Faith & Worship

NUMBER 91 · LENT 2023

Faith & Worship

The Journal of the Prayer Book Society

THE PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY

Number 91
ISSN 0309-1627

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Faith & Worship is published by the Prayer Book Society, though publication of an article does not necessarily imply that the opinions expressed therein have the Society's offiicial sanction. Submissions to the review are welcome and will be given careful consideration. All articles, reviews and correspondence should be sent to the editors at:

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Typeset by Loulita Gill Design Printed by SS Media Ltd

Cover image: The devil's visitation of the sick. Woodcut, 1720 (Wellcome Collection)

THE COLLECT FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Contents

EDITORIAL *page* 2
BIOGRAPHIES OF CONTRIBUTORS 6

GREAT LOVE IN SMALL THINGS 7
George Westhaver

'I DESIRE THAT YE FAINT NOT AT MY TRIBULATIONS FOR YOU' 11
Christopher Chessun

'GODLY AND DECENT ORDER': THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER IN THE AGE OF CHOICE 16
Humphrey Southern

AN INCLINATION TOWARDS ETERNITY: PROBING THE GROWTH OF CHORAL EVENSONG 25
Simon Reynolds

'O LORD, OPEN THOU OUR LIPS': THE POPULARITY OF CHORAL EVENSONG AND THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER IN THE NETHERLANDS 36
Hanna Rijken

GOD'S VISITATION: THE PROPER RESPONSE TO AFFLICTION IS REPENTANCE 44
Gary Thorne

OUR ONLY SAVIOUR, THE PRINCE OF PEACE 59
Jo Kershaw

Editorial

A trusted friend in a complicated world

'A trusted friend in a complicated world' is the compelling subtitle for the website of the magazine *Readers Digest* which, I was delighted to discover recently, is still alive and well. It might equally be a catchphrase that lovers of the Prayer Book can embrace as we engage with the much-changed and still-changing world that is 2023. We are emerging, blinking, into a very different world from that of 2019: the consequences of COVID-19 have hastened many of the societal and cultural changes that were already beginning to be discerned. Set this together with the recent loss of our beloved late Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth II and truly it is a time in which we need a trusted friend or two.

This edition of *Faith & Worship* cannot but continue to acknowledge and consider some of the consequences of our great national loss in the death of Her Majesty the Queen. The inspiring example and witness of her life is explored in the opening piece by George Westhaver, in the sermon he preached in Westminster Abbey just seventy-two hours after the announcement was made at Buckingham Palace. He sets before us what we might call the 'Elizabethan pastoral model', namely that of doing small things with great love, this model itself being inspired by the One who does great things with great love. The closing piece of this issue, again a sermon preached that same first weekend after the death of Her Majesty, by Jo Kershaw, considers the divine or heavenly origins of the stability and glory that we knew and perceived so clearly in the person and ministry of our late Queen.

Our two episcopal contributors to this issue, Bishops Chessun and Southern, with a delightful blend of encouragement, experience and warmth, explore the relationship between continuity and change in the continued use of the Book of Common Prayer. It is not a relic, to be preserved in a glass cabinet (unlike, say, Archbishop Laud's tortoise at Lambeth Palace), nor does it enjoy the hegemony that was assured it, not just in this realm of England but to the four corners of the Empire. Now it is just one liturgical, devotional and pastoral possibility amongst so many. Bishop Chessun, with both affection and pastoral insight (and the first mention of Series Three that I have heard in a very long time!), sets before us the challenge of nurturing the liturgical life of the Church through the 'application of a living tradition to the local context',

especially in the digital age when the seemingly immutable certainties of the printed word have largely fallen away. Bishop Southern reminds us of our responsibility to ensure that future generations of ordinands are both familiar with and also understand how to use the 'living jewel' which is the Book of Common Prayer in the complex and pluralist circumstances of Christian ministry in the modern world. The gentle humour of his royal anecdote sits very well at this particular moment.

