.* p.175

32 *Ibid.* pp175-176.

33 *Ibid.* p.240

34 *Ibid.* p.233.

the Chaplain General of the Navy was able to secure a grant of £1500 in the Navy Estimates, which was to be spent on Prayer Books and other religious books for the Naval Stores.<sup>35</sup>

As may be imagined the Victorian Navy was careful to see that due religious forms were observed. The first of the 'Articles of War' demanded that the Lord's Day was observed and that public worship was conducted 'according to the Liturgy of the Church of England'.<sup>36</sup> The diary of the Revd Charles Panter, a late nineteenth-century chaplain, records how he conducted daily prayers and there is no reason to assume that this is not representative of daily practice. He performed the full range of Prayer Book services, but found nobody came to Holy Communion. At Easter 1882 he conducted a 'full service without Litany' and then 'a screen was put up across the quarter deck by main-mast and yet no one would come to Holy Communion'. Although much naval worship was compulsory the apparent lack of interest in Prayer Book Communion can't just be attributed to sailors choosing to avoid something they didn't have to be at. Panter's Bible class was voluntary and well-supported; therefore the reluctance to go to Communion probably owed more to the fact that within the church generally this service had become marginalized.<sup>37</sup> Prayer Book Morning Prayer was also generally acceptable to Presbyterians and other Free Churchmen while Communion raised denominational differences.

As the twentieth century dawned the Navy continued to play its part in transmitting Prayer Book worship around the world. During the summer months of 1902 Scott of the Antarctic's ship was trapped in the ice of McMurdo Sound. After the 0930 inspection had taken place the ship's bell was tolled before Scott would conduct the Prayer Book morning service, which concluded with the singing of 'Eternal Father strong to save'.<sup>38</sup> One imagines that Scott would have approved of the fact that when his tent was discovered in 1912, the doctor, in the absence of a chaplain, read the Prayer Book burial service over it.<sup>39</sup>

The prayers were also finding their way into literary endeavours as illustrated by Rudyard Kipling's story 'Their Lawful Occasions', which lifts the title from the first official naval prayer. Even more remarkable is the fact that the preceding poem, 'The Wet Litany' draws upon the Latin version of the Prayer Book litany in the first and final verses.<sup>40</sup>

35 *Ibid.* p.240

36 Blunt, *op. cit.* pp. 653-54.

37 Taylor, *op. cit.* p.305.

38 R.Pound, *Scott of the Antarctic*, (1968), pp. 66-84.

39 *Ibid.* p.208

40 *The Works of Rudyard Kipling*, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), pp 659-660.



## ‘Forms of Prayer to be Used at Sea’

During the two world wars of the twentieth century the Prayer Book continued to encourage and sustain sailors. For example the Revd Wilfrid Ellis was chaplain to the destroyer *Hogue*, which was sunk by a German submarine in September 1914. He went down with the ship, but came up breathless with a spar under his arm and a Prayer Book with hymns in his pocket. The latter he recorded proved very useful in keeping spirits up in the small pinnace, which took him out of the sea.<sup>41</sup> In the Second World War the Revd Gerald Fitzgerald had the unlucky distinction of being the only naval chaplain to be captured by the Japanese. He spent the remainder of the war at Macassar where, although it had never been a British colony, he located copies of the Prayer Book, in a house undergoing demolition. He regarded their discovery as miraculous and used them in his ministrations. Fitzgerald was far from unusual since the Prayer Book was routinely drawn upon to furnish both hope and comfort at critical moments. For example Canon Walters, who took part in the Normandy Landings, later recalled the sailing of HMS *Hawkins* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1944 when he conducted a specially moving service using the ‘Prayers for Use at Sea’ which was broadcast around the mess decks.<sup>42</sup>

The extent to which the naval prayers had entered popular culture is illustrated by the 1942 British patriotic naval film *In Which We Serve*. It is set upon the fictitious HMS *Torrin*, which was based upon the real HMS *Kelly* and tells the story of a ship’s company and their families. Its title, of course, comes from the first of the official naval prayers. The continued naval familiarity with the Prayer Book provision for it is further substantiated by Lieutenant Commander John Irving’s account of a ships’ regular routine during the Second World War. During the harbour routine the daily Divisions took place, which concluded with prayer.

Non-divisional officers such as ‘Guns’ and ‘Torps’ and the others may, perhaps, gather on the quarter-deck behind the Commander, and up through the after-hatchway comes the ship’s Chaplain in cassock and surplice, his naval stole—ends a-flutter in the breeze. ‘Off caps—Stand easy,’ orders the Commander and, from end to end of the deck, each head is bared for Morning Prayer. At a sign from the Chaplain the band strikes up the first bars of a hymn, most certainly one that everyone has known since childhood; printed Service hymn-cards pass from hand to hand in the ‘congregation’ and maybe a thousand men sing. One has to hear a battleship’s complement singing a well-remembered hymn across a foreign harbour to realise the part this plays in naval routine. A few prayers, each ending with a deep-

41 Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 337.

42 *Ibid.*, p.448.

throated Amen, that splendid prayer for the fleet written by Bishop Sanderson...and used daily, by regulation, throughout the Navy,...a sailor's prayer heard daily by Royal Navy sailormen all the world over. The blessing and prayers are over and the Chaplain goes below again. 'Attention. On caps. Turn for' ard, right and left turn. Double march,' comes the order. The band strikes up a lively 'double' tune and the mass of men moves.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst divisions and prayers still continue, the compulsory attendance at Sunday Church ended in 1946, so the old widespread familiarity with a shortened form of Morning Prayer has undoubtedly vanished. The *Church Times* wisely commented, at the time, that in 'a Service routine, where conduct is organised in every detail, where nearly every act is taken corporately, to make churchgoing voluntary is tantamount to making it peculiar.'<sup>44</sup> The two official naval prayers, however, do seem to be holding their own. For example they were used publicly at Lord Mountbatten's funeral and the decommissioning of the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, and continue to be used by many current naval chaplains. The present chaplain of the fleet describes how they are always used at 'all church formal state occasions.' The Lord's Day may not be kept with the solemnity it was in the days of compulsory worship, but nothing can detract from the Royal Navy's historic role in the dissemination of the Prayer Book around the world, or its continued devotion to its own historic prayers.

(The Revd Dr Michael Brydon is the Rector of Catsfield and Crowhurst, in the Diocese of Chichester. He is also the Chairman of the Chichester East Branch of the Prayer Book Society)

43 Irving mistakenly describes how the prayer was written in 1603, but this does not detract from the point that it was in regular daily usage in the 1940s. See [www.naval-history.net/WW2aaNAvalLife-Customs2htm](http://www.naval-history.net/WW2aaNAvalLife-Customs2htm) pp7-8

44 *Church Times*, 25 June 1954

# ‘And it Came to Pass’: A Sermon Preached in Chester Cathedral on Christmas Day 2015

PETER FORSTER

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place...” When the vision of the angels passed, and the shepherds recovered from their amazement and terror, they knew that they needed to go to Bethlehem and see this thing that had taken place. Something had happened. Shepherds were, and are, down-to-earth people, who avoid daydreaming, and focus on their flocks, and the enemies of those flocks. If John Wayne, in the old cowboy films, used to say that he dealt in lead, those shepherds dealt with facts—facts on the ground.

The Christian Faith is about facts in history, or it is just the hot air of religious or philosophical opinion. The Gospel of Luke, from which we have just read, has a particular way of emphasising this. Eight times in the first two chapters, dealing with the birth of Jesus, St Luke uses the same formula: ‘And it came to pass’.

Modern translations, including those customarily used in this Cathedral, tend to regard such expressions as archaic, and omit them, but they’re there in the original Greek manuscripts. Exactly the same Greek verb is used by St Luke eight times in the first two chapters of his Gospel, and the Authorised Version translates it identically eight times: ‘And it came to pass’.

Why do I draw attention to this? For two reasons.

The first concerns the nature of Christian belief. There’s a tendency in the modern world to think that religious belief is primarily about trying to discern some religious meaning in our lives, about trying to interpret our lives in a spiritual sense. Well, in part that’s true, but it’s not enough. On its own, seeing the Christian Faith simply in terms of a religious interpretation of our lives easily lapses into seeing religious belief as a subjective matter, merely a matter of opinion. And then you’re on the way to the modern creed of ‘Believe what you like, and it’s true for you’. And then it’s not true at all—but just a matter of personal and passing opinion.

The New Testament pictures this as a house built upon sand, with no proper foundations. Built on the cheap, it may look impressive for the moment, but at any moment it’s liable to collapse.

Our 'faith' is of course 'faith' and not something we can prove by logic or scientific experiment. It is personal—that's true enough. But in Christian understanding it's built upon the solid ground of history, of something which did indeed 'come to pass' in Bethlehem—leading to its concluding drama when something else 'came to pass' on the Cross, under Pontius Pilate, and when it came to pass that Jesus rose from the dead.

If the Christian Faith isn't based on the solid foundations of real events, real historical events—it's nothing. It's like the morning mist which disperses as the sun rises in the sky; like a vivid dream in our sleep which is soon forgotten when we wake up; indeed, like the house which is built upon sand.

