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# Editorial: ‘Throwaway Liturgy’

In a recent article in the *Church Times*<sup>1</sup> the Revd Philip Welsh declared himself ‘allergic to the weekly service sheets that many churches helpfully provide’, not only because they ‘consume a good deal of parish office time and a shocking amount of paper’, but because ‘they give the impression that the Church’s liturgy is something flimsy, provisional, and disposable—throwaway liturgy’. And he goes on to argue, in terms which will be congenial to readers of *Faith & Worship*, that the proliferation of alternatives in the *Common Worship* repertoire has encouraged ‘the restless over-use of the many optional texts, as if the congregation’s attention needs to be perpetually captured by the unfamiliar’.

Changing words do, indeed, [he continues] hold the attention of the worshipper, but what they hold attention to is not the object of our worship but the pamphlet in our hands. We are not so much taking our place in worship as finding our place on the page. There is little chance for words to become known by heart, and held as part of corporate memory: the words in which we worship have moved outside us. The irony is that the Preface to *Common Worship* eloquently voices this concern: ‘It is when the framework of worship is clear and familiar and the texts are known by heart that the poetry of praise and the passion of prayer can transcend the printed word’. It would be a brave vicar who put that to the test.

And, quoting from the Preface to the Book of Common Prayer concerning ‘the manifold changings of the Service’ and the difficulty, under the old system, of finding out ‘what should be read’, he suggests that ‘we might appropriate another piece of jargon, “mission-shaped church”, to claim that the key to using *Common Worship* well is that it should be “Prayer Book-shaped”, characterised by simplicity of use, stability of text, and reticence in variation’.

The most fundamental aspect of being Prayer Book-shaped, however, is to do with memory, and our relationship to the language of worship. This is where we need to listen hard to the experience of Prayer Book

<sup>1</sup> Philip Welsh, ‘Time to Retreat from Throwaway Liturgy’, *Church Times*, 15 June 2018. The article can be read online.

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conservatives, and, in fact, get inside their head, because loyalty to the Prayer Book is about far more than fetishizing Tudor prose. Whatever the Prayer Book stands for, the stability of its text has enabled people over time to internalise and make their own the words in which they worship God, in such a way that they enjoy quite a different sense of ownership of the liturgy than we can find in modern worship. These are the people's words in a book that most people have always owned for themselves, not words supplied by the clergy from their shelf of liturgical resources.

All this is excellent, and one sympathises, too, with his suggestion that what is now needed is a *reduction* in our resources 'into a manageable range of well-trying options held in common'. If this were to be done, he concludes, 'with Cranmerian radicalism and feel for liturgical language', we would 'stand a chance, before it is too late, of relearning an older and deeper way of taking part in the Church's common prayer'.

Letters in the following issue of the *Church Times* did not really take issue with Mr Welsh's analysis, but the tone was one of ruefulness—it was all too late, the 'textual horse' had long ago 'bolted from the liturgical stable'. And it is indeed hard to imagine the Liturgical Commission attempting such a radical course, or persuading the General Synod of its necessity—the Synod's tendency has been to demand more rather than fewer liturgical resources.

A more extended discussion of the article took place on the Thinking Anglicans website. Philip Welsh had argued that *Common Worship's* 'multi-volume provision' has 'dispossessed' the ordinary worshipper, who has no awareness of the mass of resources from which selections have been made or even whether the material used is authorised or not. 'Throwaway liturgy . . . reinforces dependency on the clergy, and assumes a high view of their liturgical judgement'. The congregation are at the mercy of their incumbent, he implies, in a way they were not when the whole liturgy was in their hands and hearts.

In the Thinking Anglicans discussion there was some sharp disagreement about this. On the one hand were those who thought that clerical freedom and the 'flexibility' of *Common Worship* allowed them to 'find liturgies that connect'—'Liturgy can be contextual.' To this it was retorted that 'Clericalism stalks in some unlikely places, but one of those where it is strongest is probably that part of the church striving for "contextual liturgy" . . . there is a sort of liberal version of "Father knows best"'. In one parish unfamiliar words are thrust on the parishioners because the vicar knows 'that they are more suited to the urban/unchurched/non-graduate congregation', while in a church down the road 'the people, of a similar

demographic, happily engage in forms of worship which both priest and congregation accept as the worship of the church'.

In fairness it should be said that some priests taking part in the discussion resented the suggestion that locally-devised liturgies merely represented the preference, or whim, of the local incumbent. 'Some do work hard at contextual liturgy and do it collegially', it was claimed. But the essential difference was between those who thought that 'the more liturgy is "contextualised" and tailor-made to suit the needs (preferences?) of a local congregation, the less it appears as the liturgy of the whole church', and those who thought that what has been called 'local inculturation' was more important:

We had in mind not only regular worshippers who would know churchy words . . . but also those from the estate who wandered into services. These were of all ages; several had mental health difficulties, some spoke little English. It was important that they were not put off at the outset . . .

The examples given, though—the mentally ill, non-speakers of English—represent a pastoral rather than a liturgical challenge, surely? It is unreasonable to expect liturgy to do everything, and anyone devising services on this basis would soon run into the familiar difficulties of competing minorities—responding to the needs of one group may make life more difficult for another, the demented for example, whose tenuous hold on life may be strengthened by the old and familiar words of the Prayer Book.

The essential problem lies in the word 'context' itself, which tends to go unexamined. The idea of 'contextual liturgy' has had a pretty long run. It was already a kind of orthodoxy at the time of *Faith in the City* over thirty years ago, when UPA churches were urged to be

more informal and flexible in [their] use of urban language, vocabulary, style and content . . . allowing significant space for worship which is genuinely local, expressed in and through local cultures, and reflecting the local context.<sup>2</sup>

The Fresh Expressions emphasis on 'local inculturation' is part of the same genealogy.

Historically this is anomalous. The same rites have been used more or less unchanged over long periods and in widely-differing circumstances and cultures (the Tridentine rite, for example). In England the same Prayer

2 *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (1985), p.135.

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Book services were used in different centuries and in markedly different parts of the country, from Northumberland to Somerset. It was, after all, Cranmer's intention that 'all the whole Realm should have but one Use'. This did not prevent clergy from responding appropriately to local needs in their preaching and pastoral work. No doubt there is a sense in which a liturgy 'changes' over time even when textually stable, because people change both individually and collectively; and it is of course true that local traditions arise in this or that church concerning details of furnishings and ceremonial. But these latter differences are often quite unrelated to local context. The parish church I attended as a child was rather 'low' in style, while the neighbouring parish had a strong musical tradition and a much 'higher' tradition of worship. But these differences bore no relation to any demographic difference between the two parishes—they were more or less indistinguishable—but presumably were the result of the work of a succession of incumbents of different churchmanship.

We ought more often to reflect how unstable the idea of 'context' is in this connection. It is true, no doubt, that each parish has its unique 'profile', but though it is easy enough to compile statistics of income, crime, unemployment and so on, we should be cautious about concluding that these and other items of information, together with our own observations, can be made to constitute a reality sufficiently specifiable to bear compellingly on the character of worship. Even allowing, for the sake of argument, that the liturgy of a parish church should somehow incorporate or express the 'local context', the terms in which that 'context' is conjured will inevitably be fairly arbitrary, and reflect the partial outlook of the incumbent or of the members of the team which has been assembled to assist him (if he wants to be 'collegial'). The 'context' isn't, for the purposes of translation into liturgical terms, just 'there', and any two individuals—or teams—might easily form different impressions about the parish's needs. Of course an incumbent is entitled to come to his or her own conclusions about what is pastorally most needful in the place to which he or she has been called, and to act on those conclusions, which will doubtless change as life moves on. But this does not necessitate the further step of seeking to incorporate such shifting impressions into the worship of the church. As has been said before in these pages, the fact that change is a condition of life does not mean that all things must change equally all the time, and liturgy, for the reasons so well expressed by Philip Welsh, is one of those things which should be characterised by stability rather than transience.

John Scrivener

# Elephants and Anglicans to the Sound of Church Bells: Just How Central is the Place of the Prayer Book for Anglicans and the Future of the Communion?

ALISTAIR MACDONALD-RADCLIFF

**T**riumphant anthropocentrism on the part of those who consider themselves uniquely blessed as oracles for the latest findings of its enlightenment, seems to be accepted as normative for growing portions of the developed West.

Proponents seem to see themselves as standing upon an ever-rising summit of ineluctable human achievement whence, convinced of the urgency of their latest insights, they are seized by the imperative at least to evangelise, if not directly to subjugate, all who can be reached. This is so that all may be brought (or made) to enjoy the presumptive blessings this perspective is deemed to vouchsafe.

Notable among these *beneficia* are an expanding group of exceptionless moral norms, of which, those held to constitute rights stand pre-eminent in demand of our approbation—even if now usually advanced bereft of that prolegomenon which might reasonably have been expected to provide a pedestal by way of warrant and metaphysical support. Could there be a more imperial project, it is tempting to ask?

If empires of the past were physical and measured success in terms of territory and conquered lands, we now engage in a struggle that is about conquered minds. Moreover, the aim now seems to be to leave alternatives ideas as ones that cannot be thought, or at least that cannot be thought *legitimately*. Error is not something to be engaged and refuted by argument, for that would be to grant it ‘a platform’. Instead, it is to be stifled by being labelled, ‘inappropriate’, or as something that causes people to feel uncomfortable and thus something to be denied the oxygen of any place in our collective narrative of the like-minded (where nonetheless the rhetoric of diversity increases inversely with a reality of ever-greater sameness).

But to talk of this aspect of our wider intellectual climate is to get ahead of things and may also seem remote from today’s announced subject.

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Yet it can help to frame our intellectual context, while also hinting at the external factors conducive to some of our current points of ecclesial division and sources of difficulty in debating them. It also prompts attention to at least three layers of paradox.

First, that despite the seeming self-assurance of this world-view, proponents often seem to view themselves and all mankind, as at once, both

- the ultimate arbiters of a world we do not discover so much as construct through our choices (and which is therefore radically contingent upon us), while, we are also seen as
- helpless moppets subject to comprehensive layers of social and other forms of external determinism, which leave us like corks at sea, unable to determine our fate (short perhaps of guidance from those who have somehow escaped these bonds to remain enlightened and thus equipped either to be advocates for, or guides to, the less fortunate).

Second, there is simultaneously, a deep unease and self-loathing implicit in the blame that is heaped on mankind's existence for the most fundamental ills of the environment, and indeed the whole planet if not more. This jarring pessimism about our human vocation, seems at times to place in question the very legitimacy of humanity existing at all, which is quite the novelty from an historical perspective.

Thirdly, there is the cultural curiosity that, amidst all this emphasis on human autonomy as a mighty absolute, this is most definitely not an age of the heroic: for it seems that the greater our emphasis upon the sovereignty of the individual, the less we are able to tolerate individual difference and distinction that rises above the mean. Hence, we live in an age of celebrity certainly, but not of heroes, whatever the rhetoric about 'promoting excellence'. Truly outstanding leaders now seem to be a rarity of the past, in almost any domain, to be spoken of in hushed tones we otherwise reserve for art and antiques.

So it is with hesitation and a plea for your indulgence that we turn to *Plutarch's Lives* and the figure of Theseus whom it will be recalled founded Athens in contradistinction to Romulus who founded Rome.

For present purposes we need merely to recall one paragraph from Plutarch that narrates what happened when Theseus returned after having slaughtered the Minotaur and assorted other heroic diversions, it reads:

The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the

time of Demetrius Phalereus<sup>1</sup>, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their place, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question as to things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same.

(From 'Theseus' in *Plutarch's Lives*: translated by John Dryden.)

The reference is apposite since one of the questions that has to be asked in looking back over the history of the Church of and in England, and then the later Anglican Communion to which it gave rise, is whether it is a coherent whole or even if it is the same thing over time and in different places? And within this complex history what vital threads of continuity and the normative are there to be traced?

To put this fear in the cosy terms of John Betjeman's parody 'Hymn', after he had considered merely one instance of local reconstruction and reform, in just one church:

The Church's restoration  
In eighteen-eighty-three  
Has left for contemplation  
Not what there used to be....

In reaching for a second great figure (who thought of himself in heroic and even divine terms) it is best that he be introduced via the words of Edward Gibbon, writing upon the history of Ancient Rome, of which he observed that, while the

..first centuries were filled with a rapid succession of triumphs... it was reserved for Augustus to relinquish the ambitious design of subduing the whole earth and to introduce a spirit of moderation into the public councils.

Inclined to peace by his temper and situation it was easy for him to discover that Rome in her present exalted situation, had much less to hope than to fear from the chance of arms. [Moreover, his experience] added weight to these salutary reflections, and effectually convinced

1 Demetrius of Phalerum (also Demetrius of Phaleron or Demetrius Phalereus; c.350-c.280 BC) was an Athenian orator originally from Phalerum, a student of Theophrastus, and perhaps of Aristotle himself, and one of the first Peripatetics. Demetrius was a distinguished statesman who was appointed by the Macedonian king, Cassander, to govern Athens.



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him that, by the prudent vigour of his counsels, it would be easy to secure every concession which the safety or dignity of Rome might require from the most formidable Barbarians...

Gibbon goes on to add that, 'Happily for the repose of mankind the moderate system recommended by the wisdom of Augustus was adopted' by his successors, yet there was one exceptional combat which was allowed to intrude upon the general tranquility. This was 'undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and terminated by the most timid of all the emperors'<sup>2</sup> and comprised the forty year conquest of Britain itself.

Of the ferocious but disorderly inhabitants of these isles, who were eventually subdued, Gibbon observed that, while they had many martial virtues, they had also two fatal flaws, namely:

valour without conduct, and the love of freedom without the spirit of union.

These derelictions come to mind in the context of that churchly empire hitherto known as the Anglican Communion where today, 'the love of freedom without the spirit of union' is a tempting summary of what may lie at the root of its current woes.

Not long after coming into office, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby reflected on his experiences after seeking to visit no less than all thirty- eight provinces, in an address to the General Synod of the Church of England (of 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2014). He opened by declaring that, 'First of all, and this needs to be heard very clearly, the Anglican Communion exists' thus evidencing, perhaps too loudly to be altogether reassuring, that he understood this to be in doubt.