Simon Reynolds and Hanna Rijken tell variously of the significant revival in the fortunes of Choral Evensong, both at home and abroad. Simon Reynolds offers a compelling distillation of his recent book, *Lighten our Darkness*, on the resurgence of interest in the offering of Evensong in the English choral foundations. He maps out the enduring appeal both of unconditional welcome and also of ancient liturgical cadence that is experienced by those who attend the sung evening office in our cathedrals and other similar settings. Herein lies a power to lead us over the threshold of the eternal, and not only in the restful 'quires and places' of the English Church: according to Hanna Rijken from Amsterdam, it is catching on very nicely in the Netherlands too, with choir stalls, cassocks and surplices sometimes included: Amen to that!

From a cheering Dutch perspective, we turn to a thought-provoking Canadian review of the Church's ministry to the sick, as Gary Thorne leads us deep into the reformed and patristic theological foundations of the rite of the Visitation of the Sick, as found in the various editions of the Book of Common Prayer. It is a closely argued thesis, written in response to the recent experience of COVID-19. It serves, however, as a master key with which to unlock the much wider pastoral teaching and ministry of the Book of Common Prayer. It is original sin *not* individual sin that is the root cause of all human suffering and decay. It should be essential reading for all ordinands.

An old and well-loved parish priest, now long gone to his well-earned rest, used to puff around both his church and his parish on the Sussex coast muttering, 'Change *or* decay, change *or* decay, I keep telling them, not change *and* decay!' This was his oft-repeated word of adjuration to the members of his Parochial Church Council (and, for that matter, to anyone else within earshot) whenever they were dragging their heels over the latest (prayerful and duly considered) proposal for the building up of the life of the parish. His point being that it's a simple choice: we either change, that is adapt to the new circumstances in which we find ourselves, or we decay. In the services and public ceremonies that marked both the death of Her late Majesty, the Queen and the beginning of the reign of His Majesty the King, the Book of Common Prayer and

the Authorised Version of the Bible were reassuringly to the fore, with accompanying hymnody, ritual and ceremonial that was equally noble in character. The nations of the world gazed on as we displayed our remarkable national capacity for both continuity and change: which is truly one of the abiding strengths of our beloved Book of Common Prayer.

The Book of Common Prayer has been a 'trusted friend' for generations of English-speaking Christians and many others around the world besides, standing us in good stead to face afresh the surprises and demands of each generation. One of the unsung missionary heroes of the Victorian slums, Father Charles Lowder (himself a staunch 'Prayer Book man'), described the challenge thus in his 1866 account of his early endeavours in the East End of London: 'It was simply childish to act as if the Church were recognized as the Mother of the people. She must assume a missionary character, and by religious association and a new adaptation of… practice to the altered circumstances of the 19th Century, and the peculiar wants of the English character, endeavour with fresh life and energy to stem the prevailing tide of sin and indifference.'[1] Those prophetic words, challenging and inspiring in equal measure, are no less true today than they were in 1866. The world is altered, as ever it has been and ever will be, yet the truths of God and of His great love for mankind are unchanging and abiding. The Book of Common Prayer embodies and carries forwards the precious DNA of the English Church: faithful, humane, scriptural; welcoming, compassionate, porous; both sacramental and also a bodying forth the Spirit of God that addresses the 'peculiar wants of the English character'. The Book of Common Prayer can address these 'peculiar wants' precisely because it has been fashioned in response to them, and shaped by those who knew those 'peculiar wants' only too well in their own lives and beings. The Book of Common Prayer provides, especially in these shifting, pluralist, digital times, the root structure of faithful Christian prayer, worship and living. From this root structure can spring forth a variety of fruit-bearing blooms, as they have done through the centuries, each in their own several ways accommodating the needs and sincerely held spiritual convictions that are to be found among the many 'sorts and conditions of men'.

We are grateful to our contributors for their articles which, with a variety of voices and with a combination of scholarship, pastoral wit and godly wisdom, show the Book of Common Prayer to be not only a trusted friend but also a most excellent kitbag, filled with the very best

1 Charles Fuge Lowder, *Ten Years in St George's Mission*, 1866.

equipment for pastoral ministry and mission in the modern day and, as Bishop Chessun says, 'all in one small book'.