That's what St Luke is at pains to emphasise, with his repeated 'And it came to pass'. Not for the first time, we find that the translation in the Authorised Version, the King James Version, is both more accurate and more meaningful than modern versions where, for all their scholarship and cleverness, the meaning is literally 'lost in translation'.

When it came to pass that the shepherds went down into Bethlehem to see this thing which had taken place, they wanted to see with their own eyes the baby who had been born King of the Jews. To be told about this event by the Angels, however glorious their vision had been, was not enough. They wanted the evidence of their senses. That's how down-to-earth shepherds viewed the world around them.

My second reason for drawing attention to St Luke's repeated use of the expression 'and it came to pass' is that it highlights the uniqueness of what is being witnessed and described. What came to pass drew together the whole history described in the Old Testament, and fulfilled all that the prophets had foretold:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1.32-33).

Many people over the ages, and especially in the modern world, find the unique and exclusive claims of the Christian Faith difficult to accept. How can it be that the angels say to the shepherds 'Glory to God in the highest' in a way they don't sing to us today? Surely it would only be fair, and in the modern jargon 'non-discriminatory' if the angels were to reveal themselves equally to all people, of every time and place?

The Christian answer to that is to see the universality of God's love, the universality of God's revelation of himself, as the other side of the coin of God's unique revelation of himself. Precisely because there is only one God, that God can reveal himself to people of all times and places. The unique God is the universal God.

## 'And it Came to Pass': A Christmas Day Sermon

And it came to pass that this God revealed himself uniquely and universally in Jesus Christ—at Bethlehem, and under Pontius Pilate. The New Testament goes on to describe the universal character of God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ in various ways.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (Hebrews 13.8).

Jesus Christ is the one 'through whom all things were made'—the Nicene Creed, picking up various statements in the New Testament. Creation itself is founded upon Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the 'lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world' (1 Peter 1.20: Rev 13.8)

In the New Testament uniqueness and universality go together. They are two sides of the same coin.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.

The shepherds were the original witnesses in the dark streets of Bethlehem, and later in the story the wise men from the East represent the witness of the wider world.

Perhaps all this sounds too much like wishful thinking, too much like mere assertion. Where's the evidence? We can all be like the disciple Thomas, after the resurrection, who would only believe if first he could hold and touch the risen Christ.

I don't have evidence like that. None of us do. Christians walk by faith and not by sight, and there are good reasons for that. We are created and human; God is uncreated and divine. His ways are not our ways; his thoughts are not our thoughts. If he decides to reveal himself to us, how he does so will be up to him alone.

We believe that God, the Creator of the universe, revealed himself definitively, uniquely, and universally in Jesus Christ. He did so in history. He was born of Mary. He needed his nappy changed. He hungered and was thirsty. The nails which nailed him to the cross were real nails.

All this came to pass. The question to each of us is simply this: what do we make of it?

(The Rt Revd Peter Forster is Bishop of Chester)

# A Sermon for the Anniversary of the Accession of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

DANIEL NEWMAN

1 Peter 2.13-25

**D**uring a Royal Tour of South Africa, on 21 April 1947—her twenty-first birthday—the Princess Elizabeth dedicated her whole life ‘whether it be long or short’ to serving the people of the Empire. She affirmed that pledge several years later as Queen in the oath she made at her coronation in June 1953. This is the first anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen’s Accession since she became the longest reigning British monarch on 9 September last year. The Queen marked the day by opening the Scottish Borders Railway and referred to the occasion obliquely, commenting, ‘Inevitably a long life can pass by many milestones—my own is no exception.’ This year, we will celebrate The Queen’s ninetieth birthday with street parties and special services the length and breadth of the country. A great deal of change has taken place over the course of The Queen’s reign. Her Majesty’s coronation was the first to be televised, and her 1957 Christmas Message the first to be broadcast on television. Could Her Majesty have ever imagined one day transmitting her best wishes to the British astronaut Major Timothy Peake as he joined the International Space Station in orbit, or hearing the words ‘God save The Queen’ from space in the message he sent in reply?

The Queen has also shared in times of instability which the nation has experienced during her long life. During the Second World War, the gardens at Buckingham Palace were given over to the ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign. A black line in a bathroom at Buckingham Palace marked the level of hot water in which the Princess Elizabeth could bathe. She donned the uniform of the Auxiliary Territorial Service and learned to be a driver and a mechanic. Decades later came the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Disorder in society causes pain to each one of us in different ways. We may be the victims of crime as the law is disregarded. Families break down. Employers exploit their workers and workers fail to respect their employers. There is division in the Church. The Queen has given voice to the deep longing of our hearts in her public addresses. Building

## *An Accession Day Sermon*

community, creating harmony, coming together, and reconciliation have been frequent themes in The Queen's Christmas Message in recent years. In The Queen's address to General Synod in November, Her Majesty said:

St Paul reminds us that all Christians, as ambassadors for Christ, are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Spreading God's word and the onerous but rewarding task of peace-making and conflict resolution are important parts of that ministry.

The Queen went on to speak of 'both the progress already made and the journey that still lies ahead in the pursuit of Christian unity.'

In the second chapter of his First Epistle, St Peter describes behaviour which makes for a peaceful, harmonious society. We might sum it up in his command, 'Honour all men.' He tells us to do this, even when we are suffering wrongfully. He writes:

For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

Fractures appear in relationships when there is a lack of mutual respect. But those fractures deepen and the crisis escalates when we take matters into our own hands and retaliate in an attempt to make everyone see that we are in the right. A piece of legislation which is perceived to be unfair provokes a violent protest. An employee responds to criticism with a hurriedly-typed e-mail circulated to the whole workplace.

We honour our Queen in our prayers and praises this evening. But as a Christian monarch, The Queen is also the nation's chief disciple, and she shows us what it means to live out St Peter's vision of honouring all, even when she or those she represents have been wronged, or when she is at risk of suffering. One of the most striking examples of this was The Queen's visit to Ireland in 2011. The Queen herself had suffered personal grief during the Troubles with the death of Lord Mountbatten from an IRA bomb. Her Majesty appeared in a jade green dress and even spoke in Irish in her opening speech. In his short biography, Douglas Hurd has observed that on this and countless other occasions, The Queen put herself at physical risk in a way that no American president ever would, because she knows that is the only way to do her job. He recalls the incident in July 1982, when the intruder Michael Fagan burst into The Queen's bedroom at Buckingham Palace. When The Queen was congratulated on the coolness with which she dealt with him, Her Majesty commented, 'You seem to forget that I spend most of my time with complete strangers.'

St Peter calls us to this behaviour of honouring all even when it means suffering wrongfully because this is the example that Christ has set for us. He writes:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

St Peter saw this first hand. Jesus Christ lived a sinless human life. When he was arrested and St Peter cut off the right ear of the High Priest's servant, Jesus told him to put his sword away and that he could but ask, and the Father would send more than twelve legions of angels, but he wouldn't. When he was accused falsely by the chief priests, he did not answer. He did not dissemble when he was asked, 'Are you the Christ?' Though Pontius Pilate found no guilt in him, he endured scourging. As he was crucified, he prayed, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' When the crowds, the chief priests and the scribes laughed at him, saying, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save,' he remained silent. As he died, he cried out, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

The Queen is explicit that it is the example of Christ which leads her to seek to honour all people. On Christmas Day 2014, Her Majesty said:

For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A rôle-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none.

If St Peter had simply commanded us to honour all men and follow the example of Christ, then we would give up in despair, burdened with guilt, and society would never improve. As The Queen acknowledged this Christmas, Christ's unchanging message of love 'is not an easy message to follow.' We fail to show honour all the time to everyone. We cannot hold our tongue when someone criticises us. Christ did not just suffer to give us an impossible example to follow. He suffered to make it possible to follow his example. St Peter writes:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.



## *An Accession Day Sermon*

What leads to the unravelling of the relationships which are the threads of the tapestry of society is our sin, going our own way rather than God's way. Our focus on ourselves blinds us to the needs of others. When others threaten to prevent us achieving our goals and fulfilling our desires, we become angry and seek revenge. Just as The Queen represents the nation, so Jesus is the representative of his people. When he died on the cross, he took the punishment for the sins of his people so that they would be forgiven. When he died, they died. They are no longer held captive to that old way of life, but can live a new life following the righteous example of Christ. The Queen knows this herself. In Her Majesty's 2011 Christmas Message, she said:

Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves—from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person—neither a philosopher nor a general (important though they are)—but a Saviour, with the power to forgive.

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.

The scholar Ashley Null said this about the Anglican Reformer Thomas Cranmer's theology, which is given public expression in The Book of Common Prayer:

Grace leads to gratitude, gratitude births love, love leads to repentance, repentance produces good works, good works make for a better society. What better mission strategy could a church follow?

If we are to know transformation in our own lives, in our relationships and in our society, then like the people to whom St Peter was originally writing, we need to stop going our own way, come back to Jesus in faith for the forgiveness of our sins, and allow him to direct our lives.