He then explained the sense in which this was true (at least partially as will emerge) which was that Anglicans are going about their business in roughly 165 countries, where there are, he suggested, no less than '2,000 languages' and perhaps 'more than 500 distinct cultures and ways of looking at the world'. This led him to the insight that 'Anglicanism is incredibly diverse' with differences, 'on all sorts of matters including sexuality, marriage and its nature, the use of money, the relations between men and women, the environment, war and peace, distribution of wealth and food, and a million other things'. Nonetheless, His Grace

<sup>2</sup> Caligula, Claudius, (then leaving aside the year of the four emperors of 69AD: Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian), Titus, Domitian ?

concluded that, 'at the same time there is a profound unity in many ways' if 'Not in all ways...' for 'underpinning us is a unity imposed by the Spirit of God on those who name Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour'.

This then was broadly a *phenomenological* perspective, based upon all the activity there is to observe, which he then takes as constitutive of the Anglican Communion as a practical body of Christians in our present experience. But beyond this, the Archbishop made clear there was another Communion, namely the Anglican Communion as an *eschatological* Communion that has yet to come, which 'under God is beyond anything we can imagine or think about'. Nonetheless, within this ineffable future state, 'the prize is visible unity in Christ despite functional diversity.'

Within this polarity of present events and future ecclesial salvation, he urged that for now, 'we must learn to hold in the right order our calling to be one and our calling to advance our own particular position' and further the, 'discipline of meeting with those with whom we disagree and listening to each other' while, 'celebrating our salvation together and praying together to the God who is the sole source of our hope and future, together.' In combination, this is seemingly both other-worldly and very this-worldly.

But with all that said, His Grace is left in the present with a monumental administrative challenge, given that, 'Our divisions may be too much to manage.' and that, 'I have to say that we are in a state so delicate that without prayer and repentance, it is hard to see how we can avoid some serious fractures.'

In a later interview with Michael Binyon, in *The Times* of London in December 2014, the Archbishop further explained that the Communion will most likely 'look very different' and even that, 'I don't quite know what it will look like'; nonetheless, he has concluded that the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury will endure and, contrary to his initial expectations, 'there's going to be something in which the Archbishop of Canterbury is still the first among equals. Exactly how the links work is yet to be decided.' Thus the bonds with the See of Canterbury constitute a spiritual reality, though not a jurisdictional one, that he sees enduring, despite being tested frequently by events. However, the Primates had indicated that, 'A move towards a more collegial, collective responsibility was popular.' Indeed, as Binyon summarized: 'one of the main issues in the Communion was how decisions were made. And there was no answer to that.'

All of which invites curiosity as to how this new and improved Communion can be realised and function, short of the eschaton, or is it perhaps that—in an echo of Moltmann—the true meaning of

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Communion on this account will in fact only ever be known through ‘eschatological verification’?

For the present, it is evident that the Archbishop invites us to use the word Communion in several quite different senses, which with careful footwork, allows for a Communion that can both exist now, all around the world, in one sense (practical), while not existing in another (the theological, since the Primates have been at times unable to celebrate a Eucharist and to share Communion together). While, in a yet further sense (eschatological) it seems that the truest Communion is yet to come and comprises a challenging future hope.

To put this all another way, the Communion is—so to speak—in good shape in one sense, while in another it has passed away and is no longer with us in its fullness, but instead, lest we despair, goes before us on an eschatological horizon that has yet to be realised, although (encouragingly) when this does happen, it will feature the recovery of that full visible unity presently obscured.

Amidst these practical, phenomenological, theological and eschatological senses of Communion, there is a risk however, of losing to sight some very sharp and immediate realities.

If the Lambeth Conference is no longer necessarily able to convene all the Anglican bishops worldwide (hope and pray though we must that this will happen in 2020), and the Primates’ Meeting can no longer convene with all present (as the last meeting demonstrated sadly again) and while all the Primates even when present cannot celebrate a Eucharist together, or even be in *communio in sacris*, then an historic moment of profound change has surely arrived. This is of such magnitude as to need to be noticed.

While that time-honoured and very British temptation to carry on as though nothing has happened may have a certain pragmatic convenience for now, this must be unsustainable ultimately, in the absence of steps to re-forge the broken links, long term.

Such a state of affairs conveys a sad but seemingly negative answer to the percipient question posed to the Lambeth Conference in 1948<sup>3</sup>:

Is Anglicanism based on a sufficiently coherent form of authority to form the nucleus of a world-wide fellowship of Churches, or does its comprehensiveness conceal internal divisions which may cause its disruption?

3 In the Report presented to it on *The Nature of Authority in Anglicanism* prepared by 64 bishops, under the then Bishop of Quebec.

To put things another way, it seems that the Anglican umbrella is no longer sufficient to ensure that no one beneath it will get wet. Some beneath it desire more individual space than its width allows, while others even seem to reject the need for it, and yet others again, have come to believe they require an entirely new and more water proof umbrella of their own devising. Meanwhile there is, to the side, that further *ombrellino extraordinario* being held aloft in the deepest pastoral solicitude by Rome.

In any event, it seems evident that we have now passed over the threshold of disruption and that for now we live within a *disrupted* Anglican Communion. We must therefore find ways to address the challenges that result, if it is to have a continuity of future.

## II

### **Whither a disrupted Communion?**

One of the most senior bishops in the Church of England, now retired, has often said that there is a need to have something more to hold the Communion together than a shared fund of anecdotes about the late Archbishop Michael Ramsey. More somberly, the same bishop points out that, while we have the assurance of knowing that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, that assurance offers no specific guarantees for the Anglican Communion.

All of which gives added interest to the way in which Archbishop Welby articulated the common bonds and future hope that can yet reunite all Anglicans one day in a 'a unity imposed by the Spirit of God on those who name Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour'.

While clearly powerful, this is entirely a vision in terms of our fundamental common faith as Christians. It says nothing therefore, about this future being specifically Anglican. A point that makes it tempting to ask if the matter of being Anglican itself is now an aspect of our ever more expansive *adiaphora*? Is there a radical implication here, that the recovery of full visible unity is likely to be in a world that is 'post-Anglican' where the former identity of Anglicans is subsumed into some new and greater whole and might pass thus into history? And might such a future be faced in ten years or several hundred?

Certainly, as Christians we all share one initial and common requirement for membership of the Christian Church which is Baptism. This could therefore provide a basis for a weak kind of formal affinity if

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not unity, in which participating churches would remain free to retain even large differences. But such an historically based fraternity would offer little resource for substantive or structural cohesion and would thus seem very distant from the ‘visible unity’ which in its fullness is constitutive of true *koinonia*.

### **The Matter of Authority**

A key question posed at the Lambeth Conference in 1948 was cited earlier regarding the coherence of authority as understood and exercised in Anglicanism and it was in the Report IV prepared for that conference that there was outlined an understanding of the putatively characteristic model of ‘dispersed authority’ in Anglicanism that was later to be much championed by the late Bishop Sykes of Ely.

This seemed to bring together something of the liberal comprehensiveness and the catholicity of Anglicanism, while also recognising that it nonetheless includes numerous authoritative elements and a dispersed polity designed to comprise a bulwark against that abusive exercise of ecclesial (Roman) authority against which the sixteenth-century reformers had rebelled.

In the words of the Report itself (p. 84) :

Authority, as inherited by the Anglican Communion from the undivided Church of the early centuries of the Christian era, is single in that it is derived from a single Divine source, and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation . . . It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of saints, and the *consensus fidelium* . . . It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralized authority having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other; these elements together contributing by a process of mutual support, mutual checking, and redressing of errors or exaggerations to the many-sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to His Church. Where this authority is to be found mediated not in one mode but in several we recognize in this multiplicity God’s loving provision against the temptations to tyranny and the dangers of unchecked power . . .

Unfortunately, subsequent history has failed to live up to that Report’s optimism in supposing that authority ‘encourages and releases initiative [and] fellowship, and evokes a free and willing obedience.’ The Report’s further argument that, ‘It is the Living and Ascended Christ present in the worshipping congregation who is the meaning and unity of the

whole Church.’ may be theologically compelling, but it offered little by way of practical structure through which to sustain or even attain unity.

And it is just this, which is surely the central challenge for the Anglicanism of our times: namely how to sustain a shared doctrinal commitment, together with a dispersed understanding of authority, adequate to sustain our Anglican identity.

One concept which has come to prominence in this regard is that of *koinonia*<sup>4</sup> which was much emphasized by the the *Virginia Report* presented to the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which in Section III, explained:

*Koinonia* (communion) literally means ‘holding something in common’ and ‘within the Anglican Communion, this experience of a common life has traditionally been expressed in our use of Scripture, the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, Baptism and the Eucharist, and the historic episcopate, and in the formularies and constitutions of the different provinces which spell out the doctrinal and structural features of Anglicanism (2.4).

Moreover, ‘*koinonia* defines the relationship between humankind and God’ (2.5) and in turn becomes the measure of the authenticity of the manner in which dispersed authority is received and exercised (3.16).

Nonetheless, there remained large issues regarding the mutual relations of ‘dispersed authority’ and *koinonia* to

- the commonly-cited Anglican synthesis as it has engaged Scripture, tradition and reason,
- the Lambeth Quadrilateral
- and the approach of *lex orandi lex credendi* and the heritage of the Prayer Book that is of particular concern here today

## The Governance Deficit

All of this has focused attention upon the practicalities of governance and the somewhat limited structural resources that Anglicanism has thus far generated towards this.

Lord Carey pointed out almost a decade ago that ‘The immediate post-war aftermath and the break-up of the Empire was to see developing world provinces beginning to govern themselves and being set free to do so by Archbishop Fisher.’ While it was, ‘Under Archbishop Michael Ramsey, [that] the great ecumenical dialogues began especially with the

4 Regarding the long prior history, see *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia, Gift and Calling*, World Council of Churches (Canberra 1991), which set the unity of the Church in the wider context of God’s purposes for the whole of Creation; and also Pope John-Paul II, ‘Communion is the very mystery of the Church’, and, rather earlier, Jerome Hamer, *The Church is a Communion* (1964).

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Roman Catholic Church. This gave the Anglican Communion another impetus towards greater unity and cooperation.’<sup>5</sup>

Lord Carey also made the rather important point that it was in this context that, ‘The Anglican Communion was presenting itself as a worldwide church through these dialogues and not merely as a set of autonomous provinces.’

Faced with the rising tensions about the Ordination of women at the time of the 1988 Lambeth Conference, Archbishop ‘Robert Runcie addressed the theological problem head-on. He stressed interdependence over autonomy.’

In his opening address to the 1988 Lambeth Conference Runcie had set out the alternatives for the Anglican Communion and argued that the survival of Anglicanism was not an end in itself, because the Anglican churches have never claimed to be more than a part of the ‘One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church’ and consequently that Anglicanism has a ‘radically provisional character which we must never allow to be obscured.’

He further argued that this was part of its ‘Reformation inheritance of national or provincial autonomy’ which is opposed to centralism and yet that while Anglicans speak of a ‘dispersed authority’ and want no alternative Papacy, he nevertheless believed (rather presciently!) that there were problems on the horizon with which the then current Anglican structures would be inadequate to cope:

It can be put this way: are we being called through events and their theological interpretation to move from independence to interdependence? If we answer yes, then we cannot dodge the question of how this is to be given ‘flesh’: how is our interdependence articulated and made effective; how is it to be structured? Without losing a proper—but perhaps modified—provincial autonomy this will probably mean a critical examination of the notion of ‘dispersed authority’. We need to have confidence that authority is not dispersed to the point of dissolution and ineffectiveness.

He put his point in starker terms at the end of his address by saying that,

I believe the choice between independence and interdependence ... is quite simply the choice between unity or gradual fragmentation.

5 “‘Holding Fast and Holding On’: The Instruments of the Anglican Communion’, St. Martin’s, Houston, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2009

It is at this point that the uniquely Anglican phenomenon called the Lambeth Conference should be important at this juncture of crisis and as we look forward to its next meeting in 2020.

## **The Lambeth Conferences**

The story of these conferences and of just how their status and their decisions should be viewed, goes to the heart of both current tensions and the issues regarding authority, ecclesiology and governance we have briefly surveyed, with one central point being the tension between asserting an international identity as a Church, or family of Churches, on the one hand and autonomy for individual Provinces such as The Episcopal Church of the USA and Anglican Church of Canada on the other.

This last point, and the reference to those particular Provinces, makes it especially of interest that the first ever Lambeth Conference resulted from a unanimous decision of the Provincial Synod of the Canadian Church, held on September 20, 1865, upon the motion of the Bishop of Ontario, to urge upon the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Convocation of his Province, that means should be adopted,

by which the members of our Anglican Communion in all quarters of the world should have a share in the deliberations for her welfare, and be permitted to have a representation in one General Council of her members gathered from every land

Archbishop Longley, in his letter of invitation to that first Lambeth conference of 1867, to which this proposal ultimately led, wrote that

Such a meeting would not be competent to make declarations, or lay down definitions on points of doctrine, but united worship and common counsels would greatly tend to maintain practically the unity of the faith ; whilst they would bind us in straiter bonds of peace and brotherly charity.<sup>6</sup>

And the members of the conference itself declared (In resolution no. 4) that

Unity in Faith and Discipline will be best maintained among the several branches of the Anglican Communion by due and canonical subordination of the Synods of the several branches to the higher authority of a Synod or Synods above them<sup>7</sup>

6 See, Randall T. Davidson (ed.), *The Six Lambeth Conferences 1867-1920* (1929) p. 6.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 54



## *Elephants and Anglicans to the Sound of Church Bells*

In his opening address to the Conference, Archbishop Longley stated that

It has never been contemplated, that we should assume the functions of a general synod of all the churches in full communion with the Church of England, and take upon ourselves to enact canons that should be binding upon those here represented.

But nonetheless suggested that,

We merely propose to discuss matters of practical interest, and pronounce what we deem expedient in resolutions which may serve as *safe guides to future action*. (emphasis added)

The opening debate and vote focused upon the preamble to the resolutions adopted and resulted in the following text (which was added to the draft originally proposed) and stated that:

we do here solemnly record our conviction that unity will be most effectually promoted, by maintaining the faith in its purity and integrity, as taught in the Holy Scriptures, held by the primitive Church, summed up in the Creeds, and affirmed by the undisputed General Councils, and by drawing each of us closer to our common Lord, by giving ourselves to much prayer and intercession, by the cultivation of a spirit of charity, and a love of the Lord's appearing.