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Great Love In Small Things

GEORGE WESTHAVER

> Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you… nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.
>
> Isaiah 60:1, 3 (ESV)

In this majestic passage from the prophet Isaiah, we are invited to share in the joy of coming home. We are invited to make our home in the city which God has prepared for His people. But do we want to live there?

On the day of the coronation of our late Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth in this Abbey Church, she was given a Bible: 'Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God'. Isaiah's words are living oracles which speak to us now. During these days when we mourn the passing of our beloved Queen, as we pray for her and for ourselves, her life and witness also serves as a light to help us to live where God dwells with His people.

The prophet addresses Zion, the city of Jerusalem: 'they shall call you the City of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel' (Isaiah 60:14, ESV). This Jerusalem is more than a city. Jerusalem is both a goal and a description of the home where God dwells with His people. Jerusalem, Zion, is also a symbol for a certain kind of life: a good life; a life of 'peace' and 'righteousness'. Isaiah points beyond the destruction of the city, beyond the exile of the people, and to the rebuilding of the city and the temple in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. He points further still. Almost like one of the evangelists, Isaiah describes the realities in which we live now. He describes the light by which we see today. This Jerusalem is a prophetic description of the Church—her walls are salvation, her gates praise. Isaiah describes for us the kind of life which

should characterise the ecclesiastical commonwealth, and the welcome of all people from all places.[1]

'Arise, shine, for your light has come' (60:1). What is the light of this city? '… the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory' (60:19). This light is not just clear brightness. It has a personal character. This is the Light of the same substance with God and the Father.[2] The Light which shines on Jerusalem is the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ: 'Jesu, the very thought of thee With sweetness fills my breast; But sweeter far thy face to see, And in thy presence rest.' If we are here today, it is because we have been drawn in some way by the sweetness and goodness of this face, as our late Queen was. The principles which govern the life of the city of God are at one with this light. Righteousness and wisdom, mercy and justice, are features of the face of the Lord Jesus. They are also the living principles to which Her Majesty committed herself in the coronation ceremony.

What then do the life and witness of our late Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth show us about what it means to live in this city? '… nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising' (60:3). Early Christians saw this passage fulfilled in the coming of the Magi, the three 'kings' who come on camels with gifts of gold and frankincense to worship the infant Christ.[3] '… nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.' This living oracle was also fulfilled in the life and service of our late Queen.[4] I'd like to refer to two aspects of her witness which remain shining lights to us.

First, there is a logic of participation. The light of the glory of God in the face of Christ changes us. The light shines not just on us, but in us. The writer and apologist C. S. Lewis described the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in these terms:

1 Again, the coronation service of our late Queen encouraged us to think in these terms. As the Queen entered this Abbey Church on 2nd June 1953, the choir sang from Psalm 122: 'I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem… O pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.' Whether in this Abbey Church or the local parish church, we come into the 'house of the Lord' as citizens of the holy city of God. This Jerusalem is the reality in which we live, a way of life which is our calling, and the goal in history and beyond history.

2 This is the 'light eternal… the Light of the same substance with God and the Father… the Light that gives light to both the ordinary and extraordinary things, the light and life of Christ our very God'. Ancient Commentary on Isaiah.

3 The people who flow to Jerusalem bring not only themselves, but their riches. These riches are not only material gifts, but the wisdom of the philosopher and the expertise and knowledge of the scientist.

4 In the coronation service, the Queen was anointed to serve as a minister of Christ. We know that she took this very seriously for her whole life.

> The pressing of that huge, heavy crown on that small, young head becomes a sort of symbol of the situation of *humanity* itself: humanity is called by God to be his vice-regent and high priest on earth, yet feeling so inadequate...[5] One has missed the whole point unless one feels that we have all been crowned...'[6]

All have been crowned. The coronation gave a vocation to the Queen, but it also describes the vocation which belongs to her people. The logic of coronation as described by C. S. Lewis is part of the logic of Incarnation: God takes on human life to give each of us a share in the divine life. The lifting up of the Queen did not require that others be pushed down. Rather, we were all lifted up with her.