*(The Revd Dr Daniel Newman is Assistant Curate of St Mary's, Weymouth in the Diocese of Salisbury. This sermon was preached at St Mary's, Taunton on Sunday 7 February 2016.)*

# William Beveridge on Common Prayer

William Beveridge (1637-1708) preached and published the sermon *Concerning the Excellence and Usefulness of the Common Prayer* in 1681 at St Peter's Cornhill, where he was Rector from 1672 to 1704. The printed sermon went rapidly through several editions. The text presented here is an abridged version, with partly-modernised capitalisation, punctuation etc. Beveridge became Bishop of St Asaph in 1704.

*Let all Things be done to Edifying* (1 Corinthians 14.26)

**F**or our better understanding the true sense and purport of this rule, it is necessary to consider what the Apostle here means by edifying: For which we must know, that all Christians being, as the same Apostle saith, of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; hence whatsoever tends to the strengthening, supporting, cementing, or raising this fabric higher, whatsoever it is whereby men are made more firm and solid Christians, more holy and perfect men than they were before, by that they are said to be *edified*. And therefore it is a great mistake for men to think, as many do, that they are *edified* by what they hear, merely because they know perhaps some little thing which before they were ignorant of. For Knowledge (as the Apostle saith) puffeth up, it is Charity that *edifieth*. And therefore, whatsoever knowledge we attain to, we cannot be said to be *edified* by it any further than as it influences our minds, excites our love, and inclines our hearts to God and goodness. And that this is the true notion of *edifying*, is plain from the Apostle's own words, where he saith, *Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouths, but that which is for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.* For from hence it is manifest, that that only is properly said to *edify*, that ministers Grace unto us; whereby we are made more pure and holy than we were before. And therefore, we read of *Edifying ourselves in Love and Building up ourselves in our most holy faith*, which are the two graces that make up a real and true Christian. And nothing can be said to *edify*, but what tends to the exciting and increasing of them: Until we come (as the Apostle saith) *in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;* hence therefore, when the Apostle saith, *Let all things be done to edify*, his meaning in brief is this, that in all our Christian assemblies, when we

meet to worship and serve God, all things there are to be so done, that we may return home wiser, and better than we came thither; with our knowledge of God and Christ increased, our desires enlarged, our love inflamed, our faith confirmed, all our graces quickened, and so our whole souls made more humble, more holy, more like to God, than they were before.

The words being thus briefly explained, I shall now apply them to our present purpose, and shew that that form of religious worship, which is prescribed by our Church, established by the laws of the land, and therefore to be used now in this place, agrees exactly with this rule, or canon of the Holy Apostle, even that *all things in it are done to edifying*.

But before we prove that that Form in particular, which our Church hath prescribed, is agreeable to this Apostolical rule, it is necessary to prove first, that the prescribing a form in general is so. For unless the prescribing a form in general, be according to this rule, no form in particular, that is prescribed, can possibly agree with it. But now that this rule admits, yea requires, the prescribing of some form, is evident from the rule itself. For the Apostle here commands the Church of Corinth, and so all provincial Churches, to take care that in their religious assemblies *All things be done to edifying*. But how is it possible for any provincial Church to see that this be done, except she prescribes some certain form for the doing of it? If every Minister of a parish should be left to his own liberty, to do what he pleased in his own congregation, although some perhaps might be so wise and prudent as to observe this rule, as well as they could, yet, considering the corruption of human nature, we have much cause to fear that others would not; at least the Church could be no way secured that all would; and therefore must needs be obliged to consider of, and appoint some such form to be used in all her congregations, by which she may be fully assured, that this Apostolical rule is everywhere observed, as it ought to be. And although we should suppose what can never be expected, that all the clergy in every province should be as wise and as good as they ought to be, yet it cannot be supposed that every one of them should understand what is for the *edification* of the people, as well as all together. And therefore it must needs be acknowledged, that the surest way to have this rule observed, is, for the governors of every Church, and the whole clergy, to meet together by their representatives in a synod, or convocation, and there, upon mature deliberation, agree upon some such form, which they in their prudence and consciences judge to be according to this rule, which the Apostle here lays down before them.

And besides that, the prescribing a form in general is more for our edifying, than to leave everyone to do what seems good in his own eyes, we have the concurrent testimony, experience, and practice of the universal Church. For we never read or heard of any Church in the world, from the Apostle's days to ours, but what took this course. Though all have not used the same, yet no Church but have used some form or other. And therefore for any man to say, that it is not lawful, or not expedient, or not so edifying, to use a form of prayer in the public worship of God, is to contradict the general sense of Christianity, to condemn the Holy Catholic Church, and to make himself wiser than all Christians that ever were before him. Which, whatsoever it may be thought now, was always heretofore reckoned one of the greatest sins and follies that a man could be guilty of.

Nay, more than all this too: for this is not only to make a man's self wiser than all Christians, but wiser than Christ himself, for it is impossible to prescribe any form of prayer in more plain and express terms than he hath done it, where he saith, *When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, &c.* And I hope none here present but will acknowledge that Christ, by whom alone we can be edified, knows better what is, or what is not for our edification, than we, or all the men in the world can do. And therefore, seeing he hath not only prescribed a form of prayer for his disciples to use, but hath expressly commanded them to use it, we, who profess ourselves to be his disciples, ought to rest fully satisfied in our minds, that using of a form of prayer is not only lawful, but much more for our edifying, than it is possible for any other way of praying to be.

The same may be proved also from the nature of the thing itself, by such arguments, which do not only demonstrate that it is so, but likewise shew how it comes to be so. For First, In order to our being edified, so as to be made better and holier, whensoever we meet together upon a religious account, it is necessary that the same good and holy things be always inculcated and pressed upon us after one and the same manner. For we cannot but all find by our own experience, how difficult it is to fasten anything that is truly good, either upon ourselves or others, and that it is rarely, if ever effected, without frequent repetitions of it. Whatsoever good things we hear only once, or now and then, though perhaps upon the hearing of them, they may swim for a while in our brains, yet they seldom sink down into our hearts, so as to move and sway the affections as it is necessary they should do, in order to our being edified by them; whereas by a set form of public devotions rightly composed, as we are continually put in mind of all things necessary for us to know or do, so that is always

## William Beveridge on Common Prayer

done by the same words and expressions, which by their constant use will imprint the things themselves so firmly in our minds, that it will be no easy matter to obliterate or raze them out; but do what we can they will still occur upon all occasions; which cannot but be very much for our Christian *edification*.

Moreover, that which conduceth to the quickening our souls, and to the raising up our affections in our public devotions, must needs be acknowledged to conduce much to our *edification*. But it is plain, that as to such purposes, a set form of prayer is an extraordinary help to us; for if I hear another pray, and know not beforehand what he will say, I must first listen to what he will say next; then I am to consider, whether what he saith be agreeable to sound doctrine, and whether it be proper and lawful for me to join with him in the petitions he puts up to God Almighty; and if I think it is so, then I am to do it. But before I can well do that, he is got to another thing; by which means it is very difficult, if not morally impossible, to join with him in everything so regularly as I ought to do. But by a set form of prayer all this trouble is prevented; for having the form continually in my mind, being thoroughly acquainted with it, fully approving of everything in it, and always knowing beforehand what will come next, I have nothing else to do, whilst the words are sounding in mine ears, but to move my heart and affections suitably to them, to raise up my desires of those good things which are prayed for, to fix my mind wholly upon God, whilst I am praising of him, and so to employ, quicken, and lift up my whole soul in performing my devotions to him. No man that hath been accustomed to a set form for any considerable time, but may easily find this to be true by his own experience, and, by consequence, that this way of praying is a greater help to us, than they can imagine that never made trial of it.

To this may be also added, that if we hear another praying a prayer of his own private composition or voluntary effusion, our minds are wholly bound up and confined to his words and expressions, and to his requests and petitions, be they what they will: so that at the best we can but pray his prayer. Whereas when we pray by a form prescribed by the Church, we pray the prayers of the whole Church we live in, which are common to the minister and people, to ourselves, and to all the members of the same Church: So that we have all the devout and pious souls that are in it, concurring and joining with us in them: which cannot surely but be more effectual for the *edifying* not only of ourselves in particular, but of the Church in general, than any private prayer can be.

Lastly, in order to our being *edified* by our public devotions, as it is necessary that we know beforehand what we are to pray for, so it is

necessary that we afterwards know what we have prayed for, when we have done: for I suppose you will all grant, that all the good and benefit we can receive from our prayers, is to be ultimately resolved into God's gracious hearing and answering of them, without which they will all come to nothing.

But there are two things required to the obtaining an answer of our prayers: First, that we sincerely and earnestly desire good things at the hands of God, to which, as I have shown, a set form of prayer conduceth very much; and then, *Secondly*, it is required also, that we trust and depend upon God for his granting of them, according to the promises which he hath made unto us in Jesus Christ our Lord. And I verily believe, that one great reason why men pray so often to no purpose is because they do not take this course, but when they have done their prayers, they have done with them, and concern themselves no more about them, than as if they had never prayed at all. But how can we expect that God should answer our prayers when we ourselves do not mind whether he answers them or no? Nor believe and trust upon him for it? For certainly trusting in God, as it is one of the highest acts of religion that we can perform, so it is that which gives life and vigour, virtue and efficacy, to our prayers, without which we have no ground at all to expect they should be answered: for God having promised to answer our prayers, except we trust on him for his performance of such promises, we lose the benefit of them, and by consequence our prayers too. And therefore, as ever we desire that he should grant us what we pray for, when we have *directed our prayers to him*, we must still *look up*, expecting and hoping for the return of them.