On the second day, Wednesday, September 25, after some protracted debate about the particular situation arising from the Colenso affair<sup>8</sup> in South Africa, a resolution proposed by Bishop Selwyn, of New Zealand, was adopted stating:

That, in the opinion of this Conference, unity of faith and discipline will be best maintained among the several branches of the Anglican Communion by due and canonical subordination of the synods of

8 There were some interesting currents of thought behind the various parties to the 'Colenso affair'. The saga started with an attempt by the Bishop of Cape Town, the High Church Robert Gray to depose, in December 1863, William Colenso (a disciple of F. D. Maurice) who served under him as Bishop of Natal, on account of his liberal views in favour of Biblical criticism. However, Bishop Colenso appealed to the Privy Council in London which ruled in his favour in 1865 declaring the deposition to be *ultra vires*. What is of interest is that the liberal Colenso was supported by many Evangelicals on the grounds that they opposed any expansion of episcopal powers, while it was concern to uphold the rising status of Episcopacy that caused the Canadian bishops to seek (in the interests of Anglicanism worldwide) what would now be thought of as a 'cross border' intervention within the affairs of the South African Church, and further, to do so via what became the first Lambeth Conference. The concept of such a conference itself was more congenial on account of its conciliarist echoes to High Churchmen than to Low and it has been argued that for such reasons the concept could only be advanced after the retirement of Old Etonian Evangelical Archbishop Sumner (in office 1848-62) and the coming into office of the more High Church, Archbishop Longley (in office 1862-68).

the several branches to the higher authority of a synod or synods above them.

By the time of the 1897 conference, the Encyclical from the Bishops declared that

Every Meeting of the Lambeth Conference deepens the feeling of unity which originally made the Conference possible, and now gives increasing value to its deliberations. There are differences of opinion amongst us, but the sense of belonging to one Body, subject to one Master, striving towards one aim, grows stronger as the Meetings are repeated.<sup>9</sup>

As was noted earlier however, there is another side to this theological coin, which pertains to the desire to show full participation in what it means to be a church. This was very directly seen in ecumenical contexts for example, where there was widespread outrage among Anglicans, particularly perhaps among those of a more liberal persuasion often strongly in favour of Provincial autonomy, when the then Cardinal Ratzinger—later Pope Benedict XVI—as Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith referred to the Anglican Communion as not a full church but rather, and merely, an ‘ecclesial body’ in his document of 2001, *Dominus Iesus*.

Here, there does seem to be a dilemma with the wider danger to the Communion as a whole being forcefully expressed in the British Roman Catholic church’s magazine *The Tablet* reflecting on the Lambeth Conference of 1988 where it observed robustly that:

There is a vacuum at the centre of the Anglican Communion where hard decisions affecting the entire body are required to be taken. The Lambeth Conference is not a legislative assembly, or a Church Council. It is not a tribunal. It has no jurisdiction. Neither history nor the present mind of the churches that supply it give it authority beyond the considerable moral authority inherent in a large congregation of bishops.<sup>10</sup>

And there perhaps, in those last words is the rub.

For those keen to stress the priority of Provincial Autonomy it has been common to distinguish most carefully the matters of legal jurisdiction from moral authority and to suggest that moral authority is

9 In the Section on The Organisation of the Anglican Communion, issued by ‘The Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion, Holden at Lambeth Palace In July 1897’.

10 *The Tablet*, 6 August 1988, editorial comment on the opening of the 1988 Lambeth Conference.

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very much merely that, in the case of Lambeth Conferences. But it has to be wondered if it is not strange in a church context, and for bishops in particular, to suggest that moral authority is neither here nor there when what really counts is only what is most narrowly legally binding?

### **Of Elephants and Bells**

All of which brings matters to the questions of, ‘Where are the Elephants and where are the Church bells?’

Here it is apposite to recall the earlier discussion of Archbishop Welby’s taxonomy of different understandings of the word Communion where one approach was phenomenological and others were theological and even eschatological.

Ultimately, it is being argued here that, for all the extraordinary diversity of what Anglicans at different times and places have upheld, we shall not recover and sustain our unity—impaired as it already is—unless we recover a stronger working engagement with what defines our Anglican theological heritage. This will require more of us to know what that is and I turn to the role of our Prayer Book tradition and formularies within it.

The risk otherwise has to be, first, that of going the way of the Ship of Theseus where eventually all continuity through time was lost and thus, at some point, the original ship.

And there is no question that there are those who approach the identity issue with the mindset of the butterfly collector and seem to suppose that Anglicanism comprises merely the sum total of beliefs held by anyone, at any time, anywhere!

Others, by contrast, have sought to capture Anglican identity by reference to

- a juridical definition and canon law (such as the Anglican Consultative Council which has sought to relate being Anglican to belonging to a Province recognised by the ACC);
- agreed theological affirmations (i.e. a doctrinal definition) such as those who would have Anglicanism become ‘Confessional’ such as some of the members of GAFCON;
- a hermeneutical definition relating to a particular understanding of scripture and its authority;
- history, referring to the faith of the Church as expressed through the course of history.

Nonetheless there are those for whom each of these approaches is too confining as was well illustrated by one American commentator <sup>11</sup>

11 Mark D. W. Edington, ‘The Elusive Identity’, *The Anglican Theological Review* 92:2 (Spring 2010).

when Archbishop Rowan Williams wrote in his reflections on the 2009 General Convention ('Communion, Covenant, and our Anglican Future') of the Episcopal Church that:

the issue is not simply about civil liberties or human dignity or even about pastoral sensitivity to the freedom of individual Christians to form their consciences on this matter (para. 6).

This was robustly repudiated for,

setting out an implicit critique of the foundational values upon which the conversation in the American church has been built.

And when Archbishop Williams further pointed to the view that

what we determine together is more likely, in a New Testament framework, to be in tune with the Holy Spirit than what any one community decides locally (para. 13),

he was again charged with the allegation that in reality he was only

pointing to a larger ideal of unity that evidently has little traction for a church shaped by the American cultural milieu.

And there we have the crucial phrase '*shaped by the cultural milieu*' for here it is the external culture that holds the normative high ground, from which it can speak truth to the Church, which is clearly expected to defer to it. (And similar even more overt instances come to mind in regard to the Erastian presumptions exhibited in the United Kingdom by our Legal system and even Parliament itself in regard to matters ranging from Assisted Suicide to Gender Equality.)

This points to a quite fundamental issue of our time for the Christian project as a whole, and a perhaps particular vulnerability of Anglicanism to this with its long standing close relation to the State.

## **The Secularist Context**

The philosopher, Charles Taylor, has famously framed a key question that arises here, as it sets the stage upon which our current drama must be enacted, namely: 'How did we move from a condition where, in Christendom, people lived naively within a theistic construal, to one in which... unbelief has become for many the major default option'<sup>12</sup> and

12 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard 2007), p.14.

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one that is now being advanced as normative, a world where ‘for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option . . . accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything beyond this human flourishing. Of no previous society was this true’<sup>13</sup>

In the middle of this it is the concept of truth itself which is apt to be elbowed aside, as Richard Rorty illustrates with great candor when explaining something of what he means by his pragmatism in the opening of his book *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999):

Another way of making this last point is to say that we pragmatists cannot make sense of the idea that we should pursue truth for its own sake. We cannot regard truth as a goal of inquiry. The purpose of inquiry is to achieve agreement among human beings about what to do, to bring about consensus on the ends to be achieved and the means to be used to achieve those ends. Inquiry that does not achieve coordination of behaviour is not inquiry but simply wordplay. . . .

What is so striking here is the straightforward and blunt repudiation of truth as a matter with which we can usefully concern ourselves, a claim by which many outside the world of academia and public policy might well be taken aback. And yet it is now quite usual, if not explicitly spelled out in such circles, to assume that any claim to assert the normative can only be granted if it can be re-expressed (in exogenous terms) with that upon which there is a prevailing consensus of acceptance (without let us recall any implication regarding truth).

### **And it is at this point that it is time for the church bells**

The reference here is to something that was evidently almost a motif in the thought of Archbishop Michael Ramsey, who quite often seems to have commended doing theology in just this way.

While hard to pin down exactly in his writings<sup>14</sup> he did speak thus on record in his lectures at Nashotah House in 1979 (later published in a volume called *The Anglican Spirit*), where he observed that

German theologians, very rigorous in their academic method, have sometimes laughed at Anglican theologians for doing their theology to the sound of church bells.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.18.

<sup>14</sup> See, ‘A Theological Style: “Theology to the Sound of Church Bells”’, by Dr Jeremy Sheehy, Runcie Lecture, 2004.

To which he responded by saying,

We'll continue to do theology to the sound of church bells, for that is what Christian theology is all about

This is a timely reminder that the most authentic theology, is undertaken not purely in the abstract but rather in the spiritual context of that regular prayer and worship in which the life of Christian faith is worked out—something that is thus a metaphor of the simple, yet also rich and at times even complex ways in which Anglicans seek to bring together the several strands which only in mutual relation comprise and disclose the authentic Anglican Way.

And within that let us recall—as befits this occasion hosted by Societies devoted to the Prayer Book and held in the memory of one of its doubtiest and ablest exponents in Dr Peter Toon—the wonderfully concise statement of Henry Chadwick which captures so well the essential ingredients of the Anglican way, which is never reducible to a mere formula, (or even a Confession in the Lutheran manner), but always requires prayerful engagement of the mind informed by Holy Scripture, for

Within the Anglican Communion the accepted norms of authority are located first in the faith declared in Scripture, then in the safeguard of interpretation provided by the Catholic Creeds, and finally in the liturgical tradition of Prayer Book and Ordinal, both of which are essentials rooted in ways of worship much older than their sixteenth-century origin.<sup>15</sup>

## **The programme now needed**

Mindful of this, we surely need now to promote greater awareness Communion-wide that if there is one single thing upon which all Anglicans everywhere simply have to agree, it is the historic fact that each and every one of us everywhere is Anglican or Episcopal because we are heirs of the Prayer Book tradition.

At such a time of tension as we are now experiencing, a deeper engagement with the reality and opportunities of what this means could hardly be more appropriate, urgent and timely.

Moreover, it can surely be argued that our present travails still offer

15 Henry Chadwick, 'Tradition, Fathers and Councils' 100-114. In Stephen Sykes, John Booty, Jonathan Knight, *The Study of Anglicanism* (Minneapolis, 1988).

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room for some coming together in a better way, albeit at the price of some potentially quite costly adjustments to the self-understanding of the Communion at the international level.

And here the discussion may be more successful ultimately, if the costs of the new articulation are more explicitly set out—for they are nothing short of embracing that earlier critique of Cardinal Ratzinger and the idea that as a Communion insofar as our *koinonia* is disrupted our ecclesial status can but be diminished. We are currently unable to act upon the basis that each Province must be mindful of the mind of the whole before taking steps that break from that—with all its attendant cost.

Those who interpret prophecy in a new sense as a call to the application of new insights must, if they are to take seriously what that means, more willingly embrace the consequences too—just as is the case with the informed exercise of conscience by an individual

On the positive side, such approaches as Paul Avis has advocated can be helpful here, where we should remember that he does *not* embrace the language often used in Communion documents and provincial resolutions saying bluntly that

I gibe at the phrase ‘global church’ . . . for the Anglican Communion. . . . The Communion is not constituted as a church, but as a family or fellowship of self-governing but interrelated churches.

Such an approach, when taken seriously must limit Anglicanism’s claims for now to a global ecclesial significance as one Church, but it might make considerably easier the task of giving shape and substance to an ‘Anglican identity,’ that is more adequate to the level of actual *koinonia* we can presently—in our disrupted state—claim, pending a collective attempt at recovery.

### **But where are the elephants?**

Perhaps you have been casting far and wide for an applicable image and possible references ranging perhaps from T.S. Eliot<sup>16</sup> to Rumi<sup>17</sup>!

Well the story I had in mind was actually quite simple and based on that very ancient one that runs with many variations through much of the history of Buddhism and Hinduism in the East, that tells of those who could only encounter an elephant by touch since they were blind. Depending upon which part of the elephant they each examined they variously concluded that the elephant was like a wall (the side), a snake

16 He was evidently nicknamed ‘the elephant’ by his Faber and Faber colleagues.

17 Rumi, the thirteenth Century Persian poet and teacher of Sufism,

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(trunk) , a spear (tusk), a tree (foot), a fan (ear) and a rope (tail)

And so these men of Indostan  
Disputed loud and long,  
Each in his own opinion  
Exceeding stiff and strong,  
Though each was partly in the right,  
And all were in the wrong!

The poem ends with a 'moral' which for the theologian has to stand for any person open *only* to the secular world-view whose blindness is thus (unlike that of the characters in the poem) self-imposed by an a-priori restriction on the ways that they will allow that the world can be. For them indeed as

So, oft in theologic wars  
The disputants, I ween,  
Rail on in utter ignorance  
Of what each other mean,  
And prate about an Elephant  
Not one of them has seen!<sup>18</sup>

(The Revd Canon Alistair Macdonald-Radcliff is International Advisor to the Prayer Book Society of the USA and Executive Director of the World Dialogue Council He was formerly Dean of All Saints' Cathedral, Cairo and has served as a senior advisor to the World Economic Forum's West Islamic Dialogue. The paper printed here was delivered as the Peter Toon Memorial Lecture 2018 on Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 at Pusey House, Oxford.)

18 John Godfrey Saxe, 'The Blind Men and the Elephant'.



# The Heart and Purpose of Worship

PHILIP NORTH

I tried to buy some curtains the other day. It sounds like a fairly simple task but it has left me feeling inadequate and slightly traumatised. I went to a shop just off the M65 which had been recommended to me and started to look around. They had 87 billion choices of material and I'm not even exaggerating. Every imaginable shade, pattern and fabric was there. Where on earth was I meant to start? I hadn't even thought about a colour. But it turned out that choosing the material was just the start. The shop assistant was delightful, extremely patient and couldn't have been more helpful, but she wanted decisions from me concerning aspects of drapery that I had never before imagined existed. How were the curtains to be hung? Should they be lined? What length drop did I require? What weight of fabric? Eventually I fled in terror.

That was just buying curtains. In every aspect of contemporary life we are so assailed by choice that it has become a tyranny. Try watching TV, buying a phone, listening to music, seeing a doctor or booking a holiday and you will be so bombarded with choice that you will wish you hadn't bothered. People think choice is the same as freedom. Personally I think it has more to do with dumping responsibility.