But how do we live such a lofty vocation? Here again, we may learn from our late monarch. Of course, we saw her on grand ceremonial occasions, the opening of Parliament, or the celebration of her Jubilee. But she showed us the character of her Majesty much more often in acts of humble service: in ribbon-cutting, and unveiling plaques; on visits to hospitals, and in 'the banter with excited crowds standing in the rain'.[7]

She described this principle in her Christmas broadcast in 2016: 'Christ's example helps me see the value of doing small things with great love.'[8]

This is the logic of exchange, the logic of cross and resurrection, the logic of which Isaiah describes: 'Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver' (60:17). The city, or the person, which was called 'forsaken' shares in the joy of the Lord. Doing small things with great love connects the little moments of our lives to the divine love and life of the King of kings. In small acts of service, in choosing what is good over what is easy, even when it is embarrassing or hard, we do small things with great love. We may feel inadequate, but even then Christ, who gives us His divine life in weak human gifts, converts our water to wine. He changes our little acts of obedience to the gold of His love.[9]

Our Lord speaking to us in the living oracles of the gospel also gives

5 '... As if he said, "In my inexorable love I shall lay upon the dust that you are glories and dangers and responsibilities beyond your understanding." Do you see what I mean?'

6 '... and that coronation is somehow, if splendid, a tragic splendour.'

7 Quoting and borrowing heavily from the Rt Revd Tony Burton, 'Our Gloriana', a Facebook post, the Queen's Christmas Message, 2016 praised 'volunteers, carers, community organisers and good neighbours; unsung heroes whose quiet dedication makes them special'.

8 This idea is also from the Rt Revd Burton's 'Gloriana'.

9 In the Gospel for today, the Lord Jesus describes the logic of the Incarnation. He describes what it means for God to take on human life, and how spiritual things are given in humble, human ways.

a necessary warning: there is another kind of kingship lurking in the darkness of our lives. King Herod killed the children of Bethlehem because he did not want to acknowledge another king, even a divine king. On the one hand, even the created order witnesses to the truth the Lord Jesus speaks: 'It is the Lord that ruleth the sea... the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice' (Psalm 29). On the other hand, the deep things which He reveals do not fit with a merely human way of knowing. He has the words of life, and yet we are tempted to give up, to turn away from what is difficult to understand. There is always a little bit of King Herod in each of us. We want to make our own rules. Here again we may learn from our late Sovereign Lady. Queen Elizabeth pledged herself to principles of justice and goodness which she did not invent.[10] The living principles which give life to the divine-human city cannot be decided by a majority. The Queen's obedience to divine love and divine goodness gave a power and integrity to her love in small things.

'Arise, shine, for your light has come'. It is true that there is a lot of darkness around us. If we are honest, we know a lot about the darkness within us also. A life like that of our late Queen reveals our inconsistencies. We also know it is terribly difficult to change these things. But here again we are invited to follow our beloved Queen's recipe. We are invited to show great love in small things. We may begin with a little love and some grains of hope. We begin where we find ourselves. We begin with the light God has given us already. 'Arise, shine'… The divine life is already shining in us and for us. Doing small things with great love connects the little moments of our lives to the divine love and life of the King of kings.

A sermon preached at Choral Evensong at Westminster Abbey on the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, 11th September 2022 (Psalm 29; Isaiah 60; St John 6:51–69).

10 Nigel Biggar: A monarch 'symbolises the accountability of the whole nation, rulers *and* ruled, kings *and* people, to the *given* principles of justice. These principles are not human inventions, they cannot be decided by a majority because they are given in and with the created nature of things'.

‘I Desire that Ye Faint Not at My Tribulations for You’

CHRISTOPHER CHESSUN

> O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
>
> The Collect for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity (also the Collect of the Prayer Book Society)

I am truly pleased to join you to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Prayer Book Society and ‘I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you’, as we gather on a strike day, a very holy remnant, for surely St James’ Garlickhythe is a stronghold of those who have kept faith with the ordered, historic and authorised form of English worship during this past half-century. Our thanks are due to Fr Tim Handley and the people of St James’ for accommodating this service at short notice.

