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Editorial: Remembrance

On the morning of the eleventh of November, 1937, precisely at eleven o'clock, some well-meaning busybody consulted his watch and loudly announced the hour, with the result that all of us in the dining-car felt constrained to put aside drinks and newspapers and spend the two minutes' silence in rather embarrassed stares at one another or out of the window. Not that anyone had intended disrespect—merely that in a fast-moving train we knew no rules for correct behaviour and would therefore rather not have behaved at all.

So begins James Hilton's *Random Harvest* (1941). In November 2017, eighty years after Hilton's fictional scene, I was about to go into a supermarket on a Saturday. It was not in my mind that it was 11 o'clock or even, at that precise moment, that it was the 11th of November, but as I entered there was a public announcement that the two minutes' silence was about to be observed, and so far as I could see everybody stood still and silent for the allotted time.

I think we ought to find this rather surprising: in 1937, if Hilton is to be believed, the eleventh hour of the eleventh month might easily pass unnoticed in a public place; eighty years later it is quite likely that passengers will be notified not by 'some well-meaning busybody' but by the train company itself.

After the Second World War it was decided that the Act of Remembrance should be moved to the second Sunday in November: Remembrance Sunday would replace Armistice Day as the day on which the dead of both world wars would be remembered. It is only over the last ten or twenty years that there has been a revival of the two minutes' silence on the 11th of November itself, partly as a result, I gather, of campaigns by some tabloid newspapers. But why has it caught on? For if you had asked people in the 1970s or 80s what they thought would be the future of 'Remembrance' most, I suspect, would have predicted its gradual decline and disappearance as the old soldiers of the two world wars departed the scene.

Speculating as to the reasons for this unexpected revival is admittedly, as J.F. Stephen said in another context, 'like firing a gun at a cloud'. It seems paradoxical that it began about the time the last veterans of

the Great War were dying off—just when one might have expected a decline; but perhaps that was the very reason: where they could no longer witness for themselves, others must witness for them. On the other hand it may not have been pure coincidence that this was also the period which saw the striking (and to some disturbing) emotional manifestations surrounding the death of Princess Diana. Reinforcement from a rather different direction came later with the deaths of British troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Then again there is the marked growth of interest in genealogical relations with those who served in the First World War. Some people evidently feel a sense of vicarious participation in those momentous events through the discovery of a great-grandfather or great-great-uncle who fought or whose grave can be visited. Perhaps somewhere in this, too, is a sense that by doing this one is connecting oneself to a simpler and less eroded sense of nation and patriotism—‘never such innocence again’.

Whatever the reasons for it, the revival of the two minutes’ silence on Armistice Day itself (as opposed to Remembrance Sunday) is notable for its character as a public ritual which is unaccompanied, in most circumstances, by any declaration or prayer or even by any action. In one sense it is wholly inward: what passes in the minds of those who remain still and silent is unknown and not enquired into. But it is also public and in some degree coercive: few would wish deliberately to flout it, and if they do they will be disapproved of for lack of ‘respect’.¹ To judge by Hilton’s description this was also true eighty years ago. In any case, then as now the Armistice Day silence was secular—an interval for reflection which allowed for any belief or for none.

The transfer of the silence, following World War II, to the nearest Sunday did in some degree reattach it to the religious services held on that day, and it may be that the modern revival on a weekday has proved popular in part because it comes without any religious paraphernalia. But Remembrance Sunday services seem to have been holding up well, too. In both cases the centenary of the 1914-18 war has provided a stimulus.

But now that the centenary of the 1918 Armistice (which fell on a Sunday as it happens) is past, where will Remembrance go? And what should the Church’s attitude be? Can we continue a tradition which

¹ Some have pushed back against this, and against the renewed emphasis on wearing the poppy: the broadcaster Jon Snow has spoken of ‘poppy fascism’, and others have quoted Harry Patch, the last of the Great War combatants to die, who said that for him what went on on Armistice Day was just ‘show business’.

arose from, and is still significantly shaped by, a conflict which has now passed into history, without an increasing sense of unreality? It may be said that British soldiers have continued to die in later conflicts—this is true, but consider the numbers: in the period 1900-1945 some 1,400,000 British servicemen were killed in action; in the seventy-three since the number is about 7,000. All these lives matter of course, but it seems to me impossible to pretend that the traditional words of remembrance ('they shall grow not old as we that are left grow old . . . ') can have the same emotional resonance as they had eighty or fifty or even thirty years ago, when many millions were alive who had lived through and been directly affected by the great civilian wars of the twentieth century. Though Binyon's lines are still cherished and have become almost liturgical one can hardly think of them continuing to be used indefinitely—they will seem, perhaps already seem, dated and 'period' in a way that is not true of the much older prayers of the Prayer Book for example.

But other events, you may say, have been commemorated publicly for well over a hundred years—did not the Book of Common Prayer contain until 1859 provision for commemorating the execution of Charles I and the Gunpowder Plot? Yes, but these services had at any rate a clear didactic, even ideological, purpose—to impress upon congregations the terrible impiety of laying murderous hands on an anointed monarch or of seeking to blow up the High Court of Parliament. The difficulty with Remembrance, once it went beyond a simple act of silent recollection, was to decide what the service was intended to convey. How, in the early years, were thanksgiving and mourning to be combined? How as the years went on were these great conflicts to be Christianly understood? And how was that understanding, if it could be agreed upon, to be expressed liturgically?

At one time it was perhaps sufficient to have a straightforward service of Mattins with the Act of Remembrance attached and with suitable readings—the onus of expressing some Christian thought about the matter lying with the preacher. If, on the other hand you seek to convey meaning by the liturgy itself there are difficulties. The existing modern-language service retains 'Binyon's words' for the Act of Remembrance, together with prayers for those who have died in war, who are on active service, whose lives are disfigured by war, who are working for peace. The Beatitudes are said. It is a workable and perfectly respectable service which concludes with an Act of Commitment, balancing the Act of

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Remembrance, and expressing various aspirations for peace and justice.² These aspirations are, of course, no more specifically Christian than are the words of the Act of Remembrance. The Church has traditionally sought to sanctify what is best in the national life, so far as that is possible, and if that means playing down the more corrigible parts of our nature when providing what is essentially a civic service, and presenting a sort of compromise between different attitudes to war and to the country's past and future that may be thought a price worth paying for maintaining some contact with a largely non-Christian community. But it results in a somewhat heterogeneous act of worship.

From the Christian point of view, I sometimes think, a better solution would be a more prominent celebration of All Saints' and All Souls'. The latter does not exist in the Prayer Book, though some provision was made in the 1928 version. There is material in *Common Worship*. It has become quite usual for services to be offered around All Souls' to those who have recently been bereaved or who wish to remember their dead: there seems no reason in the long run why the names of a parish's war dead should not be read out alongside other names. There could be appropriate silences.

This, like the rest of this article, is speculative. Since the matter seems not to be much discussed it is difficult to know what anybody else thinks of our present arrangements. The passing of the centenary of the 1918 Armistice seems an appropriate moment at which to start a conversation.

John Scrivener

2 These include:
Will you work for a just future for all humanity?
All: We will.

This will perhaps be over-ambitious for most people, who may feel they have enough on their plates doing their duty where they find themselves and lack a clear vision of how best to bring about 'a just future for all humanity'.

Two Papers from the Annual Conference

Style and Substance: The Theological Battle Behind Anglican Good Taste in the Mid-Twentieth Century

EVAN MCWILLIAMS

The Son of God did not take our nature upon him in order that, suitably attired in Elizabethan costume, we might sing sentimental religious poetry set to lugubrious Victorian chants.¹

I'll admit I'm rather fond of this slightly acerbic observation which comes from Peter Hammond's 1960 book *Liturgy and Architecture*. And, on the face of it, who could disagree with such a remark? The incarnation of the divine second person of the Trinity rather trumps our aesthetic preferences.

It is impossible to argue for the significance of culturally-conditioned expressions of religion when presented with the overwhelming, universe-altering, action of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Such divine action cannot, (must not!), be held in fetters by man-made traditions, however pleasant we find them. The divine action must be set free to speak in whatever language is most suited to the day in which we find ourselves. The Church must proclaim Christ 'afresh in each generation'—as the Church of England's current declaration of assent puts it.

To proclaim afresh, to make known anew, is, according to Hammond, first to discard the old. I suggest that the entire history of aesthetic conflict in regard to art, architecture, and liturgical language in the twentieth century may be understood through the lens of 'proclaiming afresh', a great project that cannot be undertaken without first discarding the old. To put on modern clothes, we must first remove our Elizabethan ones.

I think we can all accept that the means by which something is conveyed has an impact on how it is received. The medium and the message are intertwined and associations, cultural and personal, often colour our perception. It is one thing to stand on a street-corner shouting

1 Peter Hammond, *Liturgy and Architecture* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960), p.21.

into a megaphone and quite another reverently to ascend a pulpit and read from the Bible. The text might be the same, the context and manner do much to ensure a response. In the case of the former, one risks arrest in the latter case... polite disinterest perhaps?

Peter Hammond's distrust of Elizabethan costume and Victorian chants was one way of responding to the problem of interpretation and he was not alone in being concerned that the message the Church had to proclaim was being inhibited by the manner of its proclamation. Nearly thirty years earlier, the Kelham father Gabriel Hebert bemoaned the fact that the Church had been forced during the previous generation to adopt the fashion of medieval architecture. He wrote

It was a bad sign that churches in the Victorian period were built in Gothic: the fact that churches were being built in a different style from public buildings and dwelling-houses seemed to say that the Church was following a false romanticism, seeking to escape from the present and live in a particular period of the past... The Gothic revival was thus a symptom that the Church was failing to meet the modern world and give its message in the language of the day.²

Hebert's claim is factually inaccurate. Factories, town halls, houses, and even one rather famous hotel and railway station were all built in the Gothic style. This factual inaccuracy, however, is not what matters. What matters is perception. For thinkers from the 1930s into the 1960s who viewed style as a marker of ideas—the medium shaping the message—traditional forms were considered a problem. They were not 'of today', not 'modern', not appropriate to convey meaning to a new age.

The problem of 'modernity' continues to haunt us, living as we do in a world that seems ever to be changing. Twenty-four-hour news broadcasts, constant social media interactions, new human rights appearing at every turn (I jest, but only slightly): these are all circumstances which shape the way we view life and ideas. In an ever-changing world, a progressive world, the medium and the message are intimately connected. If the message is to be heard, the medium must adapt.

Or must it? We'll try and move towards an answer to that question later, but it's an important one to keep in mind as we delve into the thinking of the mid-twentieth century.

To begin we must ask, what was it the outmoded forms associated with the Church were incapable of conveying? What image of the Church,

2 A.G. Hebert, *Liturgy and Society* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1935), pp.239-40.

what image of God, couldn't be understood properly when spoken with a late-medieval or Elizabethan accent?

The premise of this talk is that behind the battle over style in the twentieth century lies a theological battle—style as a proxy-war, if you will—and informing the dismissive attitude towards 'Elizabethan costume' was a more significant problem that needed dealing with: Elizabethan theology. Hammond here quotes John G. Davies:

The English Communion service is in many ways an extreme example of late-medieval thinking... It was this lack of historical perspective, and of any critical appreciation of liturgical development, that led the reformers into disastrous errors in their attempts to make the liturgy once again the common prayer of the people of God.³

In his 1958 book, *An Experimental Liturgy*, Davies also posited the following: the English rite found in the Book of Common Prayer 'stems from a Reformed tradition which has itself inadequately overcome the medievalism against which it first reacted'.⁴ Davies and Hammond were convinced that the English liturgy as they knew it in the Prayer Book was deeply flawed. To them, it was insufficiently Reformed. It reflected, in Hammond's words, a 'restricted view of the scope of redemption [a] preoccupation with the death of Christ [and] the same mental climate as Anselm's treatise on the incarnation'.⁵

The connection between theology and style becomes clear when we are told that the layout, the plan of churches 'embodies a conception of the Church and its worship that is essentially medieval'.⁶ What we see here is so fundamental an association between medium and message that the two have become indistinguishable. Hammond and Davies, representative of a wider group of thinkers of their day, were convinced that the theology of the Prayer Book as they read it was wrong and that that theology had led to an aesthetic expression, a stylistic preference, that actively prevented the Church from being what it should be as a community, inhibiting its worship, and distorting its theology.

Lest we be tempted to dismiss this view as one of a few disaffected Englishmen, a sort of minority report of those who simply didn't like Cranmer's prose, I offer the following from the French Roman Catholic theologian and church historian Maurice Villain: 'Vue de l'exterieur

3 Hammond., p.23. Hammond here quotes J.G. Davies, *An Experimental Liturgy*, 1958.

4 Loc. cit.

5 Ibid., p.22.

6 Ibid., p.30-31.

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l'Eglise anglicane... donne l'impression de vivre toujours dans un climat de moyen age et d'un moyen age typiquement anglais.⁷ 'Viewed from without, the Anglican Church gives the impression of living always in a late-medieval climate, and that a medieval age which is distinctly English.' Professor Scruton has observed something not dissimilar in his book *Our Church*: 'the Gothic Revival had been accepted as an integral part of the English settlement, a good-natured attempt to ensure that God found suitable accommodation in the country that was his.'⁸ There is much that could be said about the nationalistic quality of the Gothic but that, I'm afraid is another lecture.

So far as the Church of England was concerned, for many the symbolic language of architectural planning and style that had come to dominate the English— indeed, the English-speaking— cultural landscape was that of the high and late middle ages, of which Cranmer's Prayer Book was essentially still a part. In their view, this medievalising tradition was not only inappropriate but, in some significant ways, wrong. In order to correct the problems, both theological and cultural, there had to be a decisive break with the familiar medium through which these wrong ideas were being propagated. If churches were built in a modern style, planned with modern liturgical ideals in mind, bolstered by new interpretations of ecclesiology, they would reflect the truth about the Church and God in such a way as to make the message more applicable to the modern world. Put very simply: Medieval theology bad, medieval style bad, Modern theology good, modern style good.