It's perhaps inevitable that Christian worship has become equally subject to the cult of choice. If you want to spend time with God, there is now an infinite range of ways of doing it. Drum kit or organ, robed choir or worship group, contemplative prayer or messy activities, Eucharist or family service, informal talk or expository sermon, pews or scatter cushions, traditional or contemporary language, lounge suit or Spanish chasuble, priest facing north, east or west, you pay your money and you take your choice. Any sense that worship might be 'common' and so have the capacity to unite is a distant memory in the worship market place.

It would be very easy for those of you who love the Book of Common Prayer simply to collude with this and take your place in the worship shopping centre. In the opinion of many, your role is to be those whose taste is for the old-fashioned, for whom worship is a form of nostalgia and who long for the old days when families flocked to church in big

hats, long frocks and short trousers and knew the commination off by heart. And in the worship market place, that's all fine. You do it your way, we'll do it ours and everyone is happy.

But to allow yourselves to be domesticated as part of an increasingly consumerist church would be profoundly dangerous. To import the relativism that is such a feature of a post-modern culture into our worship life is playing with fire.

There is an old saying that runs 'lex orandi, lex credendi.' The law of praying establishes the law of believing. In other words our worship drives our doctrine. If we believe that worship is a matter of choice and taste, then it stands to reason that God himself will become a matter of choice and taste. I was with a group of clergy a few weeks ago discussing the cross when one person said, 'I want a God who is all-loving.' And the others responded, 'Well I want a God who...' 'I want a God who...' It was all about the sort of God they wanted. It's inevitable. If we choose the worship we want, we end up choosing the sort of God we want. Rather than offering our lives in obedience to the God who reveals himself to us once and for all in Jesus, we want to design God to our own liking, our own opinions and domestic arrangements. God is becoming a consumer product, as negotiable as a set of curtains.

That is simply not the Gospel. 'You did not choose me, I chose you,' Jesus says. In a world of choice there is only one choice that matters and that is not even a choice that we ourselves get to make. God is Lord of all things, immortal, invisible, complete in his own being, existing above and beyond the human mind. It is not we who design him, it is he who designs us. And we are a people under judgement, dependent utterly on the saving work of the cross if our broken, sinful lives are to mean anything at all. Without him we are nothing, not even dust. That is the miracle of the Gospel, that in our brokenness and sinfulness the all-powerful God has met us in Jesus and brought us home. And that is the truth that our worship must convey and express.

Now I don't suppose that anybody, even the most hard-core Prayer Book fundamentalist, seriously thinks that if we withdrew the modern rites such that every Parish returned to unique use of the Book of Common Prayer, the nation would come rushing back to church. Some degree of liturgical pluralism is inevitable. But at the same time, those who have a love for the Prayer Book can play a vital role in a confused contemporary Church because you remind us what worship really is. The Prayer Book's rootedness in a tradition, its ongoing role as the default setting of Anglican worship, its theological clarity and the disciplines it

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requires of congregation and celebrant remind the whole church what we are doing when we worship and why worship should be the very heart of our lives. That is surely the primary role of the Prayer Book Society today. To remind us that worship is not a consumer product, but an expression of the revealed truth of the Gospel.

In particular the Book of Common Prayer witnesses to three things. The first is that worship is rooted in obedience. I was with a group of church leaders a few weeks ago and one of them said, 'The really important thing is to make church fun.' Now I wouldn't consider myself to be the grumpiest and most miserable of people, but I would have to say that the primary purpose of worship is not to have fun. Worship is not a form of entertainment, it is not a matter of taste, it is not something we attend out of choice. No, we go to Church to give our lives away in obedience because that is the only possible way to express our eternal gratitude for what Jesus has done for us. The Prayer Book does not set out to entertain or engage. Rather it creates a place where we can make the complete and unconditional offering of our lives to the Father in frail imitation of what Jesus did for us upon the cross. That's what it means to worship. It is an act of obedience. 'Here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto thee.'

Secondly the Prayer Book reminds us that worship ministers redemption. One of the reasons many people feel uncomfortable with the Book of Common Prayer is that it talks an awful lot about sin. In the liturgy this morning we will be reminded at every available opportunity that we are manifold sinners, that we have justly provoked the wrath and indignation of God, that the burden of our sin is intolerable. The language of sin and repentance is increasingly unfashionable in a consumerist church but we omit it at our peril. So the Prayer Book plays a vital role in recalling us to the heart of our redemption. We are separated from God, we have no power of ourselves to save ourselves, we rely solely on the grace and mercy of the cross. Only through repentance and utter reliance on that grace can we know life and salvation. As we receive bread and wine in remembrance of Christ's saving work, we participate in the redemptive work of the cross such that sin no longer has sway over us. In this Communion, the saving power of the cross is made contemporary for us. Through it we are forgiven. Worship is not a lifestyle choice. We need it because it sets us free from sin. It is redemptive.

And thirdly, the Prayer Book reminds us that worship is an active expression of the unity of the Church. It is called the Book of Common

Prayer because it was intended as the rite for Anglicans, an expression of the unity of the Church of England. Cranmer's intention was that every Anglican would make the same prayer in every church in every part of the country. If you go to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem early in the morning, countless denominations are busy praying—the Catholics at the tomb, the Syrians round the back, the Ethiopians on the roof, the Greeks under the dome and so on. And what makes those denominations distinctive and gives them their identity is the rite that they use. If there were an Anglican chapel in that Church, how would we worship there? Messy Church? Informal Worship? Something different every week according to taste? We would be confused because the worship market place means that we are in danger of losing a sense of being identified by our rite. Again the Book of Common Prayer can still play a vital role in reminding us that worship must be primarily about commonality not diversity, about unity not individual taste. There is no other rite around which Anglicans throughout the world can unite.

Now I have to admit to being something of a hypocrite in preaching to you this morning. In twenty-five years of priestly ministry it would be hard to claim that the Prayer Book has played an integral role in my practice or in the lives of the Parishes where I have served. And as the long-suffering 8 o'clock congregation in this Cathedral will testify, all too often I get it wrong!

But whilst I may not be all that familiar with it, I am very glad we have it and very glad indeed that your Society makes a stand for it. In a pluralist Church and a choice-obsessed culture, you point us all back to the heart and purpose of worship. In our Communion service this morning, we place ourselves at the feet of the creator God, acknowledging our sinfulness and offering our lives back to him without condition. We worship God because that is the only thing we can do. May we all be fulfilled with his heavenly grace and benediction. Amen.

*(The Rt Revd Philip North is Bishop of Burnley in the Diocese of Blackburn. The sermon printed here was preached at the Annual Festival of the Blackburn Branch of the Prayer Book Society 2018.)*

# Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't? Worthy Reception of Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer

DANIEL NEWMAN

## Introduction: The Far-reaching Fruit of Preparation for Holy Communion

A young man, nineteen years old, a former pupil at Eton, comes up to King's College, Cambridge. He is athletic, something of a dandy, and has a reputation as a show-off. Three days after this young man arrives, he learns from the Provost that he has to attend a service of Holy Communion. The young man is terrified. He knows enough to understand that it is dangerous to eat the Lord's Supper as an unbeliever or hypocrite. Later in his life, he looks back on his time at Eton and says that had he a son, he would be tempted to take his son's life, rather than allow him to see the vice he himself had seen there. Readers who were there themselves can confirm or deny whether this remains the case. This young man begins desperately to read and to try to repent to make himself better. He begins with a book called *The Whole Duty of Man* but gains no spiritual help from it. He receives that first Communion unchanged, but he knows it will not be the last. That is in the January. As Holy Week begins, this young man turns to a book by Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man on the Lord's Supper (which, incidentally, is one of the earliest books published in Manx).<sup>1</sup> He describes what happened:

In Passion Week, as I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect – 'That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering.' The thought came into my mind, What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday began to have

<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance* (Leicester 2003), pp. 80-81.

a hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it became more strong; and on the Sunday morning, Easter-day April 4, I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, 'Jesus Christ is risen to-day! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul; and at the Lord's Table in our Chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Saviour.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately his life is transformed and in place of his well-known extravagance there is simplicity, a desire to teach the faith to others—his bedmaker at college, his brothers at home—and discipline in prayer and meditation on Scripture.<sup>3</sup> The year is 1779 and the young man's name is Charles Simeon.

Simeon was to become the Vicar of Holy Trinity, Cambridge for fifty-four years until his death in 1836, and a Fellow of King's College. At least as recently as 2013 his chair was in the Principal's study at Ridley Hall and his umbrella could be seen at Holy Trinity, demonstrating that it is acceptable for Evangelicals to have relics as long as they do not venerate them. Simeon endured much opposition for more than a decade of ministry to have an impact on the nation and the world. The congregation refused to let him preach on Sunday afternoons. The churchwardens repeatedly locked the doors while people stood waiting in the street when he wanted to start an evening service. On Sunday mornings the pew-holders locked the pew doors and the churchwardens threw out the chairs Simeon had set up at his own expense. The hostile congregation prejudiced students against him with rumours that he was a bad man with a high profession of goodness. Students disrupted his services, throwing in stones at the window and on one occasion waiting by Simeon's usual exit to assault him; he happened to walk home another way that day. He was ostracised by other Fellows, one of whom scheduled Greek classes on a Sunday night to prevent students from attending a service at his church. One student was denied an academic prize because of his association with Simeon.<sup>4</sup> Yet over time his influence on students preparing for ordained ministry had an impact on parishes in this country. He also became the trusted adviser of the East India Company and recommended most of the men who went out as chaplains, which was the route for Anglicans who wanted to

2 H.C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (1948), pp. 25-26, cited in Piper, *The Roots of Endurance*, p. 82.

3 Piper, *The Roots of Endurance*, pp. 82-83.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 90-94.

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become missionaries to the East. He was the mentor of Henry Martyn who translated the New Testament into Urdu and Persian and supervised its translation into Arabic. He was key to the foundation of the Church Missionary Society and supported the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.<sup>5</sup> All this began when a nineteen-year-old was told that he had to receive Holy Communion and was confronted with his own unworthiness.

It seems to be a fair observation that the vast majority of communicants do not come to the Lord's Table with either a sense of the seriousness of receiving communion in an unworthy manner or the joy which Simeon felt. Some may want to see that as an unwelcome result of the Parish Communion Movement in which Morning and Evening Prayer were replaced as the main Sunday services in the parish with Holy Communion, particularly as the movement spread from the 1960s onwards. That is not necessarily the case. Most of the major Reformers, including Calvin, Bucer and Cranmer, thought Holy Communion should be central to the worship of the Church and to people's devotional life, and wanted them to come every week. Yet they did not think frequent reception entailed a casual view of Communion and was incompatible with solemnity and joy.

Within the order for Holy Communion in the Prayer Book, after the Prayer for the Church Militant, are three exhortations. These have fallen into neglect in recent times. The first two are alternatives to be read when notice of the Communion service is given. The first warns of the consequences of receiving Communion in an unworthy manner and encourages self-examination and repentance. The second is to be used, as the rubric says, 'in case [the minister] shall see the people negligent to come to the holy Communion' and warns of the dangers of not receiving. It can leave one feeling in a no-win situation: if you receive communion in the wrong spiritual condition you are in trouble, but if you do not receive, you are also in trouble. Hence the title of this paper: 'Damned if you do, damned if you don't'. The third is to be read at the time of communion. Yet these exhortations present a rich understanding of what Holy Communion is and contain deep pastoral wisdom and can help us reflect on our own approach to Holy Communion, so that we navigate between the Scylla of unworthy reception and the Charybdis of negligence. As it was for Charles Simeon, this can help the sacrament fully to be the means to joy, spiritual growth and fruitfulness in Christian service that God intends it to be.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

## **Damned If You Do? The First Exhortation**

The exhortation specifies that the intended participants should have made adequate preparation before they receive; it describes them as those who are ‘religiously and devoutly disposed’. The exhortation goes on to explain the significance of the sacrament: ‘in remembrance of [Christ’s] meritorious Cross and Passion, whereby alone we obtain remission of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven’.

It is Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross alone that atones for the sins of God’s people and gives them a place in the kingdom of heaven. In Communion, the priest is not making a sacrifice to atone for sins on behalf of the people: the priest is administering to all God’s people who are adequately prepared an act of remembrance of that sacrifice in which they are all to participate.

But while Communion is a memorial meal, it is not just that. The exhortation explains that in Communion, God also gives his Son to be his people’s ‘spiritual food and sustenance’ in the sacrament. In John 6, Jesus says both that we must believe in him to have everlasting life and also that we need to eat his flesh in order to have life. As we eat the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper in faith, we feed on Christ’s body and blood. As St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9.16, ‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ.’

The right response to God’s gift of his Son to die for us and be our ongoing spiritual food is ‘to render most humble and hearty thanks’.

However, the benefit of the sacrament is not automatic. It is a ‘divine and comfortable thing to them who receive it worthily’. It is ‘comfortable’ in the sense that it is full of comfort. But it is ‘dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily’. There is therefore a dimension of objectivity to the sacrament. It represents what it represents – the body and blood of Christ given on the cross – regardless of the disposition of the person receiving it, and it will have an effect on everyone who receives it. Whether that effect will be beneficial and they feed on Christ spiritually, or whether it will be harmful and they do not, depends on the spiritual condition of the person receiving it. Article XXIX puts it like this. It is entitled *Of the Wicked which eat not the Body of Christ in the use of the Lord’s Supper*.

The Wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as Saint Augustine saith) the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, yet in no wise are



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they partakers of Christ; but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing.

Behind the warning of unworthy reception in this and the third exhortation, which was intended to be read out at the time of Communion, is the Apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. Paul draws a lesson from the history of Old Testament Israel. Paul considers there to be continuity between the people of God in both Testaments: he calls them 'our fathers'. They had their sacraments. They were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea: it involved passing through water. They had spiritual food and drink—the manna from heaven and the water from the rock. Although they were physical food and drink, Paul also says there was a spiritual dimension. Just as we eat physical bread and drink physical wine in the Lord's Supper, yet are fed with the spiritual food and drink of Christ's body and blood, so, Paul says, they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ; the Israelites drank from Christ, just as we do. But what happened? God was not pleased with most of them for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Paul writes that this happened as an example that we might not desire evil as they did. The particular examples of evil Paul gives are idolatry and sexual immorality, putting Christ to the test and grumbling – in each of those cases, people died. 'Do not be like Old Testament Israel,' Paul says. 'They had their sacraments and many of them received it unworthily and look what happened.' Then he comes specifically to the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. After describing the problem—some people go hungry whilst others get drunk, they despise the church of God, and they humiliate those who have nothing—and then rehearsing the narrative of institution, Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 11.27: 'Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.' What are the consequences of this? He goes on to describe them, in verses 29 and 30: 'For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.' Paul's use of 'body' in isolation from 'blood' or the bread and the cup, and Paul's statement in chapter 10 verse 17 that 'we being many are... one body', suggest that Paul is referring to a failure to recognise that the Church is the body of Christ; eating the bread and drinking the cup in an unworthy manner and sinning against the body and blood of the Lord means behaving in a way that dishonours the Church which Christ bought with his body

and blood. Charles Simeon was right to feel terrified at the prospect of receiving the Lord's Supper in his current spiritual condition when he went up to Cambridge.