Now as this is a thing of greater consequence, so a set form of prayer is a greater help to us in it, than it is commonly thought to be. For if we hear another utter a prayer extempore, which he never said, nor we heard, before, nor ever shall do it again, it is much if he himself can remember the tenth part of what he said: How much less can we that heard him, do it? And if we cannot possibly remember what we prayed for, how is it possible for us to expect it at the hands of God? Or to depend upon him for it? But now it is quite otherwise when we use a set form of prayer, for by this means, when we have prayed, we can recollect ourselves, look over our prayers again, either in a book, or in our minds, where they are imprinted; we can consider distinctly what we have asked at the hands of God, and so act our faith and confidence on him, for the granting every petition we have put up unto him, according to the promises which he hath made us to that purpose. And as this is the surest way whereby to obtain what

we pray for, it must needs be the most edifying way of praying that we can possibly use.

These things being duly weighed, I shall now take it for granted, that the using a form in general in the public worship of God, is agreeable to this Apostolical rule, *Let all things be done to edifying*; and so shall proceed to shew, that that form in particular, which our Church hath appointed to be used upon such occasions, is so too. For which end it is not necessary that I should run through every particular word, phrase or expression in the Common-Prayer, much less that I should vindicate and defend it from every little exception, that ignorance and malice may make against something in it. For nothing ever yet was, or can be said or written but something or other may be said or written against it, either well or ill. But my business must be to prove, that the form of Divine Service contained in the Book of Common Prayer, which is now used in the Church of England, conduceth so much to the edifying those that use it, that it agrees exactly to the rule which the Apostle here prescribes in that case. And this I shall demonstrate from four Heads: 1 *From the Language* 2 *From the Matter or Substance of it* 3 *From the Method* and 4 *From the Manner of Performing it*. For if it be edifying in all these respects, it must needs be acknowledged to be so in the whole; there being nothing in it but what may be reduced to some of these heads.

First, therefore, as to the *language*, you all know that the whole service is performed in English, the vulgar and the common language of the nation, which everyone understands, and so may be edified by it. And this, indeed, is the ground and foundation of all the benefits that we can possibly receive from our public prayers. And therefore in the Church of Rome, the common people are made incapable of being edified by the prayers of the Church, in that they are all made in Latin, a language which they do not understand. So that when they meet to worship God, there are seldom any in the congregation that knows what is said there, except the priest that reads it, and oftentimes not he neither. By which means they have no such thing really amongst them as Common-Prayer. Neither is it possible for the common people to be ever edified by what is there said, or done, except they could be once convinced by it of the horrible abuse which their Church puts upon them, in commanding all her public devotions to be performed in an unknown tongue, directly contrary not only to the rule in my text, but to the design of this whole chapter.

But blessed be God for it, it is not so with us. For ours is truly Common-Prayer; for it is written and read in that language which is common to all the congregations in the Kingdom, and to every person in each congregation. So that all the people of the land, whatsoever rank

or condition they are of may join together in the use of everything that is in it, and so be jointly *edified* by it: especially, considering that it is not only all in English, but in common and plain English, such as we use in our common discourse with one another. There are no unusual or obsolete words, no hard or uncouth phrases in it, but everything is expressed as clearly and plainly as words can do it. So that the meanest person in the congregation, that understands but his mother tongue, may be *edified* by it, as well as the greatest scholar.

But that which is chiefly to be considered in the language of the Common-Prayer, is that it is not only *common* but *proper* too. Though the words there used are but common words, yet they are so used that they properly express the things that are designed by them. This, I confess, may seem to be no great matter at first sight, yet it is that without which we might be subverted, by that which was intended for our *edification*. For impropriety of speech in matters of religion, hath given occasion to all, or most of the schisms, errors and heresies, that ever infested this, or any other Church, as might easily be demonstrated. Hence the Apostle gave Timothy, *A form of sound words*, and charged him to hold it fast: *Hold fast (saith he) the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me*. As knowing that except the words, whereby he usually expressed divine truths, were sound and proper, it would be impossible for his notions and opinions of the things themselves to be so. And certainly, if ever there was *A form of sound words*, composed by men since the Apostle's times, our Common-Prayer may justly deserve that title; it being all made up of such fit and proper, such sound and wholesome words, and if we do but hold fast to them, there is no fear of our falling, either into heresy, or schism. For they being duly considered, will suggest to our minds, right and true apprehensions of all the articles of our Christian religion, and so not only make us sound, but build us up strong and firm in our most holy faith: So that considering the plainness and perspicuity, the soundness and propriety of speech which is used in it, the least that can be said of the Common-Prayer is that all things in it are so worded, as is most for the *edifying* of all those that use it.

And, as the words in the Common-Prayer are all as *edifying* as words can be, so in the *second* place, is the matter expressed by those words. For there is nothing in it, but what is necessary for our *edification*, and all things that are, or can be for our *edification*, are plainly in it [. . .] Look it all over without prejudice and partiality, consider seriously everything that is in it, and you will find nothing asserted, but what is consonant to God's word, nothing prayed for, but according to his promise, nothing required as a duty, but what is agreeable to his



commands, nothing said or done, but what is grave and sober, solemn and substantial; nothing but what becomes the worship of our Great and Almighty Creator. And therefore, nothing but what we may some way or other be *edified* by it.

And as there is nothing in it, but what is *edifying*, so all things that are or can be *edifying*, are in it. For nothing can be necessary to *edify*, and make us solid and perfect Christians, but what is necessary either to be *believed*, or *done*, or else *obtained* by us. But there is nothing necessary to be *known* or *believed*, but we are taught it; nothing necessary to be *done*, but we are enjoined in it; nothing necessary to be *obtained*, but we pray for it in our public form of Divine Service.

For first, as to those things which are necessary to be *known*, or *believed*, it is acknowledged by all Protestants, that they are fully contained in the Holy Scriptures, which make a great, if not the greatest part of our Divine Service; and are constantly read over, the Psalms once every month, the Old Testament once, and the New thrice every year; and all the fundamental articles of our Christian faith, revealed in the Holy Scriptures, being briefly summed up in the Apostle's Creed, that we may be sure to keep them always in our minds we have that Creed read, and repeated always once, and most commonly twice every day in the year. And seeing the Godhead of our Blessed Saviour, the foundation of our whole religion, hath been, and still is denied by some, lest we should be led away with the error of the wicked, every Sunday and Holy-day we read the Nicene Creed, wherein the Godhead, both of the Son and Holy Ghost, is asserted and explained. And that we may not entertain any erroneous opinions concerning the most Holy Trinity, or the Incarnation of the Son of God, but the true Catholic Faith whole, and undefiled, upon certain days every year, we read that which is commonly called, The Creed of St. Athanasius, wherein those great mysteries are unfolded, in the most proper and perspicuous terms that they are capable of.

And as all things necessary to be *believed*, are summarily contained in the three Creeds, so they are frequently explained in the other parts of our liturgy; insomuch, that it would be easy to frame a complete body of divinity out of the words there used: at least of all such things as are needful for any man in the world to believe or know, in order to his eternal salvation.

The same may be said also of all those things which we ought to *do*: for, as we here do whatsoever is necessary to be *done*, in order to our worship of God in this place, so we here are taught whatsoever is necessary to be learnt, in order to our serving God in all other places. So that no man that frequents our public congregations,

where the Common-Prayer is used, can ever plead ignorance of any one duty whatsoever: for if it be not his own fault, he may there be instructed in everything which he that made him requires of him. For here, as I observed before, we constantly read the Holy Scripture, which as the Apostle saith, *Is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly instructed unto all good works.* And seeing it hath pleased the Most High God to comprise his whole will, and by consequence our duty, in the Ten Commandments, hence we read them constantly every Sunday and Holy-day throughout the whole year; by which means everyone, that doth not wilfully shut his eyes, may clearly see, and fully understand, his whole duty, both to God and man. Especially considering that in your prayers themselves also, there is frequent mention made of all those vices which ought to be avoided, and of all those good works which ought to be performed by us. So that we can never come to church, but we are still put in mind, both of *what we ought*, and *what we ought not to do*, that we may be saved.