To quote Hammond once again: 'While doctrinal error has stemmed in the first instance from a defective understanding of the Church, it has been perpetuated by churches in which erroneous doctrine has assumed visible and tangible form.'⁹

There are several ways we might go about responding to Hammond's claims. It's possible we may agree with some of them. Were we to disagree we might want to argue with him about style on its own grounds. We might want to say, with Pugin, that there was something inherently English about Gothic architecture. We might observe that the vast majority of parish churches are, whether medieval or Victorian and later, built in the Gothic style. We would be better off sticking with the familiar, appealing to the collective memory of the people of this nation who have certain

7 Maurice Villain, *Introduction à l'Ocumenisme*. (Paris-Tournai: Casterman, 1958)

8 Roger Scruton, *Our Church: A Personal History of the Church of England* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012), pp.106-107.

9 Hammond, p. 35.

expectations, often unknown even to themselves, in regard to what a church should look like, and, significantly, how it should feel.

Alternatively, we could pick up on his problems with theology. We could argue that redemption is not, in fact, universal, that the death of Christ was not merely a medieval preoccupation but the preoccupation of the gospels and the apostolic writings, and that Anselm really was on to something when he suggested that we could never pay the debt owed to God because of sin and that Jesus Christ had to die to pay it for us, in our place, as our substitute.

What actually happened in the 1960s was that neither of Hammond's claims was seriously addressed by the establishment and the tide of modernity, both aesthetic and theological, slowly crept across Britain. Unlike the tsunami which destroys all before it, the gentler tide of modernity left much of the appearance of things intact but, as we know happens with floods, it irreparably damaged the foundations of the culture it covered.

Need this have been so, you may ask? Why couldn't style and theology peacefully coexist? What was it about style that made it such a battleground in a fight that was really about something else?

In an effort to make more clear both the arguments of the party we'll call the modernisers, and the state of things against which they were arguing (the traditionalists for lack of a better term) let's begin with a church.



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St Alban's, Abington in Northamptonshire was designed by W.H. Randall Blacking and completed in 1938. It is typical of good taste in inter-war design for the expanding suburbs. The design is competent and familiar in its use of simplified Gothic forms, but not especially adventurous. The pared-down white arches and whitened wooden roof are an abstracted stage for the liturgical furnishings of pulpit, screen, font, and altar. Randall Blacking confirmed this assessment in his own writing about the church in which he noted that 'all other considerations [after the performance of the Prayer Book services] are of secondary importance'.¹⁰

What had, by the 1930s, become essential for the performance of the Prayer Book rite was a neat list of items, the origin of which went all the way back to an 1897 pamphlet by the architect and antiquarian J.T. Micklethwaite titled 'The Ornaments of the Rubric'. In this pamphlet, Micklethwaite justified nearly all of the pre-Reformation furnishings of a standard English parish church by an appeal to the so-called Ornaments Rubric of the Prayer Book. Printed on the page facing the Order for Morning Prayer, the rubric read as follows:

And here is to be noted, That such Ornaments of the Church, and of the Ministers thereof at all times of their Ministration, shall be retained, and be in use, as were in this Church of England, by the authority of Parliament, in the second year of the reign of King Edward the Sixth

A great deal of ink was spilled during the first decades of the twentieth century in an attempt to determine exactly which ornaments had remained in use during the second year of the reign of King Edward the Sixth, and even which year was actually being referred to. As most of you will undoubtedly know, part and parcel of the revival of catholic theology in the Church of England was a revival of catholic ceremonial and what does one need in order to perform full catholic ceremonial? Lots of catholic tat. Or, to use, the rubric's language 'ornaments of the church and of the ministers'.

Whether or not the compilers of the Book of Common Prayer ever actually intended the revival of the catholic ceremonies is not a question for this lecture, but what is relevant to the discourse at hand is the fact that most of the ornaments the rubric permitted (or enjoined, perhaps),

10 W.H. Randall Blacking, 'The Arrangement and Furnishing of a Church.' (London: The Incorporated Church Building Society, c. 1938), p.1.

along with many of the ceremonies associated with them, had come into the mainstream of the English Church before the Second World War. Parish churches were built not merely in a medieval style but fully equipped for medieval worship.

At St Alban's, the altar is bounded by riddel posts with curtains like a medieval altar, on it are placed two candles and a cross, there are two further candles in standards on the sanctuary pavement, and there is a piscina for washing the sacred vessels to the south of the altar. The priest, deacon, and subdeacon are accommodated in a sedilia on the south as well and there are rails at which to kneel to receive the sacrament dividing the sanctuary from the choir which is itself divided from the nave by a tall screen carrying both the royal arms and a rood group.



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Pre-Reformation catholic furnishings provided the possibility of pre-Reformation ceremonial and, given how easily this approach to liturgy seemed to mesh with the texts of the Prayer Book, it is clear that the potential for pre-Reformation theology was present as well. St Alban's is like so many churches built between about 1900 and 1940— it follows the established pattern of the familiar English parish church, denuded of paintings, statues, and the multiplicity of altars and lights endowed by medieval parishioners, but containing still all the necessities of catholic worship should the Church of England ever return to the Roman fold.

The image of the Church as seen by Villain, Davies, Hammond, and others was that of the Church of England between the reigns of Edward and Mary, Reformed but only just. To them, that image reflected a reality with which they were profoundly uncomfortable. The hierarchy of the medieval church could still be heard whispering behind a whitewashed pier. In the rustle of silk vestments as the priest turned his back to the people to say Mass, the abuse of clerical authority could be heard; the people of God were deprived of their priesthood. Separated from the holy mysteries by a rood screen, they could never fully participate in the Eucharistic act, the body of Christ offering itself to God in grateful thanksgiving.

I needn't labour the point as I think you can begin to see what they saw. Style was the message. If the Church looked medieval, it probably was, in its teaching and practice, essentially medieval. How else could its liturgical life be lived so comfortably in the clothes of the early-sixteenth century. And the Book of Common Prayer permitted this!— nay, actively supported this, in its rubrics no less than in its liturgical texts. 'Who made there by His one oblation of himself, once offered- a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice oblation and satisfaction' — 'Which oblation do thou, O Almighty God, we beseech thee, vouchsafe in all respects to make hallowed, approved, ratified, reasonable, and acceptable, that it may be made unto us the body and blood of thy most dear Son our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The former words you will know; the latter are from the Canon of the Mass in the Sarum Rite. Too close! warns Hammond. In such a church the 'erroneous doctrine' embodied in an imperfectly Reformed liturgy was made concrete. To do away with buildings like these would be a first step to correcting the mistakes they made tangible. Minor adjustments wouldn't do: 'The spiritual', he argued, 'has indeed been moulded by the concrete; the meanings and values embodied in stone have continued to shape the worship and piety of Christians even when the false teaching from which those meanings and values derive has been recognized and

corrected.’¹¹ If any of you here are historians of the Reformation, or of the period during the Civil War, what I’ve been saying may sound very familiar indeed. This was the argument of the more extreme Reformers and many of the Puritan party. It was not enough to reform gently—the way advocated by Luther and, to a lesser degree, by Cranmer—but it was necessary to obliterate all trace of untruth, no matter how closely held, in order to create a new and right Church and society.

It is no exaggeration to call such a perspective ‘radical’ and the key note was discontinuity with the past, both in medium and message. I cannot help but bring in our old friend T.S. Eliot at this point to make an observation. In his essay *The Idea of a Christian Society* he critiques exactly this sort of radical approach, an approach so often taken by those who self-identify as ‘Liberals’, though, I might add also in recent years by those who call themselves ‘Conservatives’. What Eliot notes is a tendency, often grounded in good desires, to destroy what exists in an effort to create something new and better. He cautions,

Our point of departure is more real to us than our destination; and the destination is likely to present a very different picture when arrived at, from the vaguer image formed in imagination. By destroying traditional social habits of the people, by dissolving their natural collective consciousness into individual constituents... Liberalism can prepare the way for that which is its own negation: the artificial, mechanized or brutalized control which is the desperate remedy for its chaos.¹²

Eliot, like all thinkers, was, as they say, a product of his time. For him, the opposite of an organically-developed society was a mechanised one. We may find ourselves facing quite literal dis-integration rather than a straightjacket of fascistical brutality, but his point still stands. Sometimes we think we’re doing the right thing but what is actually happening is that we are sowing the seeds of discord and self-negation.

The modernising party of which Hammond was a typical member, erudite, articulate, confident, sought to further the growth of the Church. They wanted to see parishes and congregations full of thinking, lively, believing people who were, as the apostle says, ‘of one mind’, living in charity with one another and praising God with all their intelligence, their creativity, and in all of their actions. Medieval, out. Modern, in.

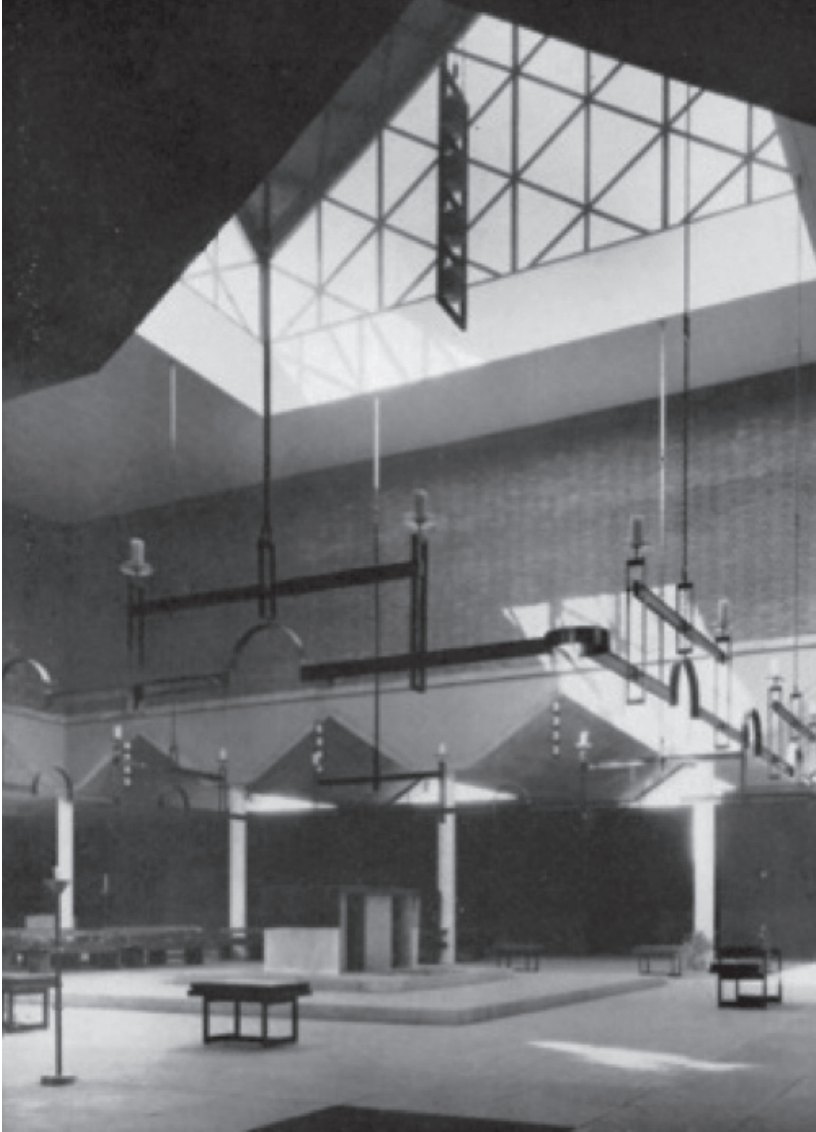
11 Hammond, p.35.

12 T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), p.49.

Style and Substance

Modernity in many forms became good taste because it was actually good. The moral quality the Victorians had attributed to the Gothic came to be associated with the 'Modern'.

Before we judge whether anything was achieved by this enterprise, let's look at another building, one that exemplifies the ideals put forward in *Liturgy and Architecture* and one that is still praised today as a stellar example of modern design.



St Paul's, Bow Common was consecrated in 1960. Reflecting on the ideas that informed his design, the architect Robert Maguire noted that 'Patterns of worship [that] developed through the Victorian and Edwardian and between-wars periods... were predominantly non-participatory, characterised by private devotion even though communally performed, and exhortation to the individual conscience from the pulpit.'¹³ His concern, and that of his working partner Keith Murray, was that their design should not foster any of these unhelpful attributes. Thus the church is designed in the round with the altar at the centre of the people, suggesting as much as possible a non-hierarchical community. There are no screens to suggest that something is taking place 'up there'. There is no sense of nave and aisles, but rather a great open space surrounded by a processional pathway articulated by columns and entered through a small octagonal porch. Chapels, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and for the reserved sacrament, project to the north and east, providing some respite from the otherwise unarticulated brick walls. The whole is lighted from above by an enormous lantern. The typical furnishings of an Anglican parish church are nowhere to be seen and even the font is placed to one side of the processional pathway rather than, as by now expected, at the west directly opposite the altar.

The newness of the scheme is clear. It represented a new theology embodied in a new manner of liturgical performance which itself demanded a new architectural context. As Maguire later said, 'The very spatial character of the building has to be such that it promotes in each individual person the conviction of belonging: inclusive space.'¹⁴ The inclusion of all individuals on an equal basis, the expectation of the same kind of participation from each person, even the lack of thick piers behind which one could hide oneself from the rest of the assembly (perhaps to rest from the stress of being in the presence of others) betrays, in my view, a fundamental misunderstanding of the function of religion in society and of the role of individual religious experience.