Since the Lord's Supper is dangerous to those who presume to receive it unworthily, the minister therefore has a duty to exhort the congregation in the time before he administers the Lord's Supper to consider its dignity—we are remembering Christ's sufferings and death through which we receive forgiveness of sins and enter the kingdom of heaven and we feed on Christ—and therefore the great peril of receiving it unworthily because it dishonours Christ and what he has done. If you know that there is going to be a fork in the road ahead and one fork leads to a broken bridge over a canyon, you are going to warn people not to take that fork. It would be negligent not to. The minister in light of this is to exhort the members of the congregation to search and examine their own consciences; this comes directly from what Paul tells the Corinthians to do before the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.28: 'Let a person examine himself, then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.' This is not to be a cursory exercise: it needs to be serious and honest. The exhortation says that this self-examination is to be carried out 'not lightly, and after the manner of dissemblers with God.' The desired outcome is not that people would be scared away from coming to the Lord's Supper but that they would come adequately prepared. To continue the analogy about the road, you do not want people to stop at the fork in the road and turn around and come back the way they came; you want people to take the correct fork. The result should be that people 'come holy and clean to such a heavenly Feast, in the marriage-garment required by God in that holy Scripture, and be received as worthy partakers of that holy Table'.

Cranmer has in mind the Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22, in which Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. At the end of the parable, when the king comes in to look at the guests, he sees someone who does not have a wedding garment. The king asks the guest how he gained admission without a wedding garment, the man is speechless, and the king orders his attendants to tie him up and cast him out. A wedding garment is required for the feast. Now this parable is about the future kingdom of heaven and accepting the invitation of the Gospel, but Cranmer makes a very profound move and uses it in relation to the Lord's Supper precisely because the Lord's Supper embodies the kingdom of heaven and enacts that Gospel by celebrating Christ's death through which we have a place in that kingdom.

## Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't?

Quoting Peter Leithart, Tim Chester writes:

‘The Eucharist is our model of the eschatological order, a microcosm of the way things really ought to be.’ In other words, this shared meal is a foretaste of God’s coming new world.<sup>6</sup>

He goes on to write:

What we call ‘the Lord’s Supper’ is a foretaste of ‘the Lamb’s Supper’ in Revelation 19. It’s a beginning of the feast we eat with Jesus and his people in the new creation. It’s not just a picture. It’s the real thing begun in a partial way. We eat with God’s people, and we eat with the ascended Christ, present through the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Just as we can only enter God’s kingdom and have a place at the banquet in the new creation if we are holy and clean, so we can only come to the Lord’s Supper if we are holy and clean.

The exhortation goes on to explain what is involved in preparing to receive the Lord’s Supper. The first step prescribed is examination of our ‘lives and conversations [i.e. conduct] by the rule [or standard] of God’s commandments’. Then, sorrow for breaches of those commandments in ‘will, word, or deed’ (‘bemoan your own sinfulness’) and confession to Almighty God ‘with full purpose of amendment of life’.

In his book *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God*, Timothy Keller recalls John Stott’s observation that many Christians routinely confess their sins yet most do not find that their confessions change them. Instead, they usually go back to the same patterns of attitude and behaviour. Stott believed the reason for this is that most people confess—admit that what they did was wrong—without at the same time disowning the sin and turning their hearts against it in such a way as to weaken their ability to do it again. Keller writes:

We must be inwardly grieved and appalled enough by a sin—even as we frame the whole process with the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ—that it loses its hold over us.<sup>8</sup>

This kind of repentance is more than self-pity, admitting the sin but only feeling sorry about the painful consequences of sin and not the sin itself. There needs to be a real inward alteration of the false beliefs and

6 Tim Chester, *A Meal With Jesus* (Wheaton, Illinois 2011), p. 103.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

8 Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy With God* (2014), p. 212

hopes, the inordinate desires and the mistaken self-perception that cause the sin. Real repentance includes admitting and rejecting it.

According to Brian Cummings,

Most people in most mediaeval parishes confessed once a year in Lent; the more devout or learned, or leisured, confessed more regularly. Instructions for priests in conducting confessions were structured around the Ten Commandments and the seven deadly sins.<sup>9</sup>

The Prayer Book Exhortation is therefore taking what was the responsibility of the priest and giving it to the individual Christian. This is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers at work: we all have the capacity to examine our lives according to God's commandments and we may confess our sins directly to God without the mediation of a priest.

An important component of true repentance of sins committed against other people which the exhortation enjoins on us is reconciliation. This reconciliation may involve making 'restitution and satisfaction, according to the uttermost of your powers, for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other'. When Jesus goes to stay with the tax collector Zacchaeus in Luke 19, Zacchaeus says, 'If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.' He shows his repentance by making restitution and then going even further beyond that. Restitution is often the missing ingredient of repentance.

As well as putting right wrongs that we ourselves have committed, we must also be 'ready to forgive others that have offended you, as you would have forgiveness of your offences at God's hand'. That is what we pray in the Lord's Prayer: 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Jesus follows that up after the Lord's Prayer by saying, in Matthew 6.14-15,

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Later in Matthew's Gospel, Peter asks Jesus how often he has to forgive his brother when he sins against him—as many as seven times? In response, Jesus tells the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. The servant who fails to forgive the small debt of a hundred denarii owed by one of his fellow-servants is thrown into gaol until he pays the large debt

<sup>9</sup> Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford 2011), p. 700 n. 24.

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of ten thousand talents owed by him to the king, even though the king had taken pity on him and forgiven his debt. His failure to show mercy to his fellow servant shows that he fails to see his own need of mercy from the king. Commenting on the petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, Keller writes:

Jesus tightly links our relationship with God to our relationship with others. It works two ways. If we have not seen our sin and sought radical forgiveness from God, we will be unable to forgive and to seek the good of those who have wronged us. So unresolved bitterness is a sign that we are not right with God. It also means that if we are holding a grudge, we should see the hypocrisy of seeking forgiveness from God for sins of our own.<sup>10</sup>

In that case, it would also be hypocritical to receive the sacrament which is intended to assure us of our forgiveness.

The Exhortation goes on to explain that all this is necessary because to receive Holy Communion with unconfessed, unrepentant sin and refusing to forgive sins committed against you will not benefit you but 'doth nothing else but increase your damnation'. This is a reference to Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11.29. The word 'damnation' in the Great Bible and subsequent versions including the King James Bible evokes the idea of a final state of eternal punishment but the word it translates, *κριμα*, is better translated 'judgement', and includes temporal discipline.

This part of the exhortation concludes by identifying a number of particular kinds of offender: 'a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of his Word, an adulterer' or someone who is 'in malice, or envy, or in any other grievous crime'. This was originally part of the exhortation that would have been read out at the time of Communion. Moving it here was a shrewd pastoral decision to protect those guilty of those particular sins from feeling pressured into receiving Communion in an impenitent state through fear of exposure and embarrassment if they were to abstain. As Cummings comments:

[John] Cosin argued in 1660... that this requirement should be placed here and not later, since a blasphemer or adulterer was hardly likely 'suddenly' to stand up and leave in the middle of preparation for Communion.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Keller, *Prayer*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>11</sup> Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 771 n. 396.

It renews the appeal either to repent, 'or else come not to that holy Table'; it is the duty of the minister to warn members of the congregation not to come to the Lord's Table if they are unrepentant. As the reason for this we are given the example of Judas. This is a synthesis of Luke's account of the Last Supper and the account of the Passover meal in John's gospel. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. He had already made a deal with the chief priests and officials. In Luke's account of the Last Supper, after the narrative of institution, Jesus says, in Luke 22.21-22: 'But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me at the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!' In John 13.27, John tells us. 'Then after he [Judas] had taken the morsel [of bread], Satan entered into him.' Then he actually goes out to fetch the band of soldiers, betrays Jesus, and commits suicide. The Prayer Book exhortation warns us not to receive the bread in an unrepentant state in case the same happens to us, we are hardened in our sins and are filled 'full of all iniquities', with the result being the 'destruction both of body and soul'.

Finally, there is provision for those who, after personal self-examination, confession, repentance and restitution, are unable to quiet their conscience. It would be inappropriate to come to the Lord's Table if there is still some doubt whether one's sins are forgiven because the Lord's Supper is meant to bring comfort by assuring us of the forgiveness of sins that comes through faith in Christ, and because of the danger of receiving communion when sin has not been fully dealt with. 'It is requisite, that no man should come to the holy Communion but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience'. The exhortation makes a prescription for those who are unable to quieten their conscience by the means already specified. Here there is a significant difference between 1549 and later Prayer Books. In 1549, they are invited to come to the person reciting the exhortation or

to some other discrete and learned priest taught in the law of God, and confesse and open his sin and grief secretly, that he may receive such ghostly counsaill, advyse, and comfort, that his conscience may be releved, and that of us (as of the ministers of God and of the church) he may receive comfort and absolucion<sup>12</sup>

What is envisaged is a 'mixed economy'. Cummings observes:

The careful wording shows how controversial the subject of penance and confession is; this exhortation approves general confession but allows

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

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for private confession, following the traditional practice. Indeed the wording assumes a traditional view of the priest's role in absolution.<sup>13</sup>

The 1549 exhortation uses the phrase 'auricular and secret confession to the Priest'. Those who are satisfied with general confession are not to be offended with those who confess to a priest, whilst those who confess their sins to the priest are not to be offended with those who make personal confession to God and general confession in the church. We are to do what is right according to our own conscience and not judge others because God's word permits both. We may sum up the principle behind the Prayer Book's approach to private confession thus: 'none must; all may; some should.'

As Ashley Null observes:

In 1552, Cranmer revised the prayer book's presentation of private confession to be more clearly in line with a merely pastoral, rather than sacramental, understanding of the practice.<sup>14</sup>

The person troubled in conscience is bidden to 'open his grief'; the word 'sin' is omitted from this clause. The word 'priest' is replaced with 'minister of God's word'. Instead of receiving absolution from the priest or even ministers of God, the benefit of absolution comes 'by the ministry of God's holy Word'. Null comments that this was 'a change which made explicit the assurance of forgiveness that came through trusting the gospel promise.'<sup>15</sup> The rôle of the minister is also to give 'ghostly' or spiritual counsel. Andrew Atherstone writes:

Unlike some of their continental colleagues, Cranmer and the other Anglican Reformers were happy to retain the practice of absolution. However, they understood it in a different way from their Roman Catholic counterparts. The Reformers insisted that authority to 'bind' and loose' lay not in the priesthood but in the gospel, not in the words of human ministers but in the Word of God. They understood Jesus' statements about the 'retention' and 'remission' of sins to refer to the substance of the message that the apostles were to preach—in other words, as a mandate to proclaim the forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup>

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 699-700 n. 24.

14 Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance* (Oxford 2000), p. 240.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Andrew Atherstone, *Confessing Our Sins* (Cambridge 2004), p. 19.

The first exhortation teaches us that Holy Communion is a remembrance of Christ's atoning death and the means by which we feed on Christ as our spiritual food, and we are to be thankful. It warns us of the danger of receiving communion unworthily and encourages us to examine ourselves, confess our sins and repent of them, seek reconciliation and restitution and forgive others, and if we are unrepentant, we ought not come to the Lord's Table. It also makes special provision for those for whom this preparation fails to quieten their conscience to go to a minister of God's word to receive the assurance of forgiveness.

### **Damned if You Do? The Second Exhortation**

This is a new composition for 1552 and is possibly the result of the influence of Martin Bucer.<sup>17</sup> The original situation seems to have been the late mediaeval devotion surrounding 'seeing the host' at the moment it is raised to the view of the parishioners and the traditional reluctance to receive the elements more than once a year.<sup>18</sup> The exhortation in 1552 contains the phrase 'yf ye stande by as gasers and lookers of them that do Communicate, and be no partakers of the same your selves'<sup>19</sup> The Reformers commonly encountered this difficulty. Bucer had found it difficult to encourage frequent Communion in Strassburg, as had Calvin in Geneva.<sup>20</sup> This clause was removed in 1662 because by then, the custom of non-communicating attendance had become quite unknown.<sup>21</sup> It may be that the fierceness of the first exhortation still kept people away.

In this exhortation, the idea of Holy Communion as a feast, which the first exhortation introduced, becomes much more developed. Cummings observes:

Despite the initial admonitory tone, this exhortation contains the kernel of a new form of devotional and affective language for the Eucharist, adopting the medieval concept of the feast but turning it into a domestic sentiment of a familiar meal. The idea of the family of Christians 'lovyngly called' enters into the religious idiom of the Church of England.<sup>22</sup>

Brian Cummings, himself a Professor of English, formerly at the University of Sussex and now at York, sees evidence of this in George Herbert's Eucharistic poem 'Love (III)', where love 'Drew nearer to me,

17 Charles Neil and J. M. Willoughby, *The Tutorial Prayer Book*, (1959 [1913]), p. 323.

18 Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 730 n. 131.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 730 n. 130.

21 Neil and Willoughby, *The Tutorial Prayer Book*, p. 323.

22 Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 730 n. 130



sweetly questioning, | If I lack'd any thing. | | A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here'.<sup>23</sup> We can spot the allusion to the phrases 'lovingly called' and 'there lacketh nothing but the guests to sit down' in the Exhortation.

This second exhortation draws a very moving analogy between refusing to come to the Lord's Supper and refusing to attend without good reason a lavish feast put on at great cost, to help the negligent see how great a slight it is to the generosity of God the host and why such behaviour is deserving of his wrath:

Ye know how grievous and unkind a thing it is, when a man hath prepared a rich feast, decked his table with all kind of provision, so that there lacketh nothing but the guests to sit down; and yet they who are called (without any cause) most unthankfully refuse to come. Which of you in such a case would not be moved? Who would not think a great injury and wrong done unto him?