It is providential that our Epistle reading (Ephesians 3:13–21) says much that was intended by the introduction of, and secured by, the continued practice of the Book of Common Prayer. The fragility of the apostolic life, ‘the tribulations for you’ in verse 13, are mirrored in the tenuousness of life into which these liturgies were introduced and the contingent nature of the lives we now live, especially as we emerge from a global pandemic. Our view of late medieval life is now rightly coloured by the detailed, brilliant and polemical work of Eamon Duffy, and it is plausible, although not certain one way or another, to suggest that most people were conservative in their religious beliefs. One thing we do know is that they were highly individualistic in practice. They were encouraged to private devotions during the Mass. Here in our passage, we find a corporate sense of the Christian community—‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named’ (vv.14–15, KJV). We do not get the play on words in Greek—*patḗr* for Father and *patria* for family—but in a use of language that Cranmer would have appreciated. St Paul is setting down the closeness of identity between redeemer and redeemed, creator and creation, parent

and adopted—the family of heaven. For St Paul, this is a corporate, communal, familial vision, not an individual one.

Thus, together, we may be 'strengthened with might by his Spirit' (v.16), 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith' (v.17), that we may share the cosmic vision of 'breadth, and length, and depth, and height' (v.18) because we are, as St Paul says, 'rooted and grounded in love' (v.17). Without such grounding in the love of God, however profound or detailed our understanding, our hearts will calcify, our decisions go astray, and we will never truly apprehend the things that matter, neither in the Church nor in the rest of life. The goal of this shared participation in Christ is to 'be filled with all the fulness of God' Himself and share in the divine purpose for the world.

Cranmer laboured in his great library in Croydon, an area which was welcomed into the Diocese of Southwark from Canterbury in 1985, but which Henry VIII considered so 'rhematic' he was never tempted to remove the manor from him. It was there that the Archbishop drew up the great schemes of liturgy and promoted the use of the English Bible that form us to this day. To the medieval mind, the highest ideal in life was the monastic one. To Cranmer's reforming outlook, the ideal was to be lived out in the parish church and in the family home. Before the Prayer Book of 1549 we get the *Homilies*, the first of which is 'the fruitful exhortation to the reading of Holy Scripture' (1547) and then the *Kalendar*, which was stripped of what he tells us were 'uncertain stories, Legends, Responds, Verses, vain repetitions, Commemorations, and Synodals' to concentrate on an annual cycle of the entire Bible, or 'the greatest part thereof'. Especial focus was given to the Psalter. This diet of Psalms, Bible reading and congregational worship in all its majestic beauty was gifted to the people of England in a form recognisable to Prayer Book Society members today.

Cranmer's genius was to take the Hours out of their monastic setting and produce a collated office for home and parochial use. The Mass was reformed for Holy Communion in which collective devotion and participation (including reception in both kinds—an issue we are again facing in the light of Covid) replaced the *sacra privata* of private prayer. However, in common with the Magisterial Reformers, Cranmer's great vision of frequent, weekly communion, combined with daily Morning and Evening Prayer for the people, morphed into a steady habit of Sunday worship of ante-communion together with a sermon, as well as Matins and Evensong—the most characteristic feature of worship for most English people for over four centuries.

Cranmer did have a collective vision, albeit one largely unfamiliar to us today. The vision was both theological and political—one people formed by one book of worship: a liturgy for clergy and laity, a prayer book for life. Even *Common Worship,* in its multiplicity of tomes, is lacking when it comes to praying for rain, for fair weather, or for help in time of dearth and famine, or in time of war and tumults. It is in the Book of Common Prayer (in a later revision) that we find the Accession Service (of recent usage). Some of us may miss the services of the Gunpowder Plot, the Martyrdom of King Charles I, the Restoration of the Stuart Monarchy, and the arrival of William of Orange, all now removed. It is probably safe to say we will wait in vain for the *Common Worship* version of 'A Commination'. All this in one small book, bound up with the Articles and Ordinal. Let us rejoice and be glad!