Maguire and Murray planned a church that functioned well for its intended purpose. It was a container for the liturgy and, in this respect at least, is very much like St Alban's that we examined before. What it failed to do, however, was to evoke. I don't mean that it was a design entirely without resonance since the layout of the church is loosely that of some of the centrally-planned churches of Rome and Ravenna, but apart from

13 Maguire in Charles Lutyens' catalogue for the exhibition 'Being in the World' (2011) quoted on St Paul's Bow Common website: 'Founding Principles.'

14 Ibid.

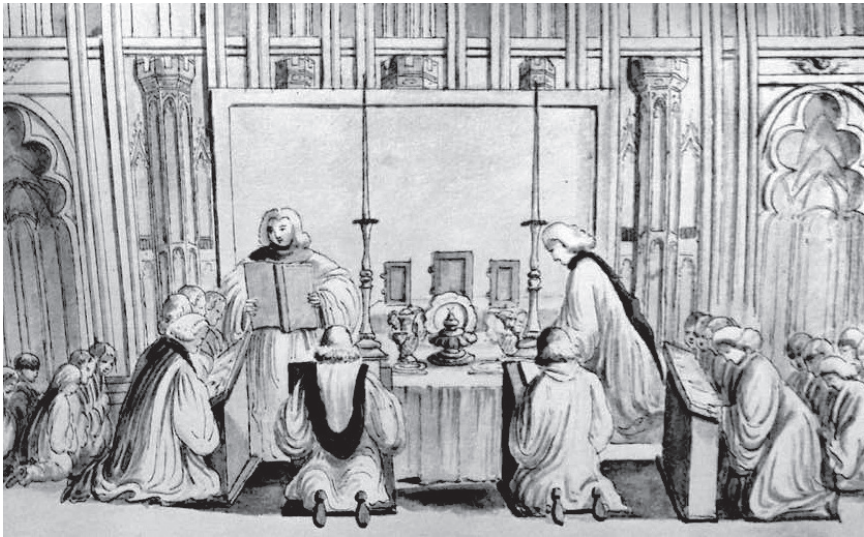
the most abstracted elements, it lacked the necessary stylistic cues which so helpfully denote historical context and signal to the worshipper that the building comes from somewhere and is leading to somewhere, that the worship it contains has an origin in the worship of our fathers and mothers, that the faith it enshrines carries a family resemblance and is therefore trustworthy.

The modernising tendency that appeared in architecture and liturgy may have possessed some of those resemblances for the academic who knew his primitive liturgies and his early-Church architecture but for the majority of lay people there was a disconnect. What they knew was what they had seen and, possibly, what they had been told by their parents and grandparents. Even well-grounded radicalism that could be demonstrably correct was, in its very nature as 'radical', breaking with the immediate past and, ironically, erecting a barrier more real to the average parishioner than were the rood screens the anti-medievalists so decried.

So again we return to the question of medium and message. What was correct about Hammond's central claim is that medium and message are linked. But what he failed to recognise, what Hebert failed to understand thirty years earlier, is that both medium and message are received and interpreted. What the originator of the message intended to say is not always what the receiver hears, however ostensibly clear the medium of communication. The modernisers came up with a tremendous vision for how style would change the Church and, in some ways it did. We are all familiar with the trope of the 'custom designed' freestanding altar placed at or near the centre of a church, very often in a style out of keeping with the surrounding interior. That in Ely cathedral is perhaps the most recent example and, to my mind, looks rather more like a cocktail bar than a Holy Table. But just as the overt modernity of St Paul's, Bow Common never really took hold here in England, neither did the neo-primitive vision of the community united in heart and mind and physically united around the altar. It didn't suit the temperament of the receivers, the parishioners of the Church of England.

Perhaps this is a shame. In our current days of disunity we might all benefit from being closer to each other in a spirit of charity and in the knowledge of God. Davies, Hammond, and others like Gregory Dix, Basil Minchin, and even relative conservatives like Addleshaw and Etchells whose scholarly book *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship* did much to shape the thinking of a generation of Anglican clergymen, failed to grasp the need for familiarity and respect for collective memory that

enables growth to happen organically. Had they paid greater attention to the spirit of the Book of Common Prayer rather than its red letters, they might have achieved more and better. For in the seventeenth century the invitation 'Draw near with faith' was a real invitation to physical as well as intellectual and spiritual movement. From the nave into the chancel moved the congregation, old and young together, rich and poor shoulder to shoulder, without hierarchy, leaving status behind at the rood screen, to kneel together before God. It wasn't medieval theology that drove this action, but the recovery of something of the primitive spirit adapted to the conditions and the stylistic and architectural context that already existed in the parishes.



At the beginning of this lecture I asked whether, if the message is to be heard, the medium must adapt. Well, the radicals of the twentieth century tried it: has the message been heard? If not, perhaps a return to the old ways is now in order. Back to the sources and, for English religion, back to the Prayer Book and, from there, to the future which, I suspect, may turn out to be a lot more like the past than any of us might expect.

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The Prayer Book and the English Novel

JOHN SCRIVENER

‘A man who has not read Homer is like a man who has not seen the ocean. There is a great object of which he has no idea’ (so, somewhere, says Walter Bagehot). The Book of Common Prayer is a ‘great object’, or a great fact, of English Life, from the second half of the sixteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century—unexampled in its reach and continuousness of presence, more widely known than any text other than the Bible, more frequently performed—even today—than the most popular of plays. And familiar not only to loyal conformists but to dissenters too—until 1837, after all, no Christian marriage could be solemnised with legal effect other than in the Church of England, and until 1880 there were many parts of the country where, since the only burial ground was Anglican, only the Prayer Book burial rite could be used at the interment. So the words of the Prayer Book had currency too among the non-conformists. Moreover, where the Prayer Book’s influence on literature specifically is concerned we should be struck by the number of our important writers who were themselves clergy of the Church of England: George Herbert, John Donne, Jonathan Swift, Lawrence Sterne, George Crabbe among others. Still more striking, perhaps, is the number of major writers who have been sons and daughters of the clergy—for example, Andrew Marvell, Jane Austen, ST Coleridge, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Lewis Carroll. It would be tedious to attempt a list of all such writers, let alone of all writers who have been mere inconspicuous lay people, but it is worth recording that even some of those who drifted away from the faith, continued sometimes to attend church, like Thomas Hardy, and that some of our most conspicuous Roman Catholic writers—John Henry Newman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene—were Anglican by upbringing

And in this connection we perhaps ought to notice two others who, though for the most part living their lives at a critical, sometimes fiercely critical, distance from the Church, nevertheless requested Church of England funerals—William Blake and George Orwell.¹

1 Blake was buried in Bunhill Fields, the dissenters’ burial ground. ‘In answer to his wife’s questions’, we are told, ‘he had replied that he did not himself mind where he lay, but it might as well be where

This penetration and presence in English life of the Prayer Book, this existence as a 'great object' seems to set up a huge presumption, *prima facie*, in favour of the influence of the BCP on our culture, but we ought to enter a couple of caveats. Firstly of course the idea of 'cultural influence'—so easy and natural to us—would have been puzzling to the men of the sixteenth century; it might easily have suggested occult planetary influences on crops or husbandry. But had we succeeded in explaining the concept it would not have appeared to them as something to be aimed at. Thomas Cranmer showed great literary skill in fashioning the first English liturgies but his object plainly was, in his own words, 'the setting forth of God's honour and glory' and the promotion of 'a most perfect and godly living'. In so far as the Book of Common Prayer has successfully done these things it will have influenced the religious and moral tone of our literature, but an influence of this kind is essentially unquantifiable. It will have been, to borrow a phrase of George Eliot's, 'incalculably diffusive'.

Something analogous might be said of the book's influence on the language—for the most part it lies too deep for inspection. What Swift said in the eighteenth century about the Prayer Book and Authorised Version having a stabilising effect on the language by being read out so frequently seems intuitively right but is difficult to demonstrate or quantify.² It is needless to add that this deep influence on the national character and language will affect the whole of English literature directly or remotely.

Perhaps it should be said that 'influence' is a tricky concept in any case and it was no doubt natural enough that the old idea of a sort of intangible planetary emanation should be developed with a wider application. There is a saying of the historian Buckle that the objection 'to generalisations respecting the development of the intellect of a nation is, not that they want certainty, but that they lack precision'. We may be certain that an influence is real without being able to specify

others of his family had been buried, and that he would wish the service to be that of the Church of England'

In the case of Orwell his will, made very shortly before his death, requested that he be buried according to the rites of the Church of England in the nearest convenient churchyard to wherever he should die. His wishes were carried out, not without difficulty, by his executors and he was buried at Sutton Courtney in Oxfordshire through the influence of David Astor. The vicar G.R. Dunstan—later a distinguished moral theologian—agreed, with the proviso that he must have the consent of his two churchwardens. One of these, a local farmer, is said to have been initially reluctant but came round on being told that the man who was to be buried had written a book called *Animal Farm*.

2 But see Ian Robinson's *The Establishment of English Prose* (1998)

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how it has worked with any great exactitude. That the Prayer Book has had a shaping influence on English life, language and literature seems an irresistible proposition, but attempts to illustrate it tend to content themselves with a few well-worn examples. My proposal is to look at the presence of the Book of Common Prayer in the work of some of our best novelists, and to consider what we can learn from it.

There have been prose narratives and fictions for millennia, but the 'Rise of the Novel' in the modern sense has been identified with the English eighteenth-century novelists Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, and was so identified, as something new, by French writers: Rousseau, Diderot and Mme de Stael for example. The details of the history do not concern us here, but as the new form came to maturity with the great novelists of the nineteenth century its expressive possibilities became so wide that it became the preeminent literary genre—and not only in this country of course. The novelist can move freely between descriptions of outward surroundings whether in or out of doors and the inward thoughts and sensations of individual characters; he can report dialogue, but also describe the accompanying tones and gestures of those conversing—he can create, in short, an immersive and convincing experience which seems 'real', 'true to life', and so on. Of course this is not a simple achievement and there would be much to say in another context as to the subtle ways in which writers manage to create this effect. The rise of the novel to preeminence runs from roughly the mid-eighteenth century to the present day, though it may be that the greatest and most characteristic realist novels in English are those of the mid-Victorian period.

What follows is obviously not exhaustive, but I believe that the kinds of ways in which the Prayer Book appears in English novels which I describe are probably representative.

Firstly we find many passing verbal references to the Prayer Book: quotations, allusions and sometimes adaptations. At the flattest end, as with other prose, a novelist may write 'The King's Arms was owned by Thomas Cribb, champion heavyweight of England. All sorts and conditions of men, from titled gentlemen to coal heavers, frequented it'.³ This is the minimal use, close to the use of idioms or proverbial phrases: the author may know where it comes from, but the reader needn't. Similar phrases would be 'outward and visible sign' or—a favourite with schoolmasters in my youth—'read mark learn and inwardly digest'. Uses of this kind

3 From Georgette Heyer's *Regency Buck*.

normally lack any significant charge from the original context. More edged are those quotations which are used for ironic purposes—the irony being directed not against the Prayer Book words but the person or action accompanying them, as when the wedding vows are quoted in ironic counterpoint to the loveless Dombey marriage in *Dombey and Son*, or when, in Joseph Conrad's great novel *Chance*, the ruined speculator and con man de Barral complains that he is the victim of 'envy, malice and all uncharitableness'. Sometimes the irony cuts both ways, as in the description of the unloved Sir Pitt Crawley's funeral in *Vanity Fair*, whose funeral train includes:

the family in black coaches, with their handkerchiefs up to their noses, ready for the tears which did not come: the undertaker and his gentleman in deep tribulation: the select tenantry mourning out of compliment to the new landlord: the neighbouring gentry's carriages at three miles an hour, empty, and in profound affliction: the parson speaking out the formula about 'our dear brother departed'. As long as we have a man's body, we play our vanities on it, surrounding it with humbug and ceremonies, laying it in state and packing it up in gilt nails and velvet: and we finish our duties by placing over it a stone written all over with lies.

The deceased has been a degenerate old scoundrel and hardly anyone's dear brother, but the description also attacks the liturgical requirement of using the same formula regardless of the merits of the deceased—an old argument of course.

We ought to add to our list, too, the use of Prayer Book phrases as novel titles—eg Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, Agatha Christie's *N or M?* Robertson Davies's *Leaven of Malice* and PD James' *Devices and Desires*. Probably not much is lost in these cases if the reader doesn't recognise the source, but there is another class of borrowings where there would be a loss—those cases where a BCP phrase is deliberately misquoted, reversed or varied for parodic purposes, as when Captain Cuttle, in *Dombey and Son*, mangles the definition of a sacrament in the Catechism, or when Leopold Bloom, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, reverses the Prayer Book's 'In the midst of life we are in death' to become 'in the midst of death we are in life' (appropriate enough for a man walking at the time through a large cemetery); or when Rose Macaulay transforms 'in quires and places where they sing' into 'in drawing rooms and places where they chat'⁴

4 Rose Macaulay, *Told by an Idiot* (1923)

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Sometimes one is unsure whether there is a verbal allusion or not. In *Mansfield Park* the Price family leave their somewhat chaotic household to attend morning service at the Garrison Chapel in Portsmouth—they are looking their best: ‘Sunday made her a very creditable and tolerably cheerful looking Mrs Price, coming abroad with a fine family of children, feeling a little respite of her weekly cares, and only discomposed if she saw her boys run into danger, or Rebecca pass by with a flower in her hat’. Is ‘run into danger’ a conscious echo of ‘neither run into any kind of danger’ from Morning Prayer? Or is it just an unconscious tug from the context? One can’t be sure.⁵

At any rate fleeting verbal allusions to and quotations from the Prayer Book are certainly very common in novels, but in many cases they aren’t doing work much different from what they are called on to do in ordinary non-fictional prose; and often enough no doubt they are used for not much more than a rather specious decoration.