The exhortation goes on to explore the reasons people may give for not coming to the Lord's Supper and then proceeds to demolish them.

The first excuse is being 'hindered with worldly business'. That is an excuse one can easily identify to the present day. The need to do inessential work or work that is not an act of charity. The need to decorate or do DIY. The need to play sport. The need to see family. The need to go out on the yacht. This is not to say we should not play sport or see family or go out on the boat on the Lord's Day; of course not. But when those activities are in competition with the Lord's Supper, it is so often the Lord's Supper that is dispensable.

The second sounds more plausible: 'I am a grievous sinner and therefore am afraid to come.' After all, the other exhortation warns me not to come. But that excuse doesn't stand up. If you are a sinner and afraid to come, 'wherefore then do ye not repent and amend?' Then you will have no reason to be afraid and can come to the Lord's Table to receive comfort. The exhortation then returns to the Parable of the Wedding Banquet in its version in Luke 14 to show how any excuses are inadmissible. People refuse to come to the feast for various reasons—one had bought a farm and wanted to see it, another had bought five yoke of oxen and wanted to try them out. Yet another had recently married. In the Parable, the master does not accept those excuses but becomes angry and says that none of those people shall taste his banquet. They make business and earthly relationships more important than God's kingdom

and so they do not enter it. The logic of this exhortation is that to make other things more important than coming to the Lord's Supper is to make other things more important than coming to Christ and entering the kingdom of heaven which the Lord's Supper represents.

In the exhortation, the minister says, 'I, for my part, shall be ready.' The minister is a fellow guest at the table who needs to set aside worldly concerns and repent in order to be prepared. The appeal to be a partaker of Holy Communion is renewed and its meaning reiterated: 'the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up his soul by death upon the Cross for your salvation' and Communion is a 'remembrance of the sacrifice of his death'. The exhortation gives further reasons why we should not neglect the Lord's Supper. It is commanded by our Lord. In the narrative of institution, Jesus says, 'Do this in remembrance of me.' Refusing to receive the Lord's Supper is an act of disobedience. Refusing to receive the remembrance of Christ's sacrificial death is an offence against God for which we are in danger of punishment because it treats lightly the death of his Son whom he sent precisely so that we could be forgiven. Finally, separating from one's brethren 'who come to feed on the banquet of that heavenly food' is divisive; it denies the unity of the Church and undermines the gospel. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10.17: 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of one bread.' Refusing to partake of that bread denies that we are one body. This gives the context for the failure to discern the body in the following chapter which is the reason for judgement. It is a failure to discern the body of Christ, which is the Church. That is what the Corinthians did when some went hungry and others got drunk. They despise the Church. That is what those who abstain from the Lord's Table do. Tim Chester calls Communion 'an act of community'. He writes:

The Lord's Supper declares the death of Jesus not just in the symbolism of bread and wine, but in the community created by the cross... Christ told us to take bread and wine because they form a meal that binds us together as a community.. We proclaim his death by eating together as a reconciled community through the cross.<sup>24</sup>

In Galatians, chapter 2, the apostle Paul recalls the incident at Antioch when he opposed Peter to his face for withdrawing from eating with the Gentiles, conduct which 'was not in step with the truth of the gospel'. We are justified and included in the one people of God by faith, and refusing to eat with someone is an implicit statement that they are not

24 Chester, *A Meal With Jesus*, p. 122.

included in the people of God and that something else is required for justification, which is a denial of the gospel. As Tim Chester writes, 'Our meals express our doctrine of justification.'<sup>25</sup>

The exhortation concludes by encouraging us to consider these things in order to have a better view of receiving communion. The minister's responsibility in this is prayer: 'for the obtaining whereof we shall not cease to make our humble petition unto Almighty God our heavenly Father.'

Unlike Charles Simeon, who was told by the Provost of King's that he had to receive communion, we do not have a human authority enforcing reception of communion. But like Charles Simeon, this exhortation tells us that we are required to receive communion according to God's word—the inadmissibility of excuses in the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Christ's command, and the warnings about division.

The third exhortation, to be read at the time of communion, again instructs those who want to receive communion to examine themselves, reminding them of both the great benefit of receiving it with true repentance and living faith, and the danger of receiving it unworthily. It encourages repentance, faith, amendment of life, charity with neighbours and thanksgiving for what Christ has done.

## **Conclusion**

Synthesising these exhortations, we can see that we ought not to receive the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, but that we must receive the Lord's Supper. It is therefore important that we prepare before we come to the Lord's Table. The exhortations taken together offer the following steps to navigate the path between being damned if we do and damned if we don't:

1. Consider God's kindness in inviting us to his heavenly banquet and sending his Son to die upon the cross to save us, so that we are filled with gratitude.
2. Consider the community which Christ brought into being by his death and which is given expression in the Lord's Supper.
3. Examine our lives according to God's commandments.
4. Confess our sins to God and turn our hearts against them.
5. Reconcile with those we have sinned against with restitution if necessary and forgive those who have sinned against us.
6. Seek the help of a minister to receive assurance of forgiveness from God's word if our consciences remain troubled.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Those who are ministers need to remember their need to prepare themselves, their responsibility to warn people neither to come to the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner but to repent, nor to let other priorities or a sense of personal unworthiness get in the way of receiving the Lord's Supper, and their duty to pray.

When we prepare in this way, we will not be negligent or terrified to come to Communion, but, like Simeon, we will have at the Lord's Table in our churches the sweetest access to God through our blessed Saviour. From that, we may find our lives transformed as we are drawn deeper into the conversation of meditation on the Scriptures and prayer, we discover a new zeal to pass on the faith to others, and we become effective instruments for God's mission in the world.

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# ‘In Love and Charity with Your Neighbours’: The Prayer Book and the Tudor Welfare State

PHILIP ANDERSON

Former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, wrote, ‘The National Health Service is the closest thing the English have to a religion, with those who practice in it regarding themselves as a priesthood.’<sup>1</sup> We might object that Archbishop William Temple played midwife to the post-war ‘welfare state’, popularising the term that was taken up by the famous Beveridge Report.<sup>2</sup> But what is generally forgotten is that the provision of public welfare was at the heart of the religion of the Book of Common Prayer from the Tudors until the early nineteenth century. The Whig government of the 1830s stripped the parishes of England of their distinctive duties to the hungry, orphans and the elderly, in a bid to cut the costs of poor relief, abetted by clergy teaching a ‘scientific’ theology.

The English tradition of public welfare free at the point of use, paid for from public funds, stands on deep legal and theological foundations—namely the Tudor poor laws, rooted in a Protestant understanding of the Church, to be precise a Reformed ecclesiology, albeit not of the Calvinist or Genevan variety. The officers of the early modern English welfare system were conceived not quite as a priesthood, but instead as an English adaptation of Reformed thinking around the ministry of deacons. Their role at the level of the parish mirrored that of the Queen and Commons in Parliament, a rebalancing of power and prestige towards lay Christians. The ‘poor laws’ describes that body of legislation enacted between the 1530s and 1590s, which established in England and Wales, but not Ireland, a rudimentary safety-net administered by newly created parochial officers.

Scholars of English welfare used to overlook the earlier Tudor poor laws, concentrating instead on the legislation of 1597 and 1601,

1 Nigel Lawson, *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (1992), p. 613.

2 Maurice Bruce, *The Coming of the Welfare State* (4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1968), p.31.

when the system achieved a classic, enduring form that lasted until the nineteenth century. Marjorie McIntosh, leading historian of early modern welfare, argued that we should look more seriously at the reign of Edward VI as the period when the system originated and began to be implemented by new officers.<sup>3</sup> This takes us to the period of the genesis of the Prayer Book. ‘Collectors for the Poor’, later called ‘Overseers of the Poor’, were given responsibility for finding work for the unemployed, using force if necessary, and the provision of minimal relief for orphans and the old, paid for at first from parochial alms, and later from local taxation. The system sought to supplement existing informal patterns of relief. It was not organised around large institutions, as a rule, and it was administered by neighbours in small rural communities. Over 90% of the Tudor population lived in the countryside. Families were always expected to care for relatives before the parish stepped in to offer assistance. A widow might remain in her own home through the winter, for example, by means of a ‘winter fuel payment’ of firewood given at the parish’s expense.<sup>4</sup> By the early seventeenth century legal rights to parochial relief kept the local law officers of the crown, the justices of the peace, busy hearing petitions. The magistrates had the power to overrule the parish officers, and ensured that judgements about eligibility for relief were protected from the worst excesses of village snobbery or feuding. At the end of the reign of Elizabeth I poor relief had become by far the most expensive and labour-intensive task of parish administration.

In terms of efficacy it has been argued that the Tudor poor laws aided the long-term growth of the English population. In France and Ireland poor harvests continued to lead to mass starvation into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the absence of effective organised relief. In England after the disruption of the Civil Wars the population rose steadily, despite poor harvests, and the poor laws provide part of the explanation for this trend, not unique in the European context, but unusual and noteworthy as an achievement for a largely rural kingdom, as opposed to smaller and relatively more urbanised, prosperous continental states, like the Dutch Republic.<sup>5</sup>

The theological context of the Tudor poor laws was the Reformation’s proclamation of the Word, and assault on ‘popery’. The true Gospel

3 Marjorie McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 2.

4 Paul Fideler, *Social Welfare in Pre-Industrial England: The Old Poor Law Tradition* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 68-101.

5 Larry Patriquin, *Agrarian Capitalism and Poor Relief in England, 1500-1860: Rethinking the Origins of the Welfare State* (Basingstoke 2007), p. 151-91.

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message was held up against late medieval teaching around works of righteousness—the popular idea that Christians might accrue merit before God by their charitable deeds, to be reckoned with on the Day of Judgement. The unbound Word of God had been rediscovered and posed a challenge to this doctrine, on which so many monastic and clerical fortunes were built. Luther's theological revolution coincided in the 1520s with rising anxiety about poverty, as the European population bounced back from its fifteenth century low, emerging from the long shadow of the Black Death. Economic growth had failed to keep pace, and throughout the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries living standards were stagnant or falling. This created a variety of social pressures, not least around unsolicited and aggressive begging by roaming strangers—'vagrants'.

For the magisterial reformers,<sup>6</sup> both Lutheran and Reformed, what to do about poor relief became an important issue—an open flank for Catholic critics. If the old theology of works of mercy was discredited, and inefficient in tackling a growing social problem, what would fill the gap? Luther's response was to stress that all are sinners, and to craft rules, 'church orders' for towns and cities influenced by the Reformation. He revived liturgical almsgiving for the poor within the context of the Eucharist, into a common chest, where alms could be deposited safely, and publicly, as a thanksgiving, in response to the unmerited grace of God. This represented a striking change from the late medieval liturgical tradition, in which the offertory of the mass, across the Latin West, had become exclusively the presentation of a little bread and wine to be consecrated for the priest's communion—a miracle, making Christ's atoning sacrifice present for the living and the dead in purgatory. The early Christian tradition of charitable almsgiving as part of the liturgy of the Eucharist had long since disappeared. In wealthy Nuremberg the city fathers sponsored the Lutheran reformer Andreas Osiander, who inspired very significant increases in charitable giving to the poor by a particular emphasis in his preaching on good works as the evidence of true faith.<sup>7</sup> In 1532 an English archdeacon, Thomas Cranmer, became acquainted with Osiander, visiting the great Imperial city in Henry VIII's service, a final diplomatic attempt to win support for the English King's

6 Magisterial as opposed to Radical, a distinction between those reformers prepared to work with civil power, i.e. magistrates, and those who rejected this because of its inevitable compromises. The distinction between Lutheran and Reformed branches of the Reformation largely crystallised around different theologies of the Eucharist.

7 See, Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Fortress Press, Minn: 1993).

annulment. Cranmer showed his Evangelical sympathies by marrying Osiander's niece, Margaret. Months later, to his surprise, the king had made him Archbishop of Canterbury.

In England's Reformation the adoption of the Lutheran poor box was to go hand in hand with a Reformed theology of the Eucharist. Diarmaid MacCulloch has pointed out the connections between England and Reformed Zurich instigated by Thomas Cromwell in the 1530s.<sup>8</sup> Some early evidence of this in England is in the 1535 translation of an iconoclastic tract by Martin Bucer into English by one of Cromwell's clients, William Marshall, *A treatise declaring and showing that images are not to be suffered in churches*. Here the Eucharist is defined only in terms of a spiritual presence of Christ, whereby Christians are stirred to turn away from sin and towards virtue by remembrance of the 'incomparable charity of Christ' in his passion. This was not the doctrine of Luther. In Zurich's Reformation destruction of holy images, as idols, had gone hand in hand with a call to see the poor as authentic icons of Christ. The translation caused a stir, the Imperial Ambassador noted its doctrine, but Cromwell protected Marshall, and a second edition was printed in the pivotal year 1536.<sup>9</sup> The dissolution of the English monasteries now began in earnest, and the first major poor law was enacted, introducing into English parish churches a poor man's box.<sup>10</sup> Royal Injunctions, issued in the name of the king, instructed parishioners to put their alms there, to help their neighbours, rather than persisting in discredited devotion to the saints.

Under Edward VI Cranmer invited leading continental Reformed theologians, Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, to the universities of Cambridge and Oxford. They helped shape the new vernacular liturgies, the two Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552. Much traditional ritual was abolished as superstitious, but lay almsgiving was inserted into the middle of the Communion service, in the 1549 book in parallel to, and in the 1552 book instead of, the ritual preparation of bread and wine for Holy Communion by the priest.<sup>11</sup> The offertory of money was deposited by laymen into the poor box, in the chancel. By 1552 the

8 Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Heinrich Bullinger and the English-speaking world', in Emidio Campi & Peter Opitz, eds., *Heinrich Bullinger: Life – Thought – Influence* (2 vols., Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 2007), Vol. 2., pp. 891-934. After the death of Zwingli, the original Zurich reformer, Heinrich Bullinger led the city's church for over forty years, and for as long as he lived the influence of Calvin's Geneva was limited in the wider Reformed world.

9 William Underwood, 'Thomas Cromwell and William Marshall's Protestant Books', in *The Historical Journal*, 47, 3 (Sept. 2004), pp. 517-39.

10 22 Hen.VIIIc.25 Statutes of the Realm Vol. 3, pp. 558-562.