This was, and is, the round of prayers, readings and devotion that provides the framework of worship, sacraments, the entry to life and departure from this mortal coil, for sickness, for thanksgiving and for holy matrimony. As one of our enduring historic formularies, the Prayer Book is sound in its doctrine, while usage impresses upon us the rhythmic precision of its language.

The passage of fifty years offers a natural opportunity to reflect on what has occurred during this time and also to look forward to what might come both for the Prayer Book Society and for the Church's worship and mission. The innovations of the Anglican Communion, of the Parish Communion Movement, of the Second Vatican Council, and eventually of Series One, Series Two, and Series Three led to the landmark *Alternative Service Book* in 1980. I scarcely mention it here, and I acknowledge that there is no thirst in this gathering for an *ASB* Society. When Archbishop Michael Ramsey retired in 1974, the bishops gave a dinner for him at New College, Oxford. In replying to the toast, he regaled them with the dream that he had been in heaven at a sherry party given by all the former archbishops. One by one they approached him, including Cranmer, who said, 'Ramsey, I don't think much of Series 3.' I imagine those words find resonance here.

Nevertheless, for all its limitations, the *ASB* was a genuine attempt to provide an alternative within one book. *Common Worship* by contrast is a library, fitting for its time, with a multiplicity of resources in the age of choice, diversity and computers. We have had innovation before—the services abolished in 1859, for example. Who would have thought before the First World War that Remembrance would meet such a deep yearning in English society as a result of the terrible scale of human loss on the fields of Flanders? It may be, therefore, that a new liturgical

devotion captures the imagination of our country and renews the common practice of the faith—a liturgical response like Corpus Christi or, centuries later, the Nine Lessons and Carols—a modern innovation which sought to tell the Christmas story anew to a society that was in danger of forgetting it.

In many ways, we have returned to earlier, pre-modern liturgical practice, which was always diverse, the product of manuscript culture where unity was found not in strict adherence to a central, authoritative text but in the application of a living tradition to the local context.

The arrival of printing, on the other hand, permitted mass production of texts not seen since the Paris Bibles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and ensured that those texts were stable and invariable. But if we take the long view, it is print culture that is unusual. Sandwiched between manuscript culture and the fluid, evasive text of electronic media, print culture—and the liturgies like the Prayer Book which flourished in it—seems, historically speaking, no longer to be the norm. But we here have benefitted so greatly from the Prayer Book. We have each been nurtured by deep familiarity with its cadences, with the rhythmic blank verse of Coverdale's Psalter, and schooled in its theological wisdom. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* to be sure.

What then is the vocation of those so properly devoted to the place of the Prayer Book in the Church of England's living tradition? I suggest that it is this: to recall the Church to its liturgical and worshipping life. The Church of England, in common with other 'mainstream' churches, has lost some of its conviction that the proper response of ordered worship is a liturgical response. In part, this is a result of the rise of that other stream of renewed worship that began in the 1960s—charismatic renewal. But the most significant cause is a lack of confidence in worship as a discipline that forms us, that our commitment to corporate prayer should be paramount.

Forty or so years ago, one may not have known *how* the Prayer Book or the *ASB* texts would be brought to life in worship in a particular place, but you would know with a certain degree of confidence *what* you would get. Today, the diversity in practice in parish churches unconstrained by a common book is so great that what one will find, should one turn up unprepared on a Sunday morning, is a very real question.

We cannot go back from this age of electronic texts, screens and social media, to an early modern print culture and the relative liturgical stability that flowed from it. Nevertheless, the Prayer Book Society has an important part to play in recalling the Church to the dignity of its first vocation—that is to say, to the dignity of worship, thoughtfully ordered,

in the language of those who have gathered together to pray that we might know 'the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God'.[1]

The Church of England feels itself to be at a difficult pass. There are some who find it difficult to trust that we shall—to borrow the words of the Collect—'continue in safety'. But it is first and foremost in worship that we approach God so that His pity might 'cleanse and defend' the Church. It is our encounter with God in prayer that purifies our hearts and succours us for service. In a time of change, the faithful approach to the altar and the recitation of our duty of Morning and Evening Prayer