Sometimes the Prayer Book is referred to as a book, the physical volume. Consider this on Mr Osborne’s library in *Vanity Fair*:

From year’s end to year’s end he never took one of these volumes from the shelf . . . except upon those rare Sunday evenings when there was no dinner party, and when the great scarlet Bible and Prayer Book were taken out from the corner where they stood beside his copy of the Peerage, and the servants being rung up to the dining parlour, Osborne read the evening service to the family in a loud grating pompous voice

A more complex moment can be found in Philip Larkin’s *A Girl in Winter*. The female protagonist is returning someone’s handbag, left in a shop. She is invited in by Miss Parbury, who makes tea. Miss Parbury lives with her bedridden, invalid mother whom she looks after. It emerges that she has a suitor who will only marry her if she puts the mother in a home. At one point Katherine looks around the room while her hostess is in the kitchen, ‘where she could be heard rattling spoons and saucers and singing what sounded like a hymn. There was a small Book of Common Prayer lying on the sideboard bound in crimson.’ The hymn and the Prayer Book focus her dilemma using a kind of shorthand—it is

5 Similarly when John Ruskin writes, in his *Elements of Drawing* of using crumbs of bread to erase faults in drawing, and writes that ‘besides, you waste the good bread, which is wrong; and your drawing will not for a long while be worth the crumbs’, one finds oneself wondering whether some faint reminiscence of the Prayer Of Humble Access is not somewhere about in the association of crumbs and worthiness. Or is one imagining things?

really her duty to care for the ailing mother, but she may miss a chance of happiness. The scene is sad, gesturing towards the kind of hidden lives whose depiction in Barbara Pym's novels Larkin admired.

Of course words from the book and the physical book can be combined: in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, Mr Dorrit returns to his room in the Marshalsea prison where his daughter Amy awaits him with a meal. It is Sunday evening: 'There the table was laid for his supper, and his old grey gown was ready for him on his chair-back at the fire. His daughter put her little prayer book in her pocket – had she been praying for pity on all prisoners and captives? – and rose to welcome him'. This brief moment precedes that great and painfully-moving scene in which old Dorrit comes to a momentary self-realisation: he has been twenty years in the debtor's prison and has built up a kind of self-protective fiction of himself as the Father of the Marshalsea, receiver of honourable testimonials and universal respect. The façade collapses because he finds himself hinting to his daughter that she should lead on the turnkey's son, who has fallen in love with her, so as to avoid any unpleasant consequences to himself. She remains lovingly silent and by sheer force of being what she is, brings on a terrible glimpse of himself as a 'squalid disgraced wretch'. The preliminary mention of the Prayer Book and the quote from the Litany discreetly intimate, without emphasising, her Christian inspiration; the quiet putting aside of the book its lack of ostentation. Amy Dorrit might be said to incarnate in a true form the virtues enjoined in the Catechism—love and succour towards her father, submission, lowliness and reverence, labour and duty—she is not only the 'child of the Marshalsea' but a child of the Catechism, but Dickens makes her seem possible, even natural, through his artistry in handling her multiple relations and endowing her with a kind of passive power.⁶

Dickens is perhaps the greatest of our novelists, so perhaps I should say something more of his relation to the Church and the Prayer Book. He was an Anglican by upbringing of course, and though he for a time in later life attended a Unitarian chapel out of admiration of the minister, he remained one. He was a very untheological and undogmatic Christian, standing by the Jesus of the Gospels as he understood him, and having a great dislike of Church quarrels and divisions. His works abound of course in religious hypocrites, and in parodies of their lamentable jargon—think of Mr Chadband. His picture of the established Church is

6 But compare Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*, who has been taught to be 'umble and know his place at a charity school—the difference of sex is also relevant of course. It is native to literature and especially prose fiction to explore how precepts make their way in different lives, circumstances, temperaments.

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less hostile, but churches are often depicted as rotting and dilapidated, and the clergy as irrelevant if sometimes kindly. The exception is Mr Milvey in Dickens's last completed novel *Our Mutual Friend*, the sympathetic but harrassed vicar of a demanding parish, whose parochial duties are realistically portrayed, and whose voice is 'not untroubled' when reading over the grave of the heroic Betty Higden the words of the burial service 'We give thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world.' 'Not untroubled' because of the circumstances of the case and the thoughtless way in which the words may be read.

In fact references to the Prayer Book and its services are quite common in Dickens, and often dwell on our right relation to its words. There is this from *David Copperfield*:

Again, the dreaded Sunday comes round, and I file into the old pew first, like a guarded captive brought to a condemned service. Again, Miss Murdstone, in a black velvet gown, that looks as if it had been made out of a pall, follows close upon me; then my mother; then her husband. There is no Peggotty now, as in the old time. Again, I listen to Miss Murdstone mumbling the responses, and emphasizing all the dread words with a cruel relish. Again, I see her dark eyes roll round the church when she says 'miserable sinners', as if she were calling all the congregation names. Again, I catch rare glimpses of my mother, moving her lips timidly between the two, with one of them muttering at each ear like low thunder. Again, I wonder with a sudden fear whether it is likely that our good old clergyman can be wrong, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone right, and that all the angels in Heaven can be destroying angels. Again, if I move a finger or relax a muscle of my face, Miss Murdstone pokes me with her prayer-book, and makes my side ache.

The Prayer Book and its words become offensive weapons here. And there is this from *Dombey and Son*, at the Christening of young Paul

Then the clergyman, an amiable and mild-looking young curate, but obviously afraid of the baby, appeared like the principal character in a ghost-story, 'a tall figure all in white;' at sight of whom Paul rent the air with his cries, and never left off again till he was taken out black in the face.

Even when that event had happened, to the great relief of everybody, he was heard under the portico, during the rest of the ceremony,

now fainter, now louder, now hushed, now bursting forth again with an irrepressible sense of his wrongs. This so distracted the attention of the two ladies, that Mrs. Chick was constantly deploying into the centre aisle, to send out messages by the pew-opener, while Miss Tox kept her Prayer-book open at the Gunpowder Plot, and occasionally read responses from that service.

During the whole of these proceedings, Mr. Dombey remained as impassive and gentlemanly as ever, and perhaps assisted in making it so cold, that the young curate smoked at the mouth as he read. The only time that he unbent his visage in the least, was when the clergyman, in delivering (very unaffectedly and simply) the closing exhortation, relative to the future examination of the child by the sponsors, happened to rest his eye on Mr. Chick; and then Mr. Dombey might have been seen to express by a majestic look, that he would like to catch him at it.

It might have been well for Mr. Dombey, if he had thought of his own dignity a little less; and had thought of the great origin and purpose of the ceremony in which he took so formal and so stiff a part, a little more. His arrogance contrasted strangely with its history.

The criticism here, obviously, is directed at Dombey, not at the ‘amiable curate’ who reads ‘very unaffectedly and simply’, and not at the service itself. Dickens makes something of a motif of the occasional offices in *Dombey*, as christening succeeds funeral, and funeral christening, and both are succeeded by the second marriage of Dombey, we are reminded that these same events have taken place in the same church, emphasising Dickens’ desire to effect an interweaving of life and death. And we should remember that elsewhere in the novel the simple and good-hearted Captain Cuttle on learning of the supposed death of Walter Gay:

put on his spectacles . . . and opened the prayer book at the burial service. And reading softly to himself, in the little back parlour, and stopping now and then to wipe his eyes, . . . in a true and simple spirit committed Walter’s body to the deep.

And that the same Captain Cuttle later in the novel ‘reads out of a Prayer book the forms of prayer appointed to be read at sea’ and ‘being heartily in earnest, read the service to the very last line, and with genuine feeling too; and approving of it very much when he had done, turned in, under the counter . . . with a serene breast and a most benevolent visage’

In Dickens then, I suggest, the services become a kind of test—of

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one's sincerity, of one's 'heart'. And this applies, too, to the manner in which the service is read: negligence and artificiality are deplored, and there is a world of difference between the clergyman at a pauper's funeral in *Oliver Twist* who reads 'as much of the Burial service as could be compressed into four minutes' and the clergyman described in 'Sunday Under Three Heads':⁷

The impressive service of the Church of England was spoken – not merely read – by a grey-headed minister, and the responses delivered by his auditors, with an air of sincere devotion as far removed from affectation or display as from coldness or indifference . . . The discourse was plain, unpretending, and well-adapted to the comprehension of the hearers.

This is evidently something like Dickens' ideal.

What we note in Dickens is a new freedom—the freedom of the novel as a form—in depicting services, and in noting the thoughts, the inattentions, the incidentals of public worship, and its dramatic possibilities. The most famous dramatic effect of this kind I suppose is in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Jane is at the altar with Rochester, and the clergyman has just read the words asking if there is any impediment to the marriage

He paused, as the custom is. When is the pause after that sentence ever broken by reply? Not, perhaps, once in a hundred years. And the clergyman, who had not lifted his eyes from his book, and had held his breath but for a moment, was proceeding: his hand was already stretched towards Mr. Rochester, as his lips unclosed to ask, 'Wilt thou have this woman for thy wedded wife?' when a distinct and near voice said – 'The marriage cannot go on: I declare the existence of an impediment.'

It must always have been possible for services to go wrong, but as far as I know Charlotte Brontë was the first to seize this particular opportunity, and should probably be regarded as the ultimate source for those 'scenes' at weddings and funerals so beloved by the TV Soaps. But the freedom of the novel is a more inward thing, allowing the novelist to enter different centres of consciousness, and to explore the most intimate thoughts of the heart. Reticence would perhaps have prevented any nineteenth-

7 To be found with *Reprinted Pieces* in the Oxford edition.

century novelist from extending this freedom to Holy Communion, but Patrick White, to my mind the greatest post-war novelist in English does this in his *Tree of Man*. The service is 1662 Holy Communion, and the setting Australian, but only the Comfortable Words are actually quoted. What we have rather are the accompanying sensations and thoughts of the three members of the Parker family as they approach the sacrament. The passage is too long to quote in full, but here is Stan Parker at the rail as he waits to receive the cup:

The light shone on the dust of the carpet, of which the pattern had worn away. Weariness was almost bliss. The flowers of the vases were so taut, so tight, that only a law of nature was preventing them from flying apart from strength of their own stillness.

The words were falling like precious blood as the priest brought the cup to each. There was nothing between them now except his large wrists. The cup and the words dissolved most mercifully, so that with some, who were particularly grateful and ashamed of themselves, the wine gurgled hotly at the backs of their mouths.

This is bold writing, but thoroughly incarnational. If one knows the form of service it provides an undergirding to the passage as a whole.⁸

This is an approach we cannot imagine Jane Austen favouring, but it is to her *Mansfield Park* and to George Eliot's *Silas Marner* I want to turn for my final examples. Both are striking and I think unusual in that the Prayer Book and its use are very closely intertwined with the central themes of the two novels

Jane Austen was the daughter of a clergyman and a loyal member of the Church of England. The family's churchmanship seems to have been of the old 'high and dry' sort, but we know very little about the process by which she moved from her 1809 remark 'I do not like the Evangelicals' to the rather different 'I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals' of 1814, the year in which *Mansfield Park* was published. It is not correct to say that the novel is 'about' ordination⁹, but ordination plays an important part in it: Edmund Bertram's determination to seek orders and to be a proper resident priest in the parish available to him

8 George Orwell shows a similar freedom, though with a different intention, in his treatment of Holy Communion at the beginning of *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935)

9 I think it is now agreed that when she writes to her sister 'I will now try to write of something else, and it shall be a complete change of subject—ordination', she is referring to a change of subject in the letter she is then writing, not a change of subject between two novels. She feels she has been writing too much about *Pride and Prejudice*, and it is time to change the subject. Cassandra had evidently been pursuing some enquiries about the mechanics of ordination for her, while staying with a clerical brother.

is not to the liking of the woman he loves, Mary Crawford. At the same time the determination to be a resident influence, approved by his father, contrasts with Sir Thomas's own non-residence at Mansfield Park while visiting his estates in Antigua—an absence with lamentable consequences. The value of residence is emphasised in the discussion in the chapel during the tour of Sotherton. Mrs Rushworth remarks that the chapel 'was formerly in constant use both morning and evening. Prayers were always read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many; but the late Mr. Rushworth left it off'. Mary Crawford replies that 'every generation has its improvements', while Fanny Price maintains that 'it is a pity that the custom should have been discontinued . . . a whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine!' There follows what is in effect a debate about the virtues of a set liturgy:

'Very fine indeed,' said Miss Crawford, laughing. 'It must do the heads of the family a great deal of good to force all the poor housemaids and footmen to leave business and pleasure, and say their prayers here twice a day, while they are inventing excuses themselves for staying away.'

'That is hardly Fanny's idea of a family assembling,' said Edmund. 'If the master and mistress do not attend themselves, there must be more harm than good in the custom.'

'At any rate, it is safer to leave people to their own devices on such subjects. Everybody likes to go their own way—to chuse their own time and manner of devotion. The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time—altogether it is a formidable thing, and what nobody likes . . . Cannot you imagine with what unwilling feelings the former belles of the house of Rushworth did many a time repair to this chapel? The young Mrs. Eleanors and Mrs. Bridgets—starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very different—especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at—and, in those days, I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now.'

For a few moments she was unanswered. Fanny coloured and looked at Edmund, but felt too angry for speech; and he needed a little recollection before he could say, 'Your lively mind can hardly be serious even on serious subjects. You have given us an amusing sketch, and human nature cannot say it was not so. We must all feel at times the difficulty of fixing our thoughts as we could wish; but if you are supposing it a frequent thing, that is to say, a weakness

grown into a habit from neglect, what could be expected from the private devotions of such persons? Do you think the minds which are suffered, which are indulged in wanderings in a chapel, would be more collected in a closet?’