11 The gathering of alms in a dish and placing of them on the holy table was a change made in 1662.



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traditional stone altars of English parish churches were meant to have been removed, and a movable wooden table placed in the middle of the choir. The consecrated sacramental bread, the traditional symbol of Christ's presence, had been usurped and replaced by the parochial alms chest and its lay collectors, symbols of a Reformed understanding of the Spirit at work in the Church, neighbourly charity interpreted as a communal spiritual sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> The Lord's Supper would feed the parish in every sense.

Martin Bucer died in Cambridge in 1550. He had just completed a somewhat long-winded treatise full of advice for the aspiring godly prince, *De Regno Christi*. In Strasbourg, Bucer's previous home, as in other territories that had turned to the Evangelical cause, the new religion had meant throwing off the bishop, who remained loyal to Rome. In England the new doctrine was being introduced by the bishops, at the instigation of Cranmer and the small circle of Evangelicals who now wielded the power of the English crown over the Church bequeathed by Henry VIII's Royal Supremacy. Bucer made his peace with bishops. But he remained keen to return to the model of church order he discerned in the New Testament. Restoring apostolic order was a characteristic motif of the developing Reformed churches. He argued for the restoration of rigorous discipline—a desire for personal and corporate holiness was a Reformed trait—and having dismantled the late medieval Church's insistence on confession to a priest before Communion, Bucer called for lay policing of the purity of the Eucharistic assembly. He argued in *De Regno Christi* that the Church's neglect of the ministry of deacons, the early Church's guardians of the poor, was a significant cause of the widespread vagrancy and idleness that contemporaries complained of so often. Bucer proposed that deacons should control all charitable giving - it ought to be forbidden for anyone to make a donation to another person privately, for fear of partiality; he further argued that the idle should be excommunicated; likewise the mean-spirited rich. He objected to the diaconate being treated as a stepping stone towards priesthood, as it had become in the medieval Church. Calvin was influenced by Bucer, and the government of the church by consistories of lay elders and ordained ministers was to become a hallmark, or at least ideal, for many Reformed churches, especially those under persecution, as in France; but in England Bucer's counsel was interpreted differently.

12 Stephen Reynolds, 'Sacrifices by Resemblance: The Protestant Doctrine of Eucharistic Sacrifice in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart Divinity', in *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 3 (1987), pp. 79-99.

The Reformed revival of the diaconate took a variety of forms across Europe, and in England the poor laws made it consistent with a church order governed by bishops, under the royal supremacy. Excommunication would not be delegated to parish officials in England, but poor relief was. Beginning with Royal Injunctions issued in 1547, clergy and churchwardens had been instructed to work together with two other men of good character, in the matter of poor relief. These two new officers were to be elected by the parishioners at the annual vestry meeting. Their position was clarified and formalised by the 1552 poor law. The so-called 'Collectors for the Poor' became an important part of English parish life for the next three centuries. Women were excluded from these roles, but through husbands or tenants could exercise significant influence over them. In the course of a lifetime in a typical parish many male householders could expect to serve in the government of the parish, with the office of churchwarden at the apex, and a variety of lesser roles traditionally regarded as preparation for that responsibility. This was an age in which fewer people had a vote in Parliamentary elections, but far more people played a part in their own self-government, within the limits set by statute. Those serving as 'Collectors' might reasonably expect to stand in need of poor relief themselves in old age. This lent the system a certain inflationary generosity, which could only be curtailed by limiting the franchise in the parish to a 'Select Vestry', a village oligarchy, but these were exceptional.

The role of the Collectors was very close to what other Protestant churches would call the ministry of deacons, as they read the apostolic tradition. In the Elizabethan period there are examples of English schemes that went beyond the letter of the law, like that in Norwich, whereby laypeople called 'deacons' administered a comprehensive scheme of relief, encompassing the provision of food, medicine and education.<sup>13</sup> At first, however, in 1552, the role of the Collectors for the Poor was to gather the alms of the parish week by week in the liturgy, having one Sunday invited the whole congregation to stay after the blessing, and publicly pledge what they would contribute to the common fund in the coming year. Then, week by week, after the end of the Sunday morning service, they were to open the poor box, count the alms publicly, and discuss the needs of the parishioners, openly. If anyone was found to be reluctant to

13 Muriel McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation, Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford, CA: 1999).

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contribute, they were to be sent to the bishop for correction.<sup>14</sup>

By the later sixteenth century government by bishops made England exceptional among Reformed churches, provoking critics. For as long as Bullinger lived Zurich was a useful ally in the contested matter of Reformed orthodoxy, as Torrance Kirby has argued,<sup>15</sup> and not only for reasons of ecclesiology. On the central Reformation doctrine of justification Patrick Collinson described Cranmer's theology of as one of justification by grace alone, not faith alone<sup>16</sup>—which is to say that faith must give rise to good works. The Homilies and Prayer Book give cause to support Collinson's view. In this respect the Zurich tradition of Zwingli, and particularly Bullinger, found a ready audience in Tudor England, with its distinctive emphasis on God's conditional, reciprocal covenant with humanity. The Reformed consensus on the causes of poverty in the sixteenth century was not so far from the traditional late medieval view. Apart from their own idleness, the meanness of the rich was the principle cause of hardship. Those who enjoyed good fortune or rank had an obligation to extend hospitality and relief to those less fortunate. In these terms poor relief became part of the response to God required of the godly in a properly ordered commonwealth.

Zurich's distinctive ecclesiology, in which the city authorities governed the church directly, without a Calvinist consistory, was useful when critics of Elizabeth I's religious settlement began agitating against the ceremonial favoured by the queen. Letters from Zurich were circulated at the beginning of the reign, arguing for obedience. Later, conformist defenders of the 1559 settlement of religion, like John Whitgift and Richard Hooker, could point to the fruitful work of the Collectors for the Poor as evidence of the ideological fundamentalism of those undermining a Protestant queen. So poor relief played a part in the contention among Elizabethans as to whether the Church of England was truly Reformed. It is no accident that Zurich gave rise to the 'Erastian' tradition, with its high esteem for the godly prince. English agitators, in exile, tried to exclude the Elector of the Palatinate, from questions of church discipline in his German territory. Bullinger weighed in on the side of his pupil Erastus, supporting the magistrate, while Beza in Geneva argued that the consistory must be free to discipline the church without fear or favour. Bullinger expressed reservations about excommunication more widely,

14 5 & 6, Ed. VI, c. 2.2, SR 4, vol. 1, 131.

15 W. J. T. Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (Leiden 2007).

16 Patrick Collinson, 'Thomas Cranmer and the Truth', in Patrick Collinson, *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (2006), pp. 1-24.

as open to abuse, and inconsistent with God's unbreakable covenant. It has to be said, however, that the mainstream 'Puritans' in England argued that the godly should be more concerned with policing their own sanctity than making judgements about the likely fate of others. Elizabeth was far from unique in being wary about making windows into souls.

In England the administration of excommunication was in disrepute, but the assumption implicit in the liturgy and law was that every parishioner might belong to the elect. Everyone ought to be treated as deserving the relief that the apostles described for the saints, those of the household of faith. We know that there were occasions when godly Overseers tried to deny poor relief to their neighbours on the grounds of popery or immorality, but the reason we know is because these judgements were overturned by the magistrates. Even vagrants, the classic 'undeserving poor', branded with irons, forced to labour, were meant to be removed to the parish they called home. An Erastian system of poor relief encompassed everyone. Every English subject was assumed to be a member of the Church of England. The anti-semitism of Elizabeth I's predecessors meant that there was no non-Christian population permanently resident in Tudor England. Catholics were regarded as laggards by this theology. In Ireland, where Protestantism was to remain a minority pursuit, it is surely significant that no equivalent system of relief was introduced.

It was in the nature of much early-modern social legislation that statutes were enacted only for the duration of one parliament. But the poor relief measures enacted in 1552, namely the creation of new officers, appointed annually, were re-enacted, modified a little, again and again. The need remained. Parochial poor boxes were further supplemented by a lasting piece of legislation, the 1559 Act of Uniformity itself, the permanent statute restoring Protestantism at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. This imposed fines on those who absented themselves from their parish churches, recusancy fines which were earmarked by law for the poor box. In the 1590s, Archbishop Whitgift orchestrated a repressive campaign against English agitators for Presbyterianism, and one radical shown clemency, Henry Arthington, wrote a tract called *Provision for the Poor now in Penury*. Keen to display his new conformity he lamented that if only Catholics were brought to heel by the prescribed fines, then every parish would have more than enough money to support its poor. He was writing against the backdrop of the years 1596-8, when England

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experienced the worst harvest failure of the century, the result was the further entrenchment of the poor laws.<sup>17</sup> Collectors for the Poor were renamed Overseers, and the local magistrates were given a hand in their appointment. Cranmer had envisaged the reform of episcopal courts and canon law, but by the 1590s that was a lost cause, the post-Reformation Church of England was left with a discredited system of discipline.<sup>18</sup> And anyway, as the population continued to rise, parochial almsgiving had to be supplemented by emergency mandatory rates, a tax levied by the parochial overseers on richer households. These emergency measures gradually became routine. Evidence from parochial accounts suggests, however, that until the Civil Wars, voluntary almsgiving made within the context of the liturgy remained the source of most parochial relief.<sup>19</sup> Cranmer was wary of anything that hinted of adoration of the elements in the Eucharist, but by the early seventeenth century both Puritans and Laudians had rediscovered the importance of the transcendent and immanent presence of Christ in Holy Communion. Both parties also found room for a high understanding of almsgiving, as a necessary, useful thanksgiving; a spiritual sacrifice; a response to grace received.

By the eighteenth century, the Tudor idea of religious uniformity had been shattered; 1688 saw to that. It was no longer possible to pretend that all neighbours might be members of one mystical body when chapel was defined against the parish church. Nonetheless rural Anglican clergy now often sat as magistrates, as aristocratic landowners became more distant from their estates. Georgian justices of the peace passed down judgements that ratcheted up the cost of poor rates until in the early nineteenth century the system was becoming very unpopular with those who paid for it. Making charity a tax was problematic, less theologically compelling, or edifying, than Cranmer's vision of neighbourly almsgiving. Fashionable Utilitarian ideas of 'Political Economy' disliked subsidising large pauper families and identified the practice of topping up low wages as a perverse incentive to landowners to pay less than they ought. The clergyman Thomas Malthus proposed a new scientific understanding of population growth which reduced the role of God to

17 Steve Hindle, 'Dearth, Fasting and Alms: The Campaign for General Hospitality in Late Elizabethan England', in *Past & Present*, 172 (Aug. 2001), pp. 44-86.

18 Churchwardens were often excommunicated for failing in their administrative duties, and it was normally possible for those with influence to step around the public humiliation of exclusion from the sacrament, by payment of a fine.

19 Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge 2008).

that of a corrective Providence, administering chastening starvation as necessary. If Cranmer intended to prick the consciences of the niggardly rich, Malthus posed a less threatening question—were they being un-Christian by their kindness?

The so-called ‘Swing Riots’ of 1830 across Southern England persuaded many voters that the old poor laws were ineffective and inefficient if the goal was public peace.<sup>20</sup> So, the Whig government created the notoriously penny-pinching New Poor Law. Dickens’ grim accounts of the workhouses, now intended to be the only source of relief, breaking up families, slowly starving their residents, went hand in hand with Tractarian nostalgia about the organic charity of the Catholic middle ages.<sup>21</sup> Vestry meetings now often fell to arguing over ceremonial matters, and a significant English lay ecclesiastical office, that of Overseer of the Poor, was secularised almost without anyone noticing. The confessional state was at an end, and collective forgetfulness fell over the Reformed pedigree of English public welfare. Erastianism was out of favour. At this time of defining ‘Anglicanism’ as a global communion, this awkward aspect of the English Reformed tradition, a relic of Christendom, was marginalised. It is no coincidence that this was the moment when agitation for liturgical reform began, Cranmer’s vision of the parish had been curtailed. Christians began to seek different ways of making the case for public welfare, funded from taxation, with allies inspired by different creeds, culminating in Temple’s wartime influence.

The modern canons of the Church of England are careful to subvert the plain meaning of the Prayer Book’s language about almsgiving for the poor at Holy Communion. In this respect it has become difficult for us to celebrate Cranmer’s Eucharist in its original spirit, and that should give us pause for thought, at a time when the Church is often perceived as self-absorbed, and food poverty widespread. Another casualty of the old confessional state was the mandatory tithe to support the clergy, but its loss has been mitigated. It wouldn’t be the first time the offering of the altar ended up feeding the priests.

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20 Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (1984), p. 41.

21 John Morrow, *Young England* (Leicester 1999).

# The National Day of Prayer, 4 August 1918

MICHAEL BRYDON

On the 11 November we shall rightly mark one hundred years since the Armistice of 1918 brought the fighting of the First World War to an end. Within my own village of Crowhurst, East Sussex, we have marked the events of a century before with an annual commemorative weekend since 2014. We have used the commemorations to help people learn more about the war, to research their own family connections and to build community, as we explore remembrance together. We have also striven very hard to challenge some of the popular stereotypes about the war.

When I was at school *Blackadder Goes Forth*, the BBC satirical comedy about the trenches, was compulsory Thursday night viewing. It very much chimed with the view that the whole war was utterly tragic. Certainly we are right to ponder the tragedy of the loss of so much life, many of the fallen being barely out of boyhood. But we also tend to forget that those fighting the war believed they were fighting it to defeat a greater evil.

Another popular myth that I particularly wanted to challenge was the belief that the First World War was a disaster for the Church of England. Robert Graves was famously dismissive of the Anglican army chaplains and stated that they were 'out of touch with their troops' and were kept safely away from the fighting unlike their Roman Catholic colleagues.<sup>1</sup> There is also a belief that the church was bellicose in her preaching against Germany; Winnington-Ingram, the Bishop of London, certainly continues to be viewed as the pinnacle of the church's role as 'a recruiting sergeant for destruction.' Those who were successful padres, such as 'Woodbine Willie', the Revd Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, or 'Tubby Clayton' the Revd Philip Clayton at Talbot House, Poperinge, are viewed as glorious exceptions.<sup>2</sup>

It stands to reason that there must have been bad chaplains and there must have been bad parish priests at home, but the evidence actually

1 A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, (1996), p.110-11

2 R.Mann, *The Great War, Ritual, Memory and God*, (2017), pp. 30-32

suggests that the Church of England did a pretty good job on both the front line and the home front. The Revd Robert Beaken's detailed examination of church life, in the garrison town of Colchester, does not show a blood-thirsty church preaching divine retribution from the safety of England. Rather it shows careful preaching and dedicated pastoral work.<sup>3</sup> There is also plenty of evidence that Anglican army chaplains were capable of great bravery with 250 being awarded the military cross, sixty-four dying as a result of enemy action and four winning the Victoria Cross, which was out of all proportion to their actual numbers within the army.<sup>4</sup> Neither should the honourable record of chaplains in the Royal Navy be forgotten; those at sea shared exactly the same risks as the men they served with, as the eight who died as result of the Battle of Jutland testify.<sup>5</sup>

It might also be added that the average soldier or sailor seems to have had a much stronger sense of faith than many contemporary or later commentators could comprehend. Sometimes the problem was that they weren't expressing their faith in the way the church wanted them to. Michael Snape, in a fascinating paper to the Friends of Lambeth Palace Library, suggested that elements of the Church of England, wanted something more akin to the obvious piety being shown by Roman Catholics.