And then, as there is nothing necessary to be *known*, or *done*, but we are taught it; so neither is there anything necessary to be *obtained*, to make us either holy, or happy, but we pray for it in the Common-Prayer. For here we have the Lord's Prayer, a prayer composed by Wisdom itself; and therefore it must needs be the most perfect and divine prayer that ever was made. Neither do we use it only once, but in every distinct service of the Church, in our prayers before we read the Holy Scripture, and in our prayers after; towards the end of the Litany, and in the beginning of the Communion Service, and in every Office of the Church besides. And the reason is, because although our Saviour hath not forbidden us to use any other prayer yet he hath expressly commanded us to say this, whensoever we pray. And therefore, in obedience to his command, our Church hath wisely ordered, that in all, and in every solemn address that we make to the most High God, we always say this prayer, lest otherwise, by our transgression of his command, in omitting this, we make all our other prayers to be ineffectual. And besides, by the constant use of this amongst our other prayers, we are always sure to use one prayer, both absolutely perfect in itself, and most acceptable unto him to whom we pray; it being a prayer of his own composure; so that we speak unto God in his own words, and so may be confident, that we ask nothing of him, but exactly according to his own will.

And though all things necessary for us be virtually contained in the Lord's Prayer, yet our Church, in conformity to the Catholic and Apostolical, hath thought good to add some other prayers, in which

the same things are more particularly expressed and desired, at the hands of our great and most bountiful benefactor. All which are so contrived, that there is nothing evil, or hurtful for us, but we pray against it; nothing good, or useful, but we pray for it. There is no vice, or lust, but we desire it may be subdued under us; no grace or virtue, but we pray it may be planted and grow in us. Insomuch, that if we do but constantly and sincerely pray over all those prayers, and steadfastly believe and trust in God for his answering of them, and so obtain what we there pray for, we cannot but be as real and true saints, as happy and blessed creatures, as it is possible for us to be in this world. Neither do we here pray for ourselves only, but according to the Apostle's advice, we make *Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men; yea, for our very enemies*, as our Saviour hath commanded us. And what can be desired more than all this, to make the matter of the Common-Prayer *edifying*, either to ourselves or others? Nothing certainly, but truth and sincerity of heart in the using of it.

I cannot pass from this head, before I have observed one thing more unto you, concerning the prayers in general, and that is that they are not carried on in one continued discourse, but divided into many short prayers, or Collects, such as that is, which our Lord himself composed; and that might be one reason, wherefore our Church so ordered it, that so she might follow our Lord's example in it, who best knew what kind of prayers were fittest for us to use. And indeed, we cannot but all find, by our own experience, how difficult it is to keep our minds long intent upon anything, much more upon so great things as the object and subject of our prayers are, but do what we can, we are still liable to distractions: so that there is a kind of necessity to break off sometimes, to give ourselves a breathing time, that our thoughts being loosened for a while, they may with more ease, and less danger of distraction, be tied up again, as it is necessary they should be, all the while that we are actually praying to the supreme being of the world.

Besides that, in order to the performing our devotions aright to the most High God, it is necessary that our souls be possessed all along with due apprehensions of his greatness and glory. To which purpose our short prayers contribute very much; for every one of them beginning with some of the properties or perfections of God, and so suggesting to our minds right apprehensions of him at first, it is easy to preserve them in our minds during the space of a short prayer, which in a long one would be apt to scatter and vanish away.

But that which I look upon as one of the principal reasons, why our public devotions are, and should be divided into short Collects is

this: Our Blessed Saviour, we know, hath often told us that whatsoever we ask in his name, we shall receive: and so hath directed us in all our prayers to make use of his name, and to ask nothing but upon the account of his merit and mediation for us; upon which all our hopes and expectations from God do wholly and solely depend. Hence therefore, (as it always was, so) it cannot but be judged necessary, that the name of Christ be frequently inserted in our prayers, that so we may lift up our hearts unto him, and act our faith upon him for our obtaining the good things we pray for. And so we see it is in the Common-Prayer, for whatsoever it is we ask of God, we presently add, *Through Jesus Christ our Lord*, or something to that purpose. And so ask nothing but according to our Lord's direction, even in his name. And this is the reason that makes our Prayers so short: for take away the conclusion of every Collect or prayer, *In the name of Christ*, and you may join them all together, and make them but as one continued prayer. But this would be to offer manifest violence to the prayers, by taking away that which gives them all their force and energy, and so making them ineffectual to the purposes for which they are used. For certainly the asking all things in the Name of Christ, as we do in the Common-Prayer, is the only way whereby to obtain what we desire, and by consequence, the most edifying way of praying in the world.

The next thing to be considered in the Common-Prayer, is the *method*, which is admirable, and as *edifying*, if possible, as the *matter* itself. This none can deny, that doth but fully understand, and seriously consider of it. Which therefore, that you may all do, I shall briefly run through the whole, and give you what Light I can into it, that you may clearly see, not only the reasonableness, but the excellency of it all along.

For which purpose I shall instance only in such things which offer themselves at first sight, to any one that doth but cast his eye upon it.

Let us therefore suppose a congregation of sober and devout Christians (such as we all should be) met together to perform their public devotions to Almighty God; every one of which hath lift up his heart privately unto him already, imploring his aid and assistance in the performance of so great a work, and so are all now ready to set about it.

The first thing we do, is to read some Sentences of Holy Scripture, that so we may begin our devotions unto God in his own words. And they are all such Sentences as put us in mind of our sins against him, and of his promise to pardon them if we do repent: that so we may present and carry ourselves with that reverence and godly fear before him, as becometh those who are sensible of their own vileness and unworthiness to approach so great a majesty; and likewise, with that

faith and humble confidence, which becometh those who believe, that he upon our repentance will pardon our sins, and accept both our persons and performances, according to the promises which he hath made unto us.

Then follows a grave Exhortation, concerning the end of our present assembling, which is of great use, and ought never to be omitted. For men generally are apt to rush into the presence of God, without ever considering what they go about, whereas, this Exhortation puts us upon considering the greatness of the work which we are now engaged in, and so upon composing our thoughts, and preparing ourselves for the due performance of it.

Our minds being thus brought into a right frame and temper for it, we all, both Minister and people, prostrate ourselves before the most high God, confessing upon our knees, the manifold sins and wickedness that we have committed against him. Which Confession is so contrived, that all, and every person in any congregation whatsoever, may join in it. For it runs in general terms, and yet so too, that every particular person may and ought in his own mind to confess and acknowledge his own sins, which he knows himself to be guilty of. As where we say, *We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.* At the saying of this everyone should call his own sins to remembrance, and what duties he knows himself to have omitted, and what vices he knows himself to have committed, and confess them accordingly unto God. And when we have thus confessed our sins to God, we presently implore his mercy in the pardon of them, and his grace, that for the future we may forsake them.

And whilst we are thus upon our knees, humbly confessing and bemoaning our sins before the Lord our God, the Minister stands up, and in the name of God, declares and pronounceth to all those who truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his Gospel, *The absolution and remission of all their sins;* which though spoken also in general terms, yet every particular person there present, ought to apply it to himself, so as to be fully persuaded in his own mind, that if he doth but sincerely repent, and believe the Gospel, he is perfectly absolved from all his sins by God himself, according to the promises which he hath made to mankind in *Jesus Christ our Lord.*

And now looking upon ourselves as absolved from our sins, upon our repentance and faith in Christ, and by consequence, as reconciled to God, we take the boldness to call him Father, humbly addressing ourselves to him in that divine form of prayer which he himself hath given us. Which done, we lift up our hearts and voices unto God, for his assistance of us in what we do, in the words of David, the Minister

crying out, O Lord, open thou our lips, and the people answering, And our mouth shall shew forth thy praise. The Minister again, O God make speed to save us, the people, O Lord, make haste to help us. And then immediately we all lift up our bodies to stand upon our feet, and so put ourselves into a posture of praising and magnifying the Eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for his infinite goodness and mercy towards us; for which purpose the Minister first saith, or sings, the *Gloria Patri*, *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost*; and the people to shew their consent, answer, As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen. But not thinking this to be enough, the Minister calls upon the people again, saying, *Praise ye the Lord*, and the people answer, *The Lord's name be praised*; and then we go on to praise him together, saying, or singing, the Ninety-fifth Psalm, *Venite exultemus Domino*, O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation, &c. And so proceed to the psalm appointed for the day. After every one of which, to testify our belief in the most Sacred Trinity, and our acknowledgment of that infinite love and goodness, which every one of those Divine Persons hath manifested to us, we repeat that incomparable Hymn, *Glory be to the Father*, &c.

Our hearts being thus raised up to God in praising and admiring of him, we are now in a fit temper and disposition to hear what he shall speak unto us. And therefore have a chapter read out of the Old Testament; and that in its ordinary course, except upon Sundays and Holy-days, when more people attending the public worship of God, than can conveniently come upon other days, we read some select chapter proper for the day, and such as is judged most edifying to all that are there present. And having thus heard God speaking unto us in his Holy Word, we presently fall upon praising of him again, for so unspeakable a mercy, saying, or singing, in the morning, the *Te Deum*, one of the most heavenly and seraphic hymns that was ever composed by men; or else, the *Song of the Three Children*, which is nothing but a paraphrase upon that which David sang so often upon earth, and which the Holy Angels sing continually in Heaven, even *Hallelujah*, *Praise ye the Lord*. Wherein we being all sensible how far short we ourselves come of praising God sufficiently, we call upon all the creatures of the world to do it, *Bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him for ever*. In the afternoon, we sing either the *Magnificat*, or else the Ninety-eighth Psalm, both which being taken out of God's own Word, cannot but be very pleasing and acceptable unto him.