‘Yes, very likely. They would have two chances at least in their favour. There would be less to distract the attention from without, and it would not be tried so long.’

‘The mind which does not struggle against itself under one circumstance, would find objects to distract it in the other, I believe; and the influence of the place and of example may often rouse better feelings than are begun with. The greater length of the service, however, I admit to be sometimes too hard a stretch upon the mind. One wishes it were not so; but I have not yet left Oxford long enough to forget what chapel prayers are.’

Edmund’s arguments are essentially those of Dr Johnson, much admired by Jane Austen.

Among the consequences of Sir Thomas’s absence is the decision of the young people to mount a performance of *Lover’s Vows*—a decision opposed by both Edmund and Fanny. It is not so much that Jane Austen simply disapproves of amateur theatricals, but rather that the ‘performance’ involved raises questions about role and integrity which in turn are related to the question concerning residence and non-residence. These matters lie behind the explicit discussion of liturgy later in the novel. Edmund and Henry Crawford are discussing reading out loud, listened to by Fanny on whom Henry is pressing his attentions.

‘Even in my profession,’ said Edmund, with a smile, ‘how little the art of reading has been studied! How little a clear manner, and good delivery, have been attended to! I speak rather of the past, however, than the present. There is now a spirit of improvement abroad; but among those who were ordained twenty, thirty, forty years ago, the larger number, to judge by their performance, must have thought reading was reading, and preaching was preaching. It is different now. The subject is more justly considered . . . in every congregation there is a larger proportion who know a little of the matter, and who can judge and criticise.’

Edmund had already gone through the service once since his ordination; and upon this being understood, he had a variety of questions from Crawford as to his feelings and success; questions, which being made, though with the vivacity of friendly interest

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and quick taste, without any touch of that spirit of banter or air of levity which Edmund knew to be most offensive to Fanny, he had true pleasure in satisfying; and when Crawford proceeded to ask his opinion and give his own as to the properest manner in which particular passages in the service should be delivered, shewing it to be a subject on which he had thought before, and thought with judgment, Edmund was still more and more pleased . . .

‘Our liturgy,’ observed Crawford, ‘has beauties, which not even a careless, slovenly style of reading can destroy; but it has also redundancies and repetitions which require good reading not to be felt. For myself, at least, I must confess being not always so attentive as I ought to be (here was a glance at Fanny); that nineteen times out of twenty I am thinking how such a prayer ought to be read, and longing to have it to read myself. Did you speak?’ stepping eagerly to Fanny ‘I fancied you might be going to tell me I ought to be more attentive, and not *allow* my thoughts to wander. Are not you going to tell me so?’

And Crawford proceeds to describe how he would wish to preach a sermon now and then before a fashionable congregation, but ‘not for a constancy’.

The passage makes clear that there is nothing improper, even on Fanny’s rather strict view, about discussing socially the ‘properest’ way of reading the liturgy, even in relation to ‘particular passages’; nor is it improper to discuss the ‘beauties’ which will survive even bad reading or the ‘redundancies’ which require superior powers. (How much we should like to know Jane Austen’s views as to the two classes!) Where Crawford begins to part company with Fanny is in his confession of being less attentive to the service than to thoughts about how he might better read it himself. Like an actor he imagines reading the service or preaching a sermon as temporary performances rather than as features of a fully-inhabited and permanent role. In short the novel, Jane Austen’s most experimental, is preoccupied with characteristically modern concerns about sincerity and authenticity, and the discussions of liturgy are central to the articulation of these concerns.

George Eliot’s use of the Prayer Book in *Silas Marner* is similarly functional, though with a different purpose. Mary Anne Evans had a conventional Church upbringing, which was followed in early youth by an intense Evangelical phase.¹⁰ This in turn was succeeded by a period

¹⁰ Church Evangelical, that is: in a letter from this period she can be found discussing one of the collects.

in which her orthodox faith was eroded; she translated Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*—a gruelling process, during part of which she had before her an image of Christ for relief. The loss of faith was painful, but when she came to translate Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* she could feel that faith had in some sort been recovered in a new form. The qualities which mankind had projected outward as God could be re-appropriated for a religion of this world. Her imagination remained in important respects Christian, so much so that the early *Scenes of Clerical Life* was thought to have been written by a clergyman. Throughout her life she read the Bible every day, and when her consort G.H. Lewes died and she married John Cross the marriage service was that of the Church of England. Her funeral was also Prayer Book, though with discreet Unitarian omissions.

Silas Marner is the tale of a weaver who having been expelled, unjustly, from a non-conformist chapel in an industrial town goes south and settles into a solitary existence in a country district. The theft of his savings and the discovery of an abandoned child whom he adopts bring him into new relations with his village neighbours. For one thing, their spokesman Dolly Winthrop tells him, the child must be christened.¹¹ Marner doesn't know what this is, but she explains to him that it is his duty:

to bring her up like christened folks' children, and take her to church, and let her learn her catechize, as my little Aaron can say off—the 'I believe' and everything, and 'hurt nobody by word or deed'—as well as if he was the clerk.

She is equally puzzled by what he tells her of the old chapel:

... folks in your old country niver saying prayers by heart, nor saying 'em out of a book, they must be wonderful clever; for if I didn't know 'Our Father' and little bits o' good words as I can carry out o' church wi' me, I might down on my knees every night, but nothing could I say.

When Marner begins to attend church it is as if he has to learn a new religion. I think it must be admitted that George Eliot rather exaggerates this; after all, Marner would hear a good deal of Scripture read in church with which he would be familiar. This illustrates I think what is distinctively new about Silas Marner's use of the Prayer Book: it forms part of a kind of sociological portrait of village and church life. The different ways in which

¹¹ Conditionally, presumably.

The Prayer Book and the English Novel

beliefs and texts adhere to different patterns of communal life means that they can be treated in effect as belonging to different religions. In the religion of Raveloe, village and church life are bound up together and the Prayer Book is coterminous with them—representing a kind of horizon; as the Parish Clerk Mr Macey says ‘there’s windings i’ things as they may carry you to the far end o’ the prayer book afore you get back to ‘em’. ‘To the far end’, but not farther. When Eppie, the foundling child now grown up, hands her Prayer Book to Marner on leaving church towards the end of the novel (‘come, come, let me carry your prayer book, else you’ll be dropping it, jumping i’ that way’) it is an emblem of his full incorporation in the community to which he was once a distrusted stranger. It should be added though that, as always in George Eliot, the sociological distance is mellowed by the warmth of recollection—she is remembering the pre-Reform country life of her childhood.¹²

The thematic use of the Book of Common Prayer by Jane Austen and George Eliot is unusual. More common, I think, have been the kind of glancing references which I exemplified earlier. What conclusions can be drawn? I would suggest the following, tentatively.

The pervasive presence I suggested earlier is certainly borne out by the number of casual allusions one comes across in the course of ordinary reading. The period during which the novel as a form rose to pre-eminence was one of rapid social change, to which the novelists were especially sensitive. It was a signal feature of the Prayer Book that it didn’t change—it remained the same, even as moral and religious sensibilities altered. The Prayer Book could therefore serve as a kind of landmark or standard: it seems often to be this in Dickens’ work, where the words and intent of the service serve as a measure of a character’s failings. Miss Murdstone weaponises the Prayer Book against others, but the judgement rebounds on her as this is necessarily a misuse.

The book’s great familiarity means that it can be used as a kind of shorthand for things that can remain unstated—the sentence in Larkin’s *A Girl in Winter* is an example in which the mere presence of the book focuses a situation. But the penalty of this familiarity can for modern readers be invisibility: the allusion goes unrecognised or is not understood.¹³ (The same may be true to some extent of churchgoing; it is assumed to be taking place and is therefore mentioned only when

12 There is a helpful discussion of *Silas Marner* by A.C.Capey in *Faith & Worship* No 25 (Autumn 1988).

13 One commentator thinks that Larkin writes of the Prayer Book ‘lying on the sideboard’ punningly—the book is mendacious. Even if the allusion is caught, then, the reaction can be obtuse.

it doesn't happen—for example Emma's finding an excuse not to go to church when it would be very awkward to encounter Mr Elton.)

The attraction of church services as dramatic settings is obvious: they enable characters to be brought together who otherwise might not meet.¹⁴ Here, again, the form and shape of the service can be assumed, allowing play to the reactions and extra-liturgical interactions of the characters, their physical sensations and stray thoughts, the appearance of the building, the manner and bearing of the minister and a hundred other things. We are all familiar with this, and take it for granted. Because the service itself can be presupposed, the author has a free rein when describing the various distractions and peripheral impressions which can accompany it. But again the assumption that what is familiar can be left undescribed may leave a present-day reader with the idea that every service consisted only of the distractions from it, which cannot always have been the intention.

It is part of the character of the greatest novels to be 'polyphonic'—to represent different centres of consciousness and their interplay. Of course there can be a dominant viewpoint, and the novel as a whole can present a total vision which may go beyond any consciously-entertained intention of the author. But there is a sense in which the viewpoints within this vision are relativised; and as the novel is a predominantly secular form there are not 'sacred novels' as there can be 'sacred poems'. This need not mean that there cannot be Christian novels, though the point has been disputed, but it does tend to have the effect of 'placing' religious practices within a broader social scene—the novelist may hint at things which go beyond this world, but such things are not describable in the repertoire of at any rate realist novels. Of course I am dealing crudely here with an immensely complex question, but it may be that the form of the novel in its classic phase demands that liturgical behaviour be on all fours with other characteristically human behaviour—that it be not representationally privileged, so to speak—though that need not preclude the novelist from evoking an especially intense experience of worship from within (as in White's *Tree of Man*).

However this may be, it does in fact seem to be true that cases of the Prayer Book being bound in with the most pressing concerns of a novel are relatively rare. And, short of a revival, they are not likely to become less so—though it would still be possible, even now, to write a novel whose centre of interest would be liturgical change.

I began by pointing to the Prayer Book as a 'great object' in English

14 As in the scene in *Bleak House* which brings together the Deadlocks and the Jarndyce party, including Esther Summerson.

life—working on our language and on our culture at a formative stage, and continuing to work over a long period, so that its presence can be expected to declare itself at different levels from casual verbal allusion to areas of formation too deep and remote to be easily discerned. The remote or indirect influence is still there, presumably, but its day to day reinforcement is now felt only by a negligible minority, and verbal allusions, for example, are likely to be found only among the oldest generation of our current writers.¹⁵ Only a widespread recovery of, and reconnection with, the country's religious inheritance will alter this; the possibility of this happening is beyond the scope of this paper.

15 The work of John le Carré (b.1931) contains quite frequent allusions to the BCP—one of his protagonists is called Cranmer, who is sent 'comfortable words' by his friend and rival (*Our Game* 1995).

Touching Mystery: The Book of Common Prayer as Liminal Space

J D RIDING

This paper explores the role of liturgy in general and the Book of Common Prayer in particular in creating and mediating liminal spaces. It outlines the concept of liminal space in a general anthropological sense and then seeks to recover the radical sense of *limen*¹ as threshold, to demonstrate how such thresholds may be found in the context of Choral Evensong services and explores their capacity to draw in the worshipper.

Liminal Space

The concept of liminal space is drawn from anthropology and has its origins in the work of Arnold van Gennep². Van Gennep (1873-1957) was born in Germany to a French mother and a Dutch father. His work on the nature and structure of human society has become foundational for modern anthropology. Anthropological theories offer new ways to understand the Church's liturgy by constructing a framework which can help us analyse moments and experiences that are often hard to interpret. The discipline offers 'a subtle way to understand the social value of religious practice' and 'is perfectly suited to the study of blurred encounters'³. Such encounters are strongly characteristic of liminal spaces and our study of them will open for us a rich seam of insight into the role of liturgical space and moment in creating these liminal phenomena.

Much of van Gennep's work focused on how individuals make the transition from one particular role in a society to another. Such transitions are commonly known as 'rites of passage' and van Gennep identified three states through which an individual passes when making such a change. The first he termed *separation* in which the individual moves away from the normality of their accustomed role, the second,

1 'a threshold, lintel or sill... a beginning/end' s.v. *limen* in Lewis & Short (1955) p.1066.

2 Van Gennep (1960).

3 Miles-Watson (2009) p.158.

transition, describes the process by which the individual moves towards the final stage of incorporation. It is the second of these states, *transition*, that is generally termed by anthropologists *liminal*, that is to say between the initial and final states and acting as a threshold the subject crosses en route from the original role towards the new role. For van Gennep this threshold is unidirectional.⁴ Van Gennep's work was taken further by Victor Turner (1920-1983) who recast van Gennep's three states as: *Separation*, *Limen* and *Aggregation*⁵ and this is how the concept is generally understood in modern anthropology.

To van Gennep's analysis of the process of transition Turner added the concept of *communitas* which he saw as arising out of liminal phenomena. He notes that the *limen* is 'a moment out of time... in and out of secular social structure' and how at the *limen* the hierarchical model of human relatedness encoded in most politico-legal-economic frameworks encounters an alternative world, unstructured, undifferentiated and non-hierarchical. Turner goes on to observe, 'Something of the sacredness of that transient humility and modelessness goes over and tempers the pride of a higher position or office ... giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond'. Here we can begin to see the relevance of this work to the Church and her liturgies. Indeed, for some expressions of church this kind of liminality is at the heart of identity. Turner saw that for mendicant and monastic communities such transitional qualities have become an institutionalised state and that this can be interpreted as liminality acting as a social leveller, stripping away the 'trappings of the secular'.⁶ Turner also notes that this '*communitas* of liminality is almost everywhere held to be sacred' and constitutes a 'generic bond of humankindness'.⁷

This sets the scene for our consideration of liturgy as creating and mediating liminal states but we need to move beyond the purely anthropological and extend our understanding of the *limen* beyond that of a unidirectional transition. With Earey⁸ we broaden our perspective to include not just moments but periods of liminality and recognise that periods of liminality need not be unidirectional but may be bi-directional and act as thresholds not only between states but also between worlds. This takes us from *separation* -> *transition* -> *incorporation* (van Gennep) via *separation* -> *limen* -> *aggregation* (Turner) to *settled state* -> *liminal moment/period* -> *settled state*. We now have a model which is a much better fit for the

4 Earey (2013) p.61.

5 Turner (2007) p.74.

6 Ibid. pp.75-78.

7 Ibid. p.83.

8 Earey (2013) pp.58-59.

daily office of the Church and her people, particularly if we imagine the process as cyclic rather than linear.