They wanted communicants rather than hymn singers at parade services.<sup>6</sup> Further impetus to the call for revision of the Prayer Book seems to have been encouraged by the belief that the Church of England was failing to meet the liturgical needs of the men serving.<sup>7</sup> In fact in the right hands and used judiciously the Prayer Book was probably doing better than they thought. Whatever Tubby Clayton's comments on his difficulties at Talbot House (usually expressed with dry humour), the limitations of the Book of Common Prayer was not one of them. He had a good attendance at the daily Evensong, but packed congregations to receive Holy Communion.<sup>8</sup> The same was the experience of Winnington-

3 R. Beaken, *The Church of England and the Home Front. Civilians, Soldiers and Religion in Wartime Colchester*, (Woodbridge 2015).

4 P. Howson, *Muddling Through: The Organization of British Army Chaplaincy in World War I* (Solihull 2013), pp. 166-68.

5 G. Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains. A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy*, (Oxford 1978), p351-53

6 M. Snape, 'The Church at the Front: the Church of England and the British Soldier in the First World War', *Lambeth Palace Library Annual Review*, 2014, pp. 104-105, 108-109.

7 Wilkinson, *The First World War*, p. 144.

8 J. Louagie, *A Touch of Paradise in Hell. Talbot House, Poperinge – Every-Man's Sanctuary from the Trenches*, (Solihull 2015), pp 114-19.



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Ingram during his 1915 visit to the western front.<sup>9</sup> Rather typically Studdert Kennedy ascribed the high number of communicants to the words of administration used in the Prayer Book, 'The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.'<sup>10</sup> Possibly some did view the sacrament as a talisman, but on the other hand there is plenty of evidence that some divisions had high numbers of faithful churchmen; it would also be surprising if the traditional point of view that the sacrament should and could be received by those approaching death had not reasserted itself.<sup>11</sup>

Another almost totally neglected sign of spiritual vitality were the First World War national days of prayer, which if the Church had been in decline suggest something of a recovery. There is a long history of special days of worship observed across the parish churches of England with forms of worship to be used in conjunction with the Prayer Book. From the Reformation onwards they were ordered by act of the state—through royal proclamations, which carried legal force—some 860 times. They marked military victories such as Waterloo, gave thanks for deliverance from plague, petitioned for good harvests, celebrated royal occasions and dealt with calamities such as famine, plague and bad weather.<sup>12</sup> Whilst the Archbishop of Canterbury was likely to be consulted there was no requirement that he needed to be.<sup>13</sup> The initiative lay with the Prime Minister who would advise the crown.

These traditional days of worship ended in the 1850s as the country became more self-consciously pluralistic following the end of many of the old test laws against Nonconformists and Roman Catholics. As Professor Williamson, part of Durham University's research project on Days of Prayer points out, there was also concern that 'some parts of the population treated special days of worship merely as mid-week holidays.'<sup>14</sup>

In the late nineteenth century if anyone had suggested that there would be a revival of special days of worship, albeit organized slightly differently, it would undoubtedly have been met with surprise. Yet this

9 S.C. Carpenter, *Winnington-Ingram. The Biography of Arthur Foley Winnington-Ingram Bishop of London 1901-1939*, (1949), pp. 283-86

10 G.A. Studdert Kennedy, *The Hardest Part* (1918), pp. 118-19.

11 Snape, *Church at the Front*, p. 106.

12 N.Mears, 'Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgiving in the British Isles, 1533 to the Present', pp.19-23, *Symeon*, Issue 4, 2014, pp. 19-20

13 English proclamations applied to Wales automatically, but separate proclamations were issued for Ireland and Scotland because of their different legal and ecclesiastical arrangements.

14 P. Williamson, 'State Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings: Public Worship in Britain, 1830-1897', *Past and Present*, no. cc (2008), pp. 149-70

is exactly what happened. During the Boer War both Queen Victoria and the then Prime Minister refused the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury for a state-proclamation of a mid-week day of humiliation for the above reasons. But Archbishop Temple was able to persuade them to have the Privy Council authorise special forms of service for use within the Church of England for the duration of the war. A precedent had now been set for the state assisting the Established Church to have a 'national' form of prayer without ordering it for the whole nation.<sup>15</sup>

In the First World War all churches agreed on the importance of prayer and the Church of England came to provide something of an umbrella to a broad range of churches, which were happy to accept a gentle lead when it came to organizing days of prayer.<sup>16</sup> On Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August 1914 the Church of England held special services and invited both the English Roman Catholic Church and the National Free Church Council also to recommend special services. For the first Sunday of 1915 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davison, went one better and not only obtained a statement of support from the King, but had agreed the date with other churches in advance.<sup>17</sup> Further days took place in 1916 and 1917 at the start of the year and on the anniversary of the outbreak of war in August.<sup>18</sup>

All of these occasions were highly impressive and invariably had strong civic support but none of them were officially state-sponsored in the ways the old days had been up until the 1850s. They were a Church initiative. By the autumn of 1917 there is clear evidence that the government was in danger of a united public criticism from the Church of England and other reformed churches for its refusal to allow an adequate expression of the nation's dependence upon God.<sup>19</sup> As Archbishop Lang put it, there was a desire that 'the nation, speaking through its responsible authorities, [should] corporately express its trust in God and desire to fulfil His Will.'<sup>20</sup>

It was eventually agreed that the day at the start of January 1918 would receive some state sanction by being presented as a personal initiative of George V, who made a call for a time of public prayer by the nation and empire.<sup>21</sup> This day was highly successful and paved the way for the even

15 P. Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer: the Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain 1899-1957', *English Historical Review*, 128 (531), (pp. 324-66), p. 3. The version used for this article was the Durham Research Online of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2013.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 4

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13

18 *Ibid.*, p. 14

19 *Ibid.*, p. 14

20 *York Diocesan Gazette*, xxvi (July 1917), pp. 143-4

21 G. Bell, *Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury*, (Oxford 1935), Volume II, pp. 827-8.

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more impressive observance on 4 August 1918 where it was agreed that both Houses of Parliament would join the King and Queen in a special service at St Margaret's, Westminster. Archbishop Davidson anticipated how this 'official attendance' at worship of the nation's leaders would be evidence of 'our prayer, our confession [and] our thanksgiving' being a deliberate 'national act.'<sup>22</sup>

The fourth anniversary of the war was certainly observed with enormous solemnity in churches across the land and in the case of St Margaret's a large silent crowd thronged Parliament Square outside. In his sermon Archbishop Davidson spoke of how never before 'in the history of the country have the King and Queen and the two Houses of Parliament joined officially, as we join today, in one solemn act of prayer and confession, thanksgiving, commemoration, and resolve.'<sup>23</sup> As elsewhere the service at St Margaret's followed the 'Forms of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God', which had been issued under the authority of the archbishops of Canterbury and York and printed by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.<sup>24</sup> For Morning Prayer and Evensong a series of special psalms had been suggested which covered the themes of the reign of God, the refuge found in God, the comfort of God and the help of God. At St Margaret's Psalm 91 was selected to major on the help of God and it was sung along with the Te Deum to 'the simplest Anglican chants'. The suggested lessons from Isaiah 55 and Revelation 21 were read respectively by the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Chancellor.<sup>25</sup>

The SPCK form of service also offered a special litany to be recited after the third collect before or in place of the sermon.<sup>26</sup> At the great national acts of worship a sermon was preached on its own, but elsewhere the 'bidding to prayer and thanksgiving' with its comprehensive prayers for those fighting, for the fallen, for those working at home and for right behaviour would have spoken powerfully. There is ample evidence that the use of the Prayer Book litany was much more widespread one hundred years ago, so this form of prayer would have been familiar. When the Bishop of London visited the western front, in 1915, he took printed copies of a litany adapted from the Russian Orthodox Church, which given his easy relationship with the 'fighting man' he clearly knew would

22 Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer', p. 15

23 Church Times, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1918, p. 95.

24 *Forms of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God to be used on Sunday the Fourth of August 1918*, (London: SPCK, 1918).

25 Church Times, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1918, p. 95; *Forms of Prayer and Thanksgiving*, p. 3.

26 *Forms of Prayer and Thanksgiving*, pp. 3-6.

be appreciated.<sup>27</sup> Even if the collect was not used then a whole series of other prayers were available after the third collect, which ranged from absent friends and prisoners of war to peace and the harvest.<sup>28</sup>

Although the civic acts of worship were non-Eucharistic provision was made for special collects and lessons to be read at Holy Communion. The *Church Times*, then a staunch Anglo-Catholic newspaper, commented how the great day of prayer was 'happily in many instances ... more completely summed up in the great Sacrifice of the altar.'<sup>29</sup> No doubt the readers of the *Church Times* were equally delighted that whilst the special litany made provision to remember 'all who have been faithful unto death' the hint of prayer for the fallen was stronger still in the Eucharistic provision. For the epistle the vision in Hebrews 12 of the great 'cloud of witnesses' had been selected and the second collect prayed that those who had laid down their lives 'might be found worthy to enter into thine everlasting joy'. This need to remember the fallen in prayer, albeit in carefully couched Anglican terms, was also heightened by the fact that the August date had been given the additional designation of a 'national day of remembrance' and was marked by the dedication of many war shrines including a large one in Hyde Park. Any prayer for the dead would once have been deeply contentious, but as early as 1917 the official Anglican service for the day honoured the fallen, before God, regardless of how they had led their lives.<sup>30</sup> After the war the bishops of the Church of England considered the remembrance of the war dead as a possible theme for an annual national day of prayer. This was overtaken by the establishment of the Armistice Day silence, but the desire for communal prayers was so strong that by 1925 the nearest Sunday had become popularly known as Remembrance Sunday in church.<sup>31</sup>

In other ways the special forms of worship were much more clearly in the theological tradition of the Prayer Book. Like the Prayer Book they were blunt about the need for a reformation of life if prayer was to do any good. The special litany was not afraid to suggest that God had every right to take 'vengeance of our sins' and was happy to list such failings as 'pride', 'the spirit of revenge', 'fornication and drunkenness', 'foolish talk' and 'all uncharitableness'. Winnington-Ingram, preaching at St Paul's spoke of how 'It has been truly said that Prayer does not alter God's intention, but it does alter His action, for it makes it possible for

27 G.V. Smith, *The Bishop of London's Visit to the Front*, (1915), p. 12 and Appendix.

28 *Forms of Prayer and Thanksgiving*, pp. 6-8.

29 *Church Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1918, p. 95.

30 Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer', p. 37.

31 Williamson, 'National Days of Prayer', p.38.

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Him to carry out His intention; even the Son of God could do no mighty work because of their unbelief.<sup>32</sup>

In 1940 the day of national prayer, which preceded the Dunkirk evacuation was widely hailed as leading to a miracle. It is less well-known that many attributed a similar result to the August 1918 date. Lt-General Sir William Dobbie, looking back on his life in 1944, put the dramatic change of the allied fortunes down to the day of prayer.

It was not until about the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1918, that a decision was taken by the Government to issue such a call [to national prayer].... Immediately that decision was taken, a remarkable change came over the situation. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, Marshal Foch gained a signal victory over the Germans between the Aisne and the Marne, and caused them to effect a hasty and costly withdrawal. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of August, four days after the day appointed to seek God's help began the Battle of Amiens—the first of a series of brilliant victories in the British sector, which in a hundred days, brought about the complete downfall of the German Army, and brought to an end the power of the German nation to continue the war. In these hundred days God's help was manifest in many ways. The weather which hitherto had mostly been unfavourable to us, now was just what we needed.<sup>33</sup>

It was not just long-term hindsight that made people feel that something had changed. Archbishop Lang publicly noted not long after the August day of prayer that the British armies were 'suddenly enabled' to counter attack successfully against the German armies.<sup>34</sup> More locally in my own parish of Crowhurst, the Rector, the Revd Frederick Sheehan simply commented that, 'Since that date many things have happened to make us realize the hopefulness of the allied cause. Pessimism has vanished from the nation's outlook, and hope of the dawn of victory looms bright... The willingness and determination of everyone to prosecute the war to a successful issue reflects the truly national standpoint in a truly noble light.'<sup>35</sup>

Sceptics will no doubt debate whether the day really had any effect on the war, but what is indisputable is that the government recognized the value of it and believed that at the very least it had made a difference to the public mood. Consequently the state was wholeheartedly behind national days of prayer in the Second World War. The prominent role played by

32 Church Times, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1918, p. 95.

33 W. Dobbie, *A Very Present Help*, (Grand Rapids 1945), p. 51

34 York Diocesan Gazette, xxvii (September 1918), p. 167.

35 F.R. Sheehan, *Crowhurst Parish Magazine*, September 1918

the King in August 1918 also did much to forge the way the monarchy functions religiously to this day. Except for specifically royal occasions it had been rare for previous monarchs to attend public worship and very rare for them to attend church, even on national occasions. From 1918 the attendance at national services became a duty of all senior members of the royal family; the whole series of commemorative services we have seen marking the wartime events of one hundred years ago are certainly testimony to this.

Whilst Queen Elizabeth has become increasingly confident in speaking of prayer publicly and praising the generous national umbrella offered by the Church of England there sadly seems little likelihood of any British government supporting a national call to prayer now. This makes it even more important that , as we mark the centenary of the armistice, the significance of the August 1918 day of prayer to the whole nation is not forgotten

*Almighty God, from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed; kindle, we pray thee, in the hearts of all men, the true love of peace, and guide with thy pure and peaceable wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth: that in tranquillity thy Kingdom may go forward, till the earth be filled with the knowledge of thy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*<sup>36</sup>

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36 Forms of Prayer and Thanksgiving, p. 8

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