After this, our soul being got upon the wing again, and soaring aloft in the contemplation of the divine perfections, we are now rightly qualified to hear and receive the sublime mysteries of the Gospel. And therefore have a chapter read to us out of the New Testament. After which, we being revived with the good tidings of the Gospel, and filled with

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admiration at the infinite goodness of God therein revealed to us, we break forth again into praising and adoring of him, in the *Song of Zacharias*, or else the Hundredth Psalm, in the morning; and at evening, either the Sixty-seventh Psalm, or else the *Song of Old Simeon*, still concluding with *Gloria Patri*.

Now having thus heard some part of the Word of God read to us, and expressed our thankfulness unto him for it, to signify our assent, not only to what we have heard, but to the whole Scripture, we all with one heart and voice repeat the Apostle's Creed, wherein the sum and substance of it is contained. And so profess ourselves to continue in the number of Christ's disciples, and that as we were at first baptized, so we still believe in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, God blessed for evermore.

Hitherto we have been mostly taken up with confessing our sins to God, imploring his mercy in the pardon of them, hearing his most Holy Word, acknowledging his goodness to us, and praising and magnifying his Name for it. By which means, except we have been extremely wanting to ourselves, our hearts cannot but be so united and fixed upon God, that we are now rightly disposed to make known our wants, and present our petitions before him. This therefore is the next thing we set upon: but seeing that neither Minister nor people can possibly do it aright, without the assistance of God himself, therefore each of them first prays for his special presence with the other. The one saying, *The Lord be with you*, the other, *And with thy spirit*. And then immediately falling down upon our knees, we adore and supplicate each Person of the most Blessed Trinity to have mercy upon us, *Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us*. After which we address ourselves to God in the words that he hath put into our mouths, saying the Lord's Prayer; which ended, the Minister and people, by turns lift up their hearts to God in some short and heavenly ejaculations, striving as it were to out-vie each other in prevailing with the Almighty to pour down his blessings upon us. And then, in an humble and solemn manner, we join together in supplicating his Divine Majesty for his grace and favour, his defence and protection, his mercy, and blessing, for ourselves, for the King, for the Royal Family, for his Church, and for all Mankind.

And thus we do ordinarily in the Collects appointed for that purpose.

But upon Wednesdays and Fridays (upon which days the Primitive Church used to perform their more than ordinary devotions) as also upon the Lord's Day in the morning, we do it in the Litany, and in such a Litany as comprehends all, and everything that we can ever need to desire of Almighty God, either for ourselves or others.

After this, upon Sundays and Holy-days, we proceed to the Communion Service: And therefore, approaching to the Lord's Table, we begin it with

his own prayer. And after another short prayer to God to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, we read the Ten Commandments, which he hath enjoined us to observe; and after every Commandment we ask God mercy for our transgression thereof, for the time past, and grace to keep the same for the time to come; saying, *Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.* And then, after a prayer for the King, and the Collect for the day, we read the Epistle and Gospel, that is, most commonly, a short paragraph taken out of the canonical Epistles, and another out of one of the Holy Gospels, which was the ancient way of reading the Scripture, before it was divided into chapters And we do it now to prepare us the better for the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, therein revealed to us. But seeing we neither do, nor can read over the whole, we repeat the substance of it in the Nicene Creed, which it is very necessary we should do at this time, that so we may demonstrate our selves to be Christians, and so capable of receiving the most holy Communion.

He that all this while hath employed himself as he ought to do in the service of our Church, cannot but find himself strangely *edified* by it. Yet howsoever, that nothing may be wanting that may any way conduce to our *edification*, after the Nicene Creed, our Church hath appointed a Sermon to be preached, which if sound, plain and practical, as it ought to be, cannot but be very *edifying* too.

And now we may be well supposed to be so far *edified*, as to be raised up to the highest pitch of devotion that we can arrive at in this world, and so are fit to be admitted to the highest Ordinance of the Church, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. And therefore we now betake ourselves to it. But that we may not appear before our Lord empty, we first offer up something to him of what he hath bestowed upon us, to be disposed of to pious and charitable uses; testifying thereby our acknowledgment of his goodness to us, and that we have nothing but what we receive from him. And to excite and encourage us to do this, all the while that we are offering, we have some select Sentences of Scripture read to us, wherein God either commands us to be charitable, or else promiseth a blessing to those that are so. And then we pray for *Christ's whole Church Militant here in earth*, whereby we profess ourselves to be real members of it, and desirous to hold Communion with it in Christ's Mystical Body and Blood. And so we proceed to the celebration of it; in which the *method* is so clear, so apparently *edifying*, that I need not say anything of it. But shall only [...] observe unto you... that our Church requireth, or at least supposeth it to be administred every Lord's Day, and every Holy-day throughout the year, as it was in the Primitive Church. For that is the reason that the Communion Service is appointed to be used upon all such days, and



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to be read at the Communion Table, that so the Minister may be there ready to administer it unto all that desire to partake of it. Which shews the great care that our Church hath of all her members, that they might be *edified* and confirmed in the faith; to which nothing contributes more, than frequent Communion at our Lord's Table. Which if people could once be persuaded to, they would soon find greater benefit by it than I can express, or they themselves, till then, imagine. I shall say no more of it at present, but only this, that I am so sensible of what I now say, that could I be sure to have a sufficient number of communicants, I should be heartily glad to administer the Holy Sacrament every Lord's Day, both for their sakes, and my own too.

Thus I have given you a short scheme of that excellent method wherein our Divine Service is performed; which whosoever rightly considers, will need no other argument to convince him, that it is, according to the Apostle's Rule, very *edifying* indeed. The last thing to be considered in it, is the *manner* of its performance; by which I mean only the several postures of the body, as *standing* and *kneeling*, which are used in it: for they are also done to *edifying*.

While we say or sing the hymns or psalms to the praise and glory of God, we *stand* up, not only to signify, but to excite the elevation of our minds at that time. For as on the one hand, if our souls be really lift up in the praises of God, our bodies will naturally lift up themselves, to accompany them as far as they can towards heaven; so on the other hand, the raising up of our bodies helps towards the raising up of our souls too, by putting us in mind of that high and heavenly work we are now about; wherein, according to our weak capacities, we join with the choir of heaven in praising God now, as we hope to do it for evermore. For this cause also we *stand* at the Creeds, for they being confessions of our faith in God, as such they come under the proper notions of hymns, or songs of praise to him. All our praising God being really nothing else but our confessing and acknowledging him to be what he is in himself and to us. And besides that, by our *standing* at the Creeds and Gospels, we signify our assent unto them, and our readiness to defend them to the utmost of our power, against all opposition whatsoever. And as for the Gospels particularly, they contain the very acts which our Lord did, and the very words which he spake when he was upon earth; and therefore we who profess him to be our Lord and Master, cannot surely but *stand* up, when we hear him speaking, and listen diligently to those gracious words which proceed out of his divine mouth.

And as when we praise God, we raise up ourselves as high as we can towards heaven, so when we pray unto him, we fall down as low as we can towards the earth, not daring to present our supplications to

the absolute monarch of the whole world, any other ways than upon our *knees*. Which is so proper, so natural a posture of supplicants, that if all men would but duly consider what they do when they pray to Almighty God, the Church need never have commanded them to *kneel* at that time. For they could not choose but do it; no, not although the place where they are, should seem never so inconvenient for it. For we find our blessed Saviour himself *kneeling* at his prayer in the garden, upon the *bare ground*, and St Paul upon the *sea-shore*, where he could have no other cushion but *stones* or *sand*. Howsoever, to take off all those little excuses that men are apt to make for themselves in this case, the seats in this church are so disposed, and all things so prepared in them, that there can be no inconvenience at all in it, but rather all the conveniences for *kneeling* that can be desired. and therefore if any one of you shall neglect to *kneel*, while the prayers are read, they will give us too much cause to call their religion into question, or to suspect they have none at all. For if they had, they durst not, they could not offer such a manifest affront to the great Creator of the World, as to carry themselves no otherwise while they pray to him, than as if they were conversing with their fellow creatures. But why do I speak of their praying unto God! It is too much to be feared they do not pray at all, nor come to church for any better purpose, than only to see and be seen. I am sure they perform no act of external worship of adoration unto God, nor shew him that respect and reverence which is due unto him; and so give very great offence to all pious and devout Christians.

Whereas if all and every person in the congregation would always be upon their *knees*, while they put up their petitions to the most High God, what a mighty advantage would this be, not only to every one in particular, but to the whole congregation in general? For as everyone would by this means keep his heart more steadfast in the true fear and dread of God, and likewise more certainly obtain the good things he prays for, as the Fathers frequently assert, so the whole congregation also would be very much *edified* by it. For by this means we should excite and inflame each other's devotions, confirm and strengthen one another's faith, and convince both ourselves and all that see us, that religion is indeed a serious thing, and that we believe it to be so, by our serving God with so much reverence and godly fear, as this humble posture representeth. And therefore as you tender the love of God, the credit of religion, or the salvation of your own souls, I beseech you all, in the name of him who made you, that whensoever you come hither to pray unto him, you do it in that awful, lowly, and solemn manner, which our Church commandeth, and as becometh creatures, when you speak to your Great and Almighty Creator; that so you may give true

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worship and honour unto him, and also receive that benefit and edification to your selves, which he hath promised, and you expect from your public prayers; this being certainly the most edifying posture that you can possibly use upon such occasions.

From what hath been hitherto discoursed concerning the *language*, the *matter*, the *method*, and the *manner* of performing Divine Service, as contained and prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer; we may positively conclude, that it agrees exactly with the rule in my text, even that *All things in it are done to edifying*: Which was the thing I undertook to prove. I know that many other arguments might be brought to shew the excellency and usefulness of the Common-Prayer; but these already produced, are sufficient to convince any sober and considering Christian of it. And if there be any here present, who are not yet convinced by what they have heard of it, I desire only one thing of them, and that is that they would make trial of it for a while For my charity prompts me to believe, that all the zeal that some express against the Common-Prayer, and all that indifferency that is in others for it, proceeds only from their ignorance of what it is, or at least from their want of an experimental knowledge of it. For let any man that seriously minds the worship of God, and the salvation of his soul, before all things else, let such a one, I say, set himself in good earnest to use the Common-Prayer, as he ought to do, for some considerable time, and I do not doubt but that by the blessing of God, he will find that benefit and edification by it, that his own experience shall convince him of all that I have now said, more than all the arguments that I have, or any man in the world can ever produce to him. Some perhaps may think this to be a paradox; but I do not question but that many here present can attest it upon their own knowledge; having found themselves more confirmed in their faith, more settled in their religion, more humbled for their sins, more supported under their troubles, more inflamed with love to God and desires of heaven, every way more edified by the constant use of the Common-Prayer, than they could ever have believed it possible to have been, except they had found it to have been so by their own experience.

# Letter: Sex and Gender

From Ian Robinson

May I make on Paul Benfield's interesting essay on the legal and constitutional position of the Prayer Book (*Faith & Worship* 78) a comment I first tried to formulate in the discussion after his talk at the PBS Conference?

Mr Benfield quotes Amending Canon 33, 'A man or woman may be consecrated to the office of bishop' which gives the explanation 'In the forms of service contained in The Book of Common Prayer or in the Ordinal words importing the masculine gender in relation to bishops are construed as including the feminine,' and he goes on to ask whether '[I]f Synod has said that words importing the masculine gender in relation to bishops shall include the feminine, what is to stop it saying the same thing in relation to marriage?' and concludes, 'If that were done we could have same-sex marriage according to the Book of Common Prayer.'

What is to stop it? English grammar and lexis would stop it. I challenge Mr Benfield's conclusion not on legal grounds, on which I am sure his authority is sufficient, but as a grammarian.

The question arises because of a now common confusion between gender, a term in grammar, and sex, a term in biology. There are important connections between gender and sex, but they are not always clear and simple. Grammatical gender is much more important in the Romance languages than in modern English, but in French there is no implication from the feminine gender that pens or tables are female. In English, ships are usually feminine but they are not female, and so are incapable of heterosexual or lesbian relationships. Let us not forget that Old English *wif* (woman, wife) was in gender neuter, though there is quite substantial evidence that before the Conquest English women were not sexless.

The third person singular pronouns *he*, *she*, *him*, *her*, *his* are often used to denote sex as part of their meaning, but the masculine is not always so used. Many languages, including Biblical Hebrew and classical Latin and Greek, have different words for man the male human being and man the human species, though they are not always consistently differentiated, and as we all know the first human male had the proper name Adam, though that is the Hebrew word for 'mankind' not 'male human being' (*ish*). English differs in that *man* covers both the human race and the individual male, and the pronoun *he* can stand for either an individual male or anybody of either sex. In Bible translation this makes English actually more inclusive than Hebrew, Latin or Greek. *Beatus vir* (Psalm cxii. 1) goes into English as 'Blessed is the man', taken,

I think, to include women, though the Latin word and the Hebrew original both mean an individual male. Our feminine pronouns have no similar generality. The *man* of ‘Man that is born of a woman...’ does not exclude girls, who are as much born as boys, but *woman* does exclude the male sex, which is not capable of giving birth. The phrase could not be rewritten ‘woman that is born of a man...’ In recent years this inclusive masculine has been offensive to English-speaking feminists, so we get the written forms (impossible to pronounce) *he/she*, *s/he*, [*s*]he or the page-filling *his-or-her* and the like. In academic essays the inclusive *he* (= any human being) is sometimes replaced by *she*, but this has the unintended effect of confining the sense to females, for as I have just noticed, in pre-feminist English the feminine pronoun has no similar generalising sense as the masculine; ‘*man*’ but not ‘*woman*’ can be the whole race. The contemporary situation has necessitated the explicit grammatical statement in many formal documents that ‘*he*’ can include females. The amended Canon quoted above appears to be doing no more.

For a long time, the Prayer Book has followed what for centuries has been ordinary English usage, where if appropriate *man* and *he* can mean everybody. So the Catechism, ‘to be learned of every person, before he be brought to be confirmed’ does not imply that girls need not learn it or that they are not persons. When it is necessary to distinguish between the sexes, the Prayer Book has the convention of using italics. In Baptism, ‘...wash *him* and sanctify *him*...’ tells the priest to substitute *her* or *them* (for the same italics invite singular or plural) as required. The same convention is used in the Burial of the Dead, including italicised *brother*, which cannot include *sister*. (This convention was not followed in the sixteenth-century forms of Baptism I have looked at, because they just use plurals, ‘these children’; but it is there in the oldest 1662 to which I have easy access, 1671.) No such italics are necessary in the preliminary explanation of why Baptism is administered in the vulgar tongue, because ‘Every *Man* present may be put in remembrance of his own profession...’, where *Man* is inclusive and does not imply that women need not be put in remembrance, though if it had been ‘every *Woman*’ it would have excluded men.

This inclusive masculine *man* does not stretch to all common masculine nouns denoting one sex, like the example just quoted, *brother*. Nor can *husband* ‘import’ *wife* or *vice versa*.

Whether *bishop* implies the male sex is an open question. As far as I can see, it is a tricky question whether the Prayer Book could be used for consecrating a woman bishop. But the Prayer-book ‘Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests’ could be used without alteration to ordain women. (Has any bishop done this?) Here, *persons* is often used of the ordinands, and ‘these thy servants’, neither of which specifies sex. The first naming

of an ordinand as he is in the paragraph inviting 'any of you' in the congregation who knows of any impediment or notable crime, 'let him come forth'. The latter is surely the inclusive use: a woman who knew of any notable crime could not offer as excuse for not coming forth that the invitation was not to her. There is no grammatical reason why the ordinand he must be exclusive. The epistle, Ephesians iv 7 ff, looks forward 'till we all come in the unity of the faith...unto a perfect man...' where *all* guarantees the inclusion of women in the perfect man. The alternative Gospel is about 'the Shepherd of the sheep'. I suppose there is some expectation that a Biblical shepherd will be a male, but the lesson is not directly about the ordinands for the priesthood but about the Good Shepherd. Next the Bishop, sitting in his chair, addresses the ordinands as *Brethren*. There is no reason to take this as less inclusive here than its frequent use in the Bible, to include any member of the Body of Christ. In the exhortation that follows, the priests are to be, amongst other things, 'watchmen'. A watchman is most likely a man, but like a spokesman or a chairman (*Madam Chairman* is a common form of address) could be a woman. I guess the Ordering of Priests was not carefully restricted to males because nobody thought the question of women priests would arise, but it is just about imaginable, given the Prayer Book's aim to be inclusive within orthodoxy, that the possibility of women priests was deliberately or sub-consciously not excluded.

This is very unlike The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony, where men are clearly and consistently differentiated from women. The Banns could be used for same-sex couples (though perhaps just impediments would be declared) but not the Form itself. By the grammar of sex and gender I have just glanced at, the vows can only be made by a male speaking of and to a female and a female of and to a male. The referent of *woman* in 'Wilt thou have this Woman...?' cannot be a male, and in this context 'Wilt thou have this Man...?' can only refer to the particular human male standing there, not (though perhaps there are women who would fancy it) to the whole human race, which the singular demonstrative cannot qualify. A 'wedded wife' must be a woman and 'a wedded husband' a man. This, of course, is all after the opening rubric referring to the Man and the Woman, and the statement of the first cause why Matrimony was ordained: 'First, it was ordained for the procreation of children.'

To declare that 'woman' can mean 'man' and 'man' 'woman' as appropriate would not be a use of the inclusive masculine, but a drastic alteration of meaning. The Church if she so decides may make strange assertions about contemporary language, but has no authority to change the clearly understood meaning of a sixteenth-century text.

So in my view we need neither hope for nor fear a Prayer-book 'marriage' of a same-sex couple.

# Branches and Branch Contacts

- BATH & WELLS:** Mr Ian Girvan,  
59 Kempthorne Lane, Bath. BA2 5DX  
T:01225-830663 iangirvan@me.com
- BIRMINGHAM:** Please contact the office,  
Copyhold Farm.
- BLACKBURN:** Mr Christopher Norton,  
26 Handsworth Road, Blackpool  
Lancashire FY1 2RQ T: 01253 623338
- BRISTOL:** Roger Tucker, 18 Springfield  
Grove, Westbury Park, Bristol BS6 7XQ.  
T: 0117 9248629 rogettucker@live.co.uk  
(Membership) Mrs Joyce Morris,  
29 St John's Road, Clifton, Bristol. BS8 2HD
- CANTERBURY:** Mr Christopher Cooper,  
Goose and Gridiron, 6 Churchyard Passage,  
Ashford, Kent. TN23 1QL  
T:07525-095717  
saveashfordchurch@yahoo.co.uk
- CARLISLE:** (Membership) Mrs Kate East,  
10 Fernwood Drive, Kendal. LA9 5BU  
T:01539-725055
- CHELMSFORD:** Please contact  
Copyhold Farm
- CHESTER:** Mr J. Baldwin, Rosalie Farm,  
Church Minshull, Nantwich, Cheshire.  
CW5 6EF T:01270-528487  
mdsc187@aol.com
- CHICHESTER EAST:** Mr Benjamin Tyler  
Browning Manor, Blackboys,  
East Sussex TN22 5HG  
T: 07505 650754  
benjamin.tyler@yahoo.co.uk
- CHICHESTER WEST:** Mrs Valerie Dane  
225 Chichester Road, Bognor Regis.  
PO21 5AQ T:01243-827330  
valerie.225@btinternet.com
- COVENTRY:** Mr Peter Bolton,  
19 Kineton Road, Wellesbourne,  
Warwickshire. CV35 9NE  
T:01789-840814  
peterandrosalindbolton@hotmail.com
- DERBY:** Please contact Head Office.
- DURHAM:** Mrs Rosemary Hall, 23 Beatty  
Avenue, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. NE2 3QN  
T:0191-285-7534 hallrosyhall@aol.com
- ELY:** Mr P.K.C. White, The Orchard House,  
12 Thrift's Walk, Old Chesterton,  
Cambridge. CB4 1NR T:01223-324176  
pkcwhite@waitrose.com
- EXETER:** Mrs Esme Heath, BrookWeld,  
Stokenham, Kingsbridge, Devon.  
TQ7 2SL T:01548-580615  
esme.heath@sky.com
- GLOUCESTER:** Mrs S.M. Emson,  
38 Gloucester Road, Stratton,  
Cirencester. GL7 2JY T: 01285-654591  
susanemson@gmail.com
- GUILDFORD:** Dr John Verity, 65 Chart Lane,  
Reigate. RH2 7EA T: 01737 210792
- HEREFORD:** Mr Stephen Evans,  
14 Raven Lane, Ludlow, Shropshire.  
SY8 1BW T:01584-873436  
M:07920-200619
- LEICESTER:** Mrs S. Packe-Drury-Lowe,  
35 Green Lane, Seagrave, Loughborough.  
LE12 7LU T:01509-815262  
ritaphillips@gmail.com
- LICHFIELD:** Mr David Doggett, Grassen-dale,  
5 Park Drive, Oswestry, Shropshire.  
SY11 1BN T:01691-652902
- LINCOLN:** Mrs Clío Perraton-Williams  
Pyrus House, 12 Spital Terrace,  
Gainsborough. DN21 2HE  
T: 01673 818109  
clio@perraton-williams.com
- LIVERPOOL:** Ms Dianne Rothwell  
7 Gorse Lane, Warrington. WA1 3PT  
elfmag@btinternet.com  
T: 01925-632974 (eve)
- LONDON:** Mr Paul Meitner, c/o the PBS  
office, Copyhold Farm  
paul.meitner@uk.pwc.com  
T: 020 7212 6394
- MANCHESTER:** Mr Nicholas Johnson,  
552 Liverpool Street, Salford  
Manchester. M5 5JX  
nicholasj2104@yahoo.co.uk
- NEWCASTLE:** see Durham.
- NORWICH:** Mrs A. Wilson, The Old  
Rectory, Burston Road, Dickleburgh, Diss,  
Norfolk. IP21 4NN T:01379-740561
- OXFORD:** Mr J.B. Dearing, 27 Sherman Rd,  
Reading, Berkshire. RG1 2PJ  
T:0118-958-0377 gpwild@btconnect.com
- PETERBOROUGH:** Mrs M. Stewart, The  
Sycamores, 3 Oakham Road, Whissendine,  
Rutland. LE15 7HA T:01664-474353  
mary.stewart@decomplexity.com

PORTSMOUTH: see Winchester for details.

ROCHESTER: Mr G & Mrs J Comer,  
27 Long Meadow, Riverhead, Sevenoaks,  
Kent. TN13 2QY T:01732-461462  
joannacomer@btinternet.com

ST ALBANS: Mrs J.M. Paddick (Treasurer)  
Dr. Matthew A Clarke,  
23B Faraday Road, Stevenage. SG2 0BH  
T: 07866430604  
austin81clarke@gmail.com

ST EDMUNDSBURY & IPSWICH:  
Mr Anthony C. Desch, 4 Byfield Way,  
Bury St Edmunds IP33 2SN  
T: 01284-755355  
anthonycdesch@gmail.com

SALISBURY: Mrs Lucy Pearson, 10 Briar  
Close, Wyke, Gillingham, Dorset. SP8 4SS  
T:01747-825392  
lucypearson@waitrose.com

SHEFFIELD: Miss Rosemary Littlewood,  
Railway House, Hazlehead, SheYeld.  
S36 4HJ T:01226-764092  
rowood@waitrose.com

SODOR & MAN: Mrs Clare Faulds  
The Lynague, German, Isle of Man.  
IM5 2AQ faulds.clare@gmail.com  
T:01624-842045

SOUTHWARK: Mr Paul Meitner, c/o the PBS  
office, Copyhold Farm  
paul.meitner@uk.pwc.com

SOUTHWELL & NOTTINGHAM:  
Mr A.F. Sunman, 1 Lunn Lane,  
South Collingham, Newark. NG23 7LP  
T:01636-893975  
adriansunman@lineone.net

TRURO: Mr J. St Brioc Hooper,  
1 Tregarne Terrace, St Austell. PL25 4BE  
T:01726-76382 j.stbrioc@btinternet.com

WEST YORKSHIRE & THE DALES  
(BRADFORD): Please contact Head Office.

WEST YORKSHIRE & THE DALES  
(RIPON & LEEDS): Mr J.R. Wimpres,  
Bishopton Grove House, Bishopton, Ripon.  
HG4 2QL T:01765-600888  
bgh@ripon.org

WEST YORKSHIRE & THE DALES  
(WAKEFIELD): Revd Philip Reynolds,  
St Aidan's Vicarage, Radcliffe Street,  
Skelmanthorpe, Huddersfield.  
HD8 9AF T:01484 -863232  
life.draw@virgin.net

WINCHESTER: Mrs Nikki Sales  
19 Heath Road South, Locks Heath,  
Southampton. SO31 6SJ  
T:01489-570899 grass.green@virgin.net

WORCESTER. Mr John Comins,  
The Old Rectory, Birlingham,  
Nr Pershore, Worcestershire. WR10 3AB  
T:01386 -750292

YORK: Mr R.A. Harding, 5 Lime Avenue,  
Stockton Lane, York. YO31 1BT  
T:01904-423347 eboraco@talktalk.net

NORTH WALES: The Revd Neil Fairlamb, 5  
Tros-yr-afon, Beaumaris, Anglesey.  
LL58 8BN T:01248811402  
rheithor@spamarrest.com

SOUTH WALES: Please contact the office,  
Copyhold Farm.

CHANNEL ISLANDS: see Winchester for  
details.

OVERSEAS MEMBERS: Mrs Sally Tipping,  
Woodland Cross Cottage, Woodland Head,  
Yeoford, Crediton, Devon.  
EX17 5HE tippingssc@gmail.com

AFFILIATED BRANCHES

IRELAND: The Revd T. Dunlop,  
12 Mount Aboo Park, Belfast. BT1 0DJ  
T:02890-612989 trdunlop@tiscali.co.uk

SOUTH AFRICA: Please contact Head Office.

SISTER SOCIETIES

AUSTRALIA: Miss Margaret Steel,  
9/63, O'Sullivan Road, Rose Bay, NSW.  
2029 Australia mste8801@bigpond.net.au  
Mr F. Ford, PO Box 2, Heidelberg, Victoria.  
3084 Australia  
Mrs Joan Blanchard, 96 Devereux Road,  
Beaumont, South Australia.  
5066 Australia

CANADA: The Prayer Book Society of  
Canada, Mr Michael Edward, Pearsie Farm  
(RRI), Belfast, Prince Edward Island.  
C0A 1A0 Canada  
www.prayerbook.ca

SCOTLAND: Mr J. C. Lord,  
11 Melrose Gardens, Glasgow, G20 6RB  
T:0141-946-5045  
jcl30@btinternet.com

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:  
The Prayer Book Society, P.O. Box  
137 Jenkintown, PA 19046-0137, USA  
www.pbsusa.org