We can now move beyond van Gennep's thinking of 'life as a sequence of events and accompanying rites'⁹ and recognise the role of liminality in the 'natural rhythms of nature and the year which also help us to mark our journeys through life'. This has implications for modern liturgies that prefer their own frame of reference as Earey notes, 'Much worship that happens on a Sunday is theme-based, and the danger with theme-based worship is that it becomes static ... we learn lots about God ... but we are not necessarily changed by the act of worship'.¹⁰ This is an acute observation and might be considered in the light of Richard Rohr's comments on the distinction between sacred and profane liminal spaces, 'the church has followed post-modern civilisation by creating false liminal spaces like to profane space. Profane space has no center but rather many centers that periodically take their turn ... profane space always reflects the dominant consciousness because it knows no alternative [and] ... profane space never allows the appearance of the shadow. It would be far too threatening'.¹¹

We should acknowledge that there are many occasions when the Church's liturgy serves to mediate what we might term traditional rites of passage: Baptism, confirmation, marriage, ordination, funerals et al. are all examples of the anthropological understanding of the *limen* as a moment of transition between different states. Good liturgy articulates these moments and invites the participants to take the step across the threshold into a new place or state. Confession¹² and commendation¹³ are also examples of such events. How these moments are negotiated is key to the success of the rite and there are some particular tools that are often employed: performative words, clear and powerful symbols and coherent actions.¹⁴ Sometimes these will be geared towards a particular life event but they are equally applicable and essential to the daily cycle of prayer and confession in the Office. For the particular context of Choral Evensong we can add music to words, actions and symbols, nor should we forget the physical space in which the rite takes place which also contributes to a sense of difference and hence liminality.

Much of the Church of England has embraced the modern liturgy of *Common Worship* which forms the typical weekly pattern of worship in

9 Van Gennep quoted in Earey (2013) p.62.

10 Earey (2013) p.63.

11 Rohr (2002) quoted in Rundel (2015) p.134.

12 Earey (2013) p.162.

13 Ibid. p.200.

14 Ibid. p.217.

most parish churches. With most Sunday morning services now firmly Eucharistic, the focus of *Common Worship* on *κοινωνία* as a key (often almost the key) aspect of worship has brought an emphasis on corporate expressions of identity at the rite. One example will suffice. The creeds as expressed in *Common Worship* have rejected the traditional singular 'I' in favour of the collective 'We'.¹⁵ Some have presented this as a return to the original forms of the creeds but in fact the conciliar 'we' was only ever a device to indicate the agreement of the Bishops in council. Whenever the creeds were used liturgically, typically at Baptism, 'we' necessarily became 'I' unless the question was put to a sponsor in which case the singular s/he was employed.¹⁶ The modern focus on the gathering emphasises the communal and encourages the individual to think of Sunday worship as primarily an expression of community. The use of language and styles of music common to the secular world gives a sense of familiarity but this creates a space and moment that is almost diametrically opposed to the sense of dislocation and 'other[ness]' encountered at the *limen*. The outcome is a presentation that invites the participant into safe and familiar space where the expectation of a deeper encounter is limited.

Choral Evensong

Choral Evensong is a unique phenomenon in the twenty-first century Church of England. It is perhaps the one context within which the modern rite has made little or no impact. Its combination of archaic usage, music, language and buildings creates a space with many liminal characteristics. As a model for encounter it is both symptomatic and causal.¹⁷ Its elements are strongly symbolic, sometimes even totemic, and functioning symbolically they provide guidance and order during a moment when outward and inward lives cohere.¹⁸ This momentary coherence is a true and multi-dimensional *limen*. Seemingly disparate systems briefly touch one another and the polysemous nature of symbol allows a range of understandings to flow back and forth across the threshold, sharing something of the mystery and creating a 'space ...

15 The only ancient (8thC) source for a plural declaration is the Stowe Missal - *credimus*. Kinzig (2016).

16 Kinzig (2016).

17 McGilchrist (2009) p.97.

18 'Released for a moment from social structure, persons in liminality can relate to each other simply and fully as human beings and experience an intense quality of human communion usually impossible in structured society... It is in such moments of liminal *communitas*... that persons can be free enough to reflect on their lives or society, envision new ideas and ways of doing things, and dream new dreams. Powerful rituals latent with ultimate meanings, new or old insights, and alternative ways of interpreting reality can have their powerful impact on persons in liminal *communitas*'. Lee (2001) p.98.

distinct from that of the normal world'.¹⁹ After the encounter the worlds may well go their different ways but that sense of what Turner called *communitas* remains. With repetition it strengthens,²⁰ cementing together disparate perceptions and understandings. And if this seems hopelessly theoretical the slowly but steadily growing weekday Choral Evensong congregations in our Cathedrals and Colleges testify to its reality. Choral Evensong has become a moment in which those of any faith and none, priests, bankers, musicians, analysts, carpenters et al. can all come together, without pressure to confess anything particularly in common, and simply share in the beauty of the music, the words and the place. It is globally inclusive, turning no one away and its growing popularity demonstrates clearly that it serves a need.²¹

How does this happen? The daily office has its origins in the monastic communities.²² Part of Cranmer's genius in the Book of Common Prayer was to combine the *cultus* of cathedral worship with the contemplation of the monastery. The worship of the basilica cathedral, sited so often beside the market place and deeply embedded within the wider community, inherits the role of the ancient temples as a focus for collective identity, celebrating the lunar and solar feasts and providing a temporal framework for the cycle of collective life.²³ There is nothing inherently Christian in this but in a community that strongly identifies as Christian it becomes a powerful expression of Christianity.²⁴ In past centuries such worship was foundational to English identity but this is no longer the case. The monastery, by contrast, is more focussed upon a worship that brings each moment of the day into dialogue with God, marking the hours in prayer. It is at one and the same time both deeply introspective and focussed beyond topographical and temporal boundaries. In short, it represents a continuing state of liminality²⁵ where the threshold between the sacred and secular is thin and porous. It is from this place of continual encounter that Cranmer drew the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, combining elements from the liturgy of the hours into two moments, one at the beginning and one at the end of the day, where the bustle of the market place is set aside and the soul looks beyond.

19 Miles-Watson (2009) p.161.

20 Turner (1969) pp.166-203

21 See Plumber, Service, Bingham, Fraser, Tilby and Wyatt for more on this phenomenon.

22 Bradshaw (1992) pp.399-402 & Grisbrook J (1992) p.403ff.

23 Lane-Fox (1986) pp.66-68.

24 As in, for example, the custom of early catechists to gather in the narthex of the church: Louth (1989) p.320. See also Graf, F (2015) for wider discussion.

25 Turner (2007) p.77.

Touching Mystery: The Book of Common Prayer as Liminal Space

In Evening Prayer Cranmer brought together a powerful set of symbol and narrative. The use of Scripture within the office is not only symbolic of the Reformers' *sola scriptura*, it is the means by which the worshipper is brought into dialogue with the realities of humanity and redemption through which humankind glimpses the divine. The penitential opening, the daily cycle of psalms and the canticles frame the readings from the old and new covenants and the intercessions within the redemption narrative. This is strong stuff, speaking to a deep human need for forgiveness and acceptance. It offers an escape from what Richard Rohr calls 'a person's entrapment in normalcy' by drawing us to and across a threshold and onward into a sacred space.²⁶ The daily lectionary readings expose us to many metaphors of liminality in the scriptures such as, tomb: death -> tomb -> resurrection; wilderness: separation -> transition -> return; and exile: dislocation -> mourning -> redemption. These are powerful narratives with the ability to deconstruct 'false towers of existence and [reshape them as] a new dwelling place on the journey' speaking as they do of the need to leave behind old forms of identity so that God may be found beyond.²⁷

There is one element of the Office in particular which embeds us deeply within such narratives.²⁸ The recitation of the Psalter has, until very recently, been at the heart of the worship of the Church. In adapting it for his morning and evening office Cranmer recast the monastic weekly recital of the Psalter to take place over a month, dividing the Psalms sequentially for each morning and evening in turn. Anyone who has stood daily in the quire of a cathedral or a college chapel singing or listening to the choir reciting the Psalms will testify to their power in connecting human realities to divine redemption. Their absence from so much of modern worship²⁹ is a great and debilitating loss to the Church. They are considered by many too 'difficult' but as Brueggemann observes,³⁰ they 'are not obscure, technical or complicated' and they still hold the power to nourish and nurture.

Brueggemann divides the Psalms into three types of narrative which he sees as accompanying the worshipper from a settled stasis through

26 Rohr (1999) p.132.

27 Franks (2007) pp.215-220.

28 I am indebted to a suggestion made by an ex-colleague, Richard Wyld, who observed to me that there might be points of contact between the nature of liminal spaces and Walter Brueggemann's treatment of *The Spirituality of the Psalms*. This has proved a fruitful study and I am very grateful to him for his insight.

29 In many parishes they are never heard at the weekly Eucharist and where they are heard it is often as disembodied fragments, sanitised for post-modern sensibilities.

30 Brueggemann (2002) p.vii.

the disturbance of challenge and transition into a new stability. He calls these three stages: *Orientation*, *Disorientation* and *New Orientation* and speaks of them as voices of faith deeply rooted in the actual life of community, articulating experiences common to all. They are strongly analogous to the van Gennep/Turner expression of individual transformations from one role to another.³¹ For Brueggemann psalms within the cultus offer ‘a setting for imagination, creative speech that forms new worlds for us’ and are ‘peculiarly in touch with what goes on in our life’. Brueggemann’s typology of psalms is also analogous to the redemptive narrative of God in Christ where *Orientation—though he was in the form of God, becomes Disorientation—he emptied himself* and finally, *New Orientation—therefore God has highly exalted him...* (Phil 2.5-11). He goes on to observe that ‘the psalms of negativity, the complaints of various kinds, the cries for vengeance and profound penitence are foundational to a life of faith in this particular God’.³²

What does this have to do with Choral Evensong in a post-modern world? Brueggemann again, ‘As children of the Enlightenment, we have censored and selected around the voice of darkness and disorientation,’³³ seeking to go from strength to strength, from victory to victory, [this] is a lie in terms of our experience ... the honest recognition that there is an untamed darkness in our life that must be embraced ... is fundamental to the gift of new life’.³⁴ The narratives of the Psalms insist on a faith which seeks human well-being. They return continually to issues of justice, righteousness and equity and do not shrink from interrogating God in these matters. They are ‘a world in which faithful address and answer make a transformative difference’.³⁵ These are the texts around which the Church has built her daily worship for millennia. In them she has found reality and redemption, justice and equity. And it is these texts that are at the heart of Choral Evensong, and indeed both Morning and Evening Prayer. The Psalms are genuinely dialogical. Small wonder they speak so eloquently to so diverse a group of adherents.

The Worshipper

We have seen how rich the daily office is as a resource connecting reality and redemption but the particular experience of Choral Evensong is dependent on a broad expression of this narrative. The music, the great

31 Ibid. pp. viii-ix.

32 Ibid. p. x.

33 c.f. Rohr (2002) *supra*.

34 Brueggemann (2002) p.xii.

35 Ibid. pp. xiv-xv.

buildings lit by the golden light of the setting sun streaming through the west window splashing colour across nave, screen and choir contribute much to the sense of presence and mystery that draws people to the encounter. A common criticism is that beauty of music, language and architecture is precisely and only what the experience means for many and it is certainly the case that many of those who attend Choral Evensong will cite these things as significant rather than a clearly articulated belief in God. But we should not dismiss such expressions out of hand as lacking any spiritual content.

The other component brought to Choral Evensong, in addition to beauty of music, language and place is the worshippers themselves. Just as the narratives of the office speak to deep human realities so too does the beauty of place and moment. To understand how this may be we need to borrow a little from cognitive science. It seems that human beings are constructed in such a way as to be drawn to pattern and symmetry. Recent developments in cognitive and neural science indicate that the fundamental mechanisms of the human cortex are built upon an innate ability to recognise, reproduce and transform patterns.³⁶ This ability underpins our cognitive competencies at a foundational level and it responds to recognisably common inputs and structures. In other words we are built to enjoy pattern, symmetry and beauty of form. But within this general affinity for pattern and beauty there are specific human attributes that Choral Evensong touches particularly deeply. We have already observed how language and music are central to our experience of worship in the general context of patterns and repetition but beyond this language and music touch the very ground of our being and identity.

As regards language there is strong evidence that, as a species, we learned to sing long before we spoke.³⁷ We see indications of this in the fossil records of early humans which demonstrate the physiological attributes necessary for intonation and phrasing long before the archaeology of tool-making and evidence for ritual (often linked to language development). We can still find evidence for such pre-linguistic capabilities in whistle languages and tonal languages, some of which can sustain conversations that consist of interactions of 'sung' inflection rather than utterances constructed from words.³⁸ The cultural record also

36 For a detailed exploration of the pattern-focussed abilities of the human cortex see: Hawkins (2005), Kurzweil (2014).

37 McGilchrist (2009) pp.94-132.

38 Everett (2007) p.183.

supports this conclusion by demonstrating that poetry is endemic in the art and memory of human society and expression long before prosody appears.³⁹ From this we see that intonation and phrasing is foundational in human communication and allows us to engage at a level for which formal language is poorly suited. Which leads us on to music.

Music is a thing experienced. It can be analysed but fundamentally it is encountered and in the encounter there is a continual 'newness'. It communicates emotion and, experienced corporately, it brings individuals together in a moment that is both shared and yet permits the possibility of individual encounter within the collective. It is integral within society to celebration, festival, ritual and recreation and binds people together in a shared humanity.⁴⁰ And it is surprisingly absent from our daily lives. As neurologist Oliver Sacks puts it, 'One has to go to a concert, or a church or a music festival, to recapture the excitement of and bonding of music'⁴¹. The psychiatrist and philosopher Iain McGilchrist notes,⁴² 'the culture of the written word tends inevitably towards the predominantly left-hemisphere phenomenon of a competitive, specialised and compartmentalised world'⁴³ and goes on to observe, 'Most forms of imagination ... innovation, intuitive problem solving, spiritual thinking or artistic creativity require us to transcend language'. In other words, we spend most of our lives locked into a frenetic world where, in the midst of the minutiae of desperate individual achievement, we have, perhaps, managed to lose something of ourselves.

We have seen how the music, language and places associated with Choral Evensong speak to the fundamental nature of humanity. The rhythms and inflection of chant, invocation and response, the beauty and symmetry of buildings and musical line, and the shared experience of the moment take us out of the everyday to a place where we can glimpse beyond the limitations of our world. They speak, in other words, to the soul. It is a heady mix and it calls to all of us, Christian or not. It makes no judgements and goes to the centre of our humanity. But we have also seen that the narratives of the office speak to other deep rooted human needs. They locate us, whether we acknowledge it or not, within a salvic narrative that continually draws us onward, beyond the normalcy of our daily lives towards something greater. It is a narrative that places us with

39 McGilchrist (2009) p.103.

40 c.f. Turner on *communitas*, *supra*

41 Sacks (in McGilchrist(2006) p105).

42 I must record my thanks to Canon Angela Tilby for introducing me to McGilchrist (2009).

43 McGilchrist (2009) p.105

the one in whom we find our being,⁴⁴ standing with others who have walked this path before us. We find ourselves juxtaposed synchronically with eternity and diachronically with the past generations who have stood and worshipped in these places guided by this rite.

Choral Evensong is a truly liminal phenomenon, a way to draw near to the threshold of mystery. It is transformative, weaving worshippers into its tapestry of worship just as its pattern becomes in time a part of them.⁴⁵ It is a moment when worlds touch and where music, language and space all conspire to draw us into the narrative of salvation. It is by no means the only way to such an encounter but it is one well suited to minister to post-modern man and woman. It has the power to rescue us from the frenzy of continual achievement that imprisons us. It brings us to a place of honesty and reflection where we can measure our lives against a greater reality. A place where we can 'surrender to a higher power'⁴⁶ and where we may, for a moment, find ourselves as God would have us be, full of grace and truth.

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‘Word for Word’

DAVID FULLER

Ten years ago, a report was published in the Advent 2008 edition of the *Prayer Book Society Journal* (as it was then called) in which Oxford priest Father John Hunwicke presented a rather humorous account of a visit he made as a locum to a country church to celebrate Holy Communion. In his report Father John explained that he was asked by his host to use the Prayer Book. Let me quote their conversation as Father John reported it: ‘You’ll have to use the Prayer Book here,’ he said, rather abruptly. ‘It’ll be a pleasure,’ said I, rather puzzled. ‘I mean 1662,’ said he. ‘Certainly,’ said I, even more puzzled. ‘Word for word; absolutely word for word,’ he said. ‘No problem at all,’ I replied. Later, after the service, Father John discovered the background to this bizarre exchange. The incumbent had learned that Father John had trained at a theological college with an extremely Catholic reputation; he was afraid that the good Father would unleash heaven-only-knows what sort of High Church or Popish rigmarole on his unsuspecting, country parishioners.

I wondered, after reading his account, just how near Father John came to that supposed ideal, and, indeed, how close his host really wanted him to come. Father John mentioned, for example, that he had not insisted on being given the names of intended communicants on the day before his service, as the first rubric of the Holy Communion service requires. Did Father John check, we might enquire, that members of his congregation had been satisfied that any ‘open and notorious evil livers’ had, ‘truly repented and amended their former naughty lives’ as demanded by the second rubric?

Let me pose for you some more questions about the service that Father John celebrated, in relation to the Prayer Book’s requirements. Was the table (not an altar, you note) placed in the body of the Church or in the Chancel? Was it covered by just a fair white linen cloth? Did Father John, at the conclusion of the Nicene Creed, refrain from giving any notices to the congregation, ‘but what is prescribed in the Rules of this Book, or enjoined by the King, or by the Ordinary of the place’? Thereafter did he preach the mandatory sermon? No alternative is given in the rubric,

other than to offer instead one of the Homilies, ‘already set forth, or hereafter to be set forth by authority’.

Were the alms of the faithful collected, ‘in a decent bason’, observe the archaic spelling, ‘to be provided by the parish for that purpose’, while the Offertory Sentences were being read (no collecting bags, you note!)? I was delighted to read that Father John included the appropriate Exhortation—they are almost never heard these days—but, as he later remarked, ‘Do we really want an Exhortation every Sunday?’ A concluding rubric demands that the bread of the Eucharist is, ‘as such as is usual to be eaten, the best and purest Wheat Bread’. It is to be hoped that the parish that Father John visited did not use communion wafers because the rubric suggests that they, ‘provide occasions of dissention and superstition!’

So we move on to what is sometimes called The Canon of the Mass. Now, it is the common practice of many Celebrants to remove the breaking of the bread to a separate place outside the Prayer of Consecration, indeed this action has now become a uniquely identified part of the liturgy in many modern Eucharistic rites. It is to be hoped that Father John followed the 1662 rubric and broke the bread where the prayer dictates.

At this point I must declare a personal interest. As a post-graduate student at the University of Glasgow from 2009-14 I studied the life and principal liturgical writings of Dom Gregory Dix. He was an Anglican, Benedictine monk whose short life spanned the first half of the twentieth century; he died in 1952. His magnum opus, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, first published in 1945, has been on the book sellers’ lists ever since. In this ground-breaking work of some 750 pages Dix explained that, despite studying the writings of the Evangelists, the Apostles and the Early Church Fathers, he found it impossible to arrive at a consensus of what comprised the original wording of the earliest Eucharistic rite. Dix argued that the different written accounts made this task impossible to resolve. However, there was, in his opinion, a ‘shape’ to the Eucharistic liturgy that has survived from earliest times. This shape had four essential elements, which could be identified with the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he ‘took, blessed, broke and gave’. Within the Eucharist these correspond with the Offertory, the Consecration, the Fraction and the Communion. Many subsequent liturgists, following Dix’s hypothesis, have placed the Fraction, the Breaking of the Bread, in its own special section, detached from the Prayer of Consecration. In the Church of England it was with the publication of the *Alternative Service Book*, the ASB, in 1980 that Dix’s explanation of the four-fold shape was essentially

incorporated into its Eucharistic rites. So, despite rubric ‘b’ included in the 1662 Prayer of Consecration, ‘And here to break the Bread:’, it has become common practice to remove the Fraction to a separate, detached place. Should we, as good Prayer Book folk, adhere to what many may consider to be Cranmer’s instruction in this matter? Well, we may like to think so, but, in fact, Cranmer removed the so-called ‘manual acts’ from the Prayer in his 1552 revision; they didn’t appear again until the 1662 Book. For completeness I should add that a number of modern liturgists, like Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks, disagree with Dix’s ‘four-fold shape’ assertion, so the ASB may well have got it wrong!

Let us return to the Book of Common Prayer. Again, it is the practice of many priests to get the final ablutions out of the way immediately after the Administration of the Communion, but a Prayer Book rubric clearly states that, ‘the Minister shall return to the Lord’s Table, and reverently place upon it what remaineth of the consecrated Elements, covering the same with a fair linen cloth’. It is interesting to reflect that, even within this avowedly Protestant order, the consecrated elements must remain on the table, until after the blessing. The ‘high’ theology associated with this understanding of the Real Presence was clearly in direct contrast to Cranmer’s intention. In his revised rite of 1552 he adopted what Dix called a Zwinglian, receptionist, interpretation of the Eucharist in which he saw the Lord’s Supper celebrated purely as a memorial meal. The presence of Christ was only to be found in the hearts of the worshippers, not in any mystical attribute of the bread and wine. In the minds of the Reformers, Jesus Christ was not ubiquitous, his Body and Blood were in heaven, where he was seated at the right hand of his Heavenly Father; they could not possibly be present in the elements of the Eucharist. Cranmer’s 1552 rite, the Elizabethan order of 1559 and the 1604 Hampton Court Conference Communion service of James I, all contained a rubric that stated, ‘If any bread and wine be left over the Curate shall have it for his own use’. In those earlier days the Church taught that there were no sacramental changes; even after consecration the bread and wine were still just that, bread and wine.

The major revision in the Church’s understanding of the sacredness of the Eucharistic elements between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shows how important it is that in all of our discussions we clearly separate Cranmer and his advisors from many aspects of the wording of the Restoration Prayer Book, the one that we hold dear. To put it simply, the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 is not wholly the work of Archbishop Cranmer! On this subject Father John made the

following observation: 'We are fortunate enough to belong to the Prayer Book Society. Naturally, it includes people of many different types, from dyed-in-the-wool Reform Protestants to those who glory in the name of Catholic. This is admirable. But occasionally the Prayer Book Society can seem a bit like a Cranmer Admiration Society'.

Despite the confusion caused by the increasingly Protestant developments in Cranmer's Eucharistic doctrines, we must continue to admire the wonderful, classical, liturgical language in which he and those who followed him translated and composed their texts. As Father John reminded his readers, 'Cranmer was steeped in the Latin prayers and texts with which he had grown up, and they formed the basis of his work, both when he was translating and when he was being creative. They were texts which went back ... to the ancient Roman sacramentaries put together by Popes in the early Christian centuries. Among examples are the great majority of the Sunday Collects'.

Now, despite all these minutiae about orders, rites and rubrics, and their respective authors and instigators, we all profess a deep devotion for this wonderful book, yet I firmly believe that we love it for what we perceive it to be, not necessarily what it is. It can be a sort of 'all-things-to-all-men' book. The parts that we like, we include in our worship; the parts that we don't, we simply ignore. How many of us don't notice the absence of an Exhortation in our Holy Communion services? Most of us, I suspect, have never heard of one being included; I certainly haven't! How many of us don't object to there being no sermon at 8:00 o'clock on Sunday mornings? How many of us are indifferent to hearing The Summary of The Law, rather than having The Decalogue rehearsed with us? We must thank the authors of the Deposited Prayer Book of 1928, which never, of course, passed into law, for proposing that change.

So, to continue my theme, I must raise some questions about other parts of the Prayer Book. How many of us attend Matins yet don't seem to mind if the *Quicunque Vult*, otherwise entitled 'At Morning Prayer', that wonderful, Christological and Trinitarian Creed, named after Saint Athanasius, although not written by him, is not substituted for the Apostles' Creed as the rubric requires, 'upon these Feasts...' (fourteen feast days are listed)? How often do we find The Litany included after Morning Prayer on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, as we rightly should? Do we still hear the Collect for the First Sunday in Advent, 'repeated every day with the other Collects in Advent, until Christmass Eve'? Similarly, do we hear the Collect for Ash Wednesday, 'read every day in Lent after the Collect appointed for the Day'? After Morning Prayer

and The Litany on Ash Wednesday, do we still hear, ‘A Denouncing of God’s Anger and Judgements against Sinners (A Commination)’? On Good Friday are we still happy to implore God’s mercy for, ‘all Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks’?

The service of Confirmation has fallen by the wayside in many places: and Baptism is often seen as the single and only requirement for full membership of the Church and admission to all of its sacraments. I’m sorry, I should have said ‘both of its sacraments’, if we are to adhere to the doctrine contained within Article Twenty-Five of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. According to our Prayer Book, The Catechism, ‘is to be learned of every person before he be brought to be confirmed by the Bishop’; is it still taught, I wonder? The first version appeared in the 1559 Elizabethan Prayer Book. At that time bishops’ injunctions demanded that weekly classes in the Catechism be held for the youth of each parish and that no one was to be admitted to Holy Communion who did not know it thoroughly. This doesn’t seem to apply in today’s Church, where, in many places, young children are permitted to receive the Sacrament.

We love to hear the opening words of the Marriage Service, or more correctly The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony—‘Dearly beloved brethren, we are gathered together here in the sight of God ...’—yet we don’t seem to want to be reminded of, ‘man’s carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding ...’. Do we still expect the mothers of new-born babies to, ‘come to church decently apparelled,’ to give thanks and be ‘churched’? What today would comprise ‘decent apparel’? When did you last hear the Accession Service, or ‘Forms of Prayer with Thanksgiving to Almighty God’, for use, ‘upon the Anniversary of the Day of the Accession of the Reigning Sovereign’? Should we, as Father John asked his readers, discontinue the singing of all hymns, with the obvious exception of *Veni Creator Spiritus*, two versions of which are included in the Prayer Book Ordinal?

Let us consider some other Prayer Book matters. When visiting the sick of the parish does the minister, ‘admonish the sick person to make a will and declare his debts’ (if he hath not before disposed of his goods)? Does he require that sick persons make, ‘a special confession of their sins,’ and receive absolution? In this context, how many of us appreciate or acknowledge a requirement for auricular confession and priestly absolution within the pages of the Book of Common Prayer?

On the subject of auricular confession and priestly absolution, I should mention in passing the abhorrence and detestation expressed by a number of bishops when this practice was re-introduced into the

Church of England at the time of the Oxford Movement in the first half of the nineteenth century, not least by the Honourable Doctor Henry Montague Villiers, Lord Bishop of Carlisle. In a Charge delivered to his Clergy in 1858 he wrote, 'I am thankful that we appear to be clear of the filthiness of the confessional, as well as free from [other] puerilities connected with the Church of Rome.' Yet sacramental confession was demanded within the pages of the Prayer Book all the time. What, we might ask, did the said bishop think he meant when, at the Ordinations of his clergy, he used the words, 'Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained?' Of course, this was all in the past. All a candidate for priesthood gets to hear today from the *Common Worship* Ordinal is: 'Send down the Holy Spirit on your servant for the office and work of a priest in your Church'. There is no mention of sin or of absolution. It's all rather sad.

Perhaps I have been too flippant and have waxed over-lyrical in my comments about the Book of Common Prayer, but we only have to hear its resonant cadences: 'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord'; 'a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world'; 'for we have no health in us'; 'Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings'; 'We bless thee for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life'; 'In the midst of life, we are in death'; and, dare I say it, 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'; to know that what we read in our Prayer Book is divinely inspired. For three hundred and fifty years Anglicans across the globe, and many others besides, have used this quaintly charming yet wonderfully stirring book for their private devotions and corporate worship; a book that for all its rubrical regulations and requirements, either firmly followed or irreverently ignored, has been of inestimable benefit down the centuries for Protestant and Catholic Anglicans alike. As Eamon Duffy wrote in his wonderful book *The Stripping of the Altars*, 'Cranmer's sombrely magnificent prose, read week by week, entered and possessed their minds, and became the fabric of their prayers, the utterance of their most solemn and their most vulnerable moments'.

The Editor of the *Prayer Book Society Journal* posed a question at the end of Father John's paper: 'Is it wrong for congregations to expect Prayer Book services to be used word for word and for rubrics to be followed to the letter?' How should we respond to this? As we have seen, such an expectation is clearly not reasonable nor practical without the Prayer Book, or, at least, its rubrics, undergoing some serious revision; and who would decide on what changes were acceptable? Try to remember

the problems of such endeavours in 1927 and 1928. Yet the *status quo* must be defended. We must continue to demand that we be allowed to use our Prayer Book for our corporate worship, and not just at 7:30 on Wednesday mornings, or some other equally inconvenient time for a majority of Church goers. However, within that demand, we must be prepared to accept that not every devotee sees the Prayer Book through the same liturgical lens. But surely that is the basis of our love for this tantalising work.

Where does all this leave us in relation to the request from Father John's host in that country church a decade ago? Did he really want the Holy Communion service celebrated 'absolutely word for word'? I suspect he did not! He wanted his congregation to take part in a service with which they were familiar, just as, severally, we all do. The fact that this content varies significantly from church to church, and from congregation to congregation is, it seems, of little consequence. We know what we like and we each want our particular orders of service to be maintained.

In conclusion let me respectfully remind you that even Prayer Book purists make their own interpretations of its content, order and rubrics. The late, much loved Reverend Canon Geoffrey Williams, who was the prime mover in the foundation of this Branch of the Prayer Book Society, always added the Prayer of Oblation to the end of the Prayer of Consecration, just as Cranmer had ordered in 1549. He then prostrated himself before the altar, leaving members of his congregation in no doubt that he believed in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the consecrated elements. This gesture was, of course, in complete contrast to Cranmer's later Eucharistic teaching, and the strictures contained in John Knox's infamous Black Rubric, which mysteriously resurfaced in our 1662 Book. Yet, I cannot believe that Saint Peter denied Canon Williams entry into Heaven for those idiosyncrasies. I suspect that Saint Peter may be as confused about the Book of Common Prayer as the rest of us!

As Father John Hunwicke has been our constant companion in our short study of the Prayer Book this afternoon, perhaps we should let him have the last word. At the end of his report he wrote: 'I value the Prayer Book for its continuities, rather than as a sign of rupture or a repudiation of the way Englishmen had worshipped for a thousand years. I value it not as a new start or a Protestant beacon shining in a gloom of Romish superstition and darkness, but as one way in which ancient traditions and texts of Catholic worship were handed on. Cranmer occupied but one moment – albeit a remarkable one – in that wonderful continuum'. I think we can all agree with Father John's sentiments, don't you?

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Jane Austen and the Eucharist

EDWARD MARTIN

On Monday 20th June 1808, Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra of the ‘sad story of Mrs Powlett ... I should not have suspected her of such a thing...’ she told her, ‘[Mrs Powlett] staid the Sacrament I remember, the last time that you and I did. A hint of it, with Initials, was in yesterday’s Courier; and Mr Moore guessed it to be Lord Sackville... and so it proved.’¹ The woman mentioned by Austen was Mary-Letitia Powlett, the wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Powlett. Mrs Powlett, it seemed, had cast aside her husband in favour of Viscount Sackville. The news in *The [London] Courier* confirmed that the Colonel now planned to take an action for ‘damages’ by way of a suit of ‘Criminal Conversation’ against Viscount Sackville.²

William Jarvis in his study ‘Jane Austen and Religion’ suggests that Austen may have had some sympathy with the eloping Mrs Powlett, describing her estranged husband as ‘silly’. However, there remains a sense of ‘shock’ within Austen’s letter that someone in such a predicament should have made their communion alongside Austen and her sister.³ The attitude with which Jane Austen regarded the Sacrament was typical of the Regency and later Georgian period. We know that she engaged in careful preparation for attendance at the quarterly or monthly celebration. What many regard as the key influence or guide in this respect was her copy of William Vickers’ *A Companion to the Altar* given to her as a Confirmation gift in April 1794. That copy, now owned by Princeton University, was one of only twenty books owned by Austen during her lifetime and shows obvious signs of use. Florence Austen, Jane Austen’s great-niece, noted: ‘...this book of devotions [was] always used by Jane Austen, we used to be told so by my old Aunt Cassandra.’⁴ According to Irene Collins in her book ‘Jane Austen: The Parson’s Daughter’, Austen ‘cherished the *Companion* and made constant use of the prayers and meditations... She was to take her participation in the Sacrament of Holy Communion

1 *Jane Austen’s Letters* (New Edition) D. le Faye (ed) Oxford University Press, 1996, p.131.

2 Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce: England 1530 to 1987*, Oxford University Press, 1990, p.236.

3 William Jarvis, *Jane Austen and Religion*, The Stonesfield Press, 1996, p.17.

4 *Ibid.* p.17.

seriously as 'a cleansing from sin and a repeated welcome into the company of the faithful.'⁵

Based on her known use of the *Companion to the Altar*, how might Austen have viewed the action of Mrs Powlett in making her communion that day?

A *Companion to the Altar* begins by quoting the Catechism from the 1662 Prayer Book, exhorting all that would come to the Sacrament to 'examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins steadfastly purposing to lead a new life, [to] have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ with a thankful remembrance of his death, and to be in charity with all men.'⁶ So plenty there for any would-be communicant to be thinking about!

This call to 'self-examination' before the Eucharist finds its roots in the words of St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, 'But let a man examine himself... For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself' (1 Cor 11.28-29a). However, Vickers is at pains to note that the 'sickness or death, which [afflicted] the City of Corinth... for their great abuse and profanation of this solemn institution; and the damnation threatened, hath no relation to us, unless it could be proved that any of us were ever guilty of the same... namely gluttony, drunkenness and faction.'⁷ It is not the fear that we might suffer the same illness or affliction as the Corinthians that should move us to self-examination before reception but, as Vickers states, we should do so in order that we may 'come to this heavenly Feast holy... adorned with the Wedding Garment [of the Lamb]'⁸ so that the 'God... who knoweth the Secrets of all hearts... may... count us worthy of his favour and countenance.'⁹

Above all, what Vickers seeks to enable and cultivate within his readers is what he calls 'the Sense and Sight of Sin'¹⁰. We are, he says, to 'awaken our consciences' so that we may 'judge our own actions, as we would our greatest and worst enemy'¹¹. 'Only... a strict and impartial examination', says Vickers 'will [help us to] discover... that accursed thing, sin.'¹² So, having searched our hearts, examined our consciences and uncovered our sin, we must then seek to become a 'new creature' by way of repentance and amendment of our lives. To fail to do so carries

5 D Gilson, *A Jane Austen Bibliography*, Oak Knoll Press (US) 1997, p.445.

6 William Vickers, *A Companion to the Altar*, Printed by John Beercroft, London, 1764 p.8.

7 Ibid. p.8-9.

8 Ibid. p.9.

9 Ibid. p.10.

10 Ibid. p.11.

11 Ibid. p.1.2

12 Ibid. p.12.

with it a severe warning; for Vickers states that any who approach the Sacrament intending to continue in their uncovered sin 'comes somewhat like... Judas, that came and received, and at the same time continued his resolution of betraying his Master.'¹³

Perhaps we can appreciate the extent of Austen's shock and concern for Mrs Powlett having 'staid to Communion' when London society was awash with the particulars of her situation! What then could Austen have hoped for Mrs Powlett? Could she have hoped that the act of making her communion might have stirred Mrs Powlett to self-examination and repentance? Not according to Vickers, for he is at pains to stress that 'The Sacrament of the Lord's is not a converting, but a confirming ordinance.'¹⁴ It is, he insists, for the increase of God's grace first given in Baptism that we should come convicted and convinced to the altar; to suggest otherwise, he says, would be to misunderstand the Sacrament and to put the spiritual cart before the horse (so to speak).

So what remained for Mrs Powlett? Had she committed the 'unforgiveable sin' by making her communion in the manner that she appeared to have done? Not necessarily! For Vickers himself draws our attention to Our Lord's forgiveness of the woman taken in adultery, reassuring us that 'It is not the committing of this or that great sin that will... exclude us from God's mercy and forgiveness... But it is our living and dying without repentance and amendment that brings God's wrath.'¹⁵ Reception of the Sacrament should never cease to be an option for Mrs Powlett and for all of us who approach, unworthy though we are, with a broken and contrite heart, for Vickers tell us it is to those who are 'deeply sensible of their unworthiness'¹⁶ that 'Christ doth call'¹⁷. Furthermore, he is at pains to point out that, 'there is none condemned for unworthy receiving, but [only] such as deserve it for continuing in their iniquities.'¹⁸ To say otherwise would be to suggest that Christ had somehow intended the Eucharist to be 'a snare to entangle our souls'¹⁹ rather than a confirmation of the grace of God for all who turn to him.

What then is key (the vital ingredient) to help prepare us for a more worthy reception of the Eucharist? For Vickers the answer is clear—the answer is faith! In order to know the need for self-examination,

13 Ibid. p.15.

14 Ibid. p.15.

15 Ibid. p.17.

16 Ibid. p.19.

17 Ibid. p.19.

18 Ibid. p.18.

19 Ibid. p.19.

the reality of our sin and the grace of God available to us in this Sacrament we must have faith, 'All that Christ hath done and suffered for us... and [for] our salvation can never profit us unless we have faith.'²⁰ It is faith in the Son of God that helps us to a more worthy remembrance of his saving death and that brings about the 'happiness and glory which we could never expect or hope to enjoy had not Christ died for us.'²¹

So, did Mrs Powlett (or Lord Sackville for that matter) ever find themselves stirred by faith to repentance and amendment so that they might readily hear the call of Christ to the Sacramental remembrance of his passion and saving death? We do not know (but we might hope and pray that it was so). What we do know is that Lord Sackville was prosecuted for £3,000 in damages and that Colonel Powlett was granted an ecclesiastical separation from his wife but then failed to obtain a divorce from Parliament. As for Jane Austen, she included a matrimonial fracas in her novel *Mansfield Park* (published just five years later) when the 'beautiful Mrs Rushworth... quitted her husband's roof in company with the well-known and captivating Mr Crawford.'

What then might we consider to be the particular insight that Jane Austen may have gained from her use of the *Companion to the Altar*? With Vickers' insistence that 'we must search our hearts and examine our consciences not only till we see our sins, but until we hate them'²² it may be no accident that, within Austen's own writings, it is those moments of self-awareness of the faults and shortcomings of her characters that provides the turning-point in several of her novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennett speaks of her change of attitude towards Mr Darcy, of her having been 'blinded by folly'²³ and that 'Till this moment I never knew myself.'²⁴ In *Emma*, when Harriet Smith reveals her love for Mr Knightley, it is Miss Woodhouse who finds herself in a moment of honest self-realisation: 'Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before... What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world.'²⁵ In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marian Dashwood speaks of how recovery from illness afforded her the opportunity for serious

20 Ibid. p.22.

21 Ibid. p.23.

22 Ibid. p.9.

23 Jane Austen, *The Complete Novels*, BCA London, 1996, p.276.

24 Ibid. p.276.

25 Ibid. p.776.

Jane Austen and the Eucharist

recollection and reflection and even ‘time for atonement to my God.’²⁶ In these examples we see the new perspective and consolation granted to those who find themselves able to engage in critical self-examination and then to apply the fruits of those hard-learned lessons in their lives.

We can be in no doubt as to the piety and sincerity with which Jane Austen approached the Eucharist. As Laura White observes in her analysis of Austen’s Anglicanism ‘Austen took communion seriously, and asked for and received communion on her deathbed.’²⁷ With William Vickers’ *Companion to the Altar* as her guide, Austen could hardly have been more aware of the virtue of self-awareness, the need for repentance, the value of faith and the grace of God available to her in the remembrance and commemoration of his saving death.

On this Feast of Corpus Christi let us pray that we might also cultivate that same self-awareness, as in this Holy Sacrament as we seek to be cleansed from our sins and welcomed, with Austen, into the company of the faithful in Christ. [Amen.]

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26 Ibid. p.159.

27 L. White, ‘Jane Austen’s Anglicanism’, unpublished thesis, p.91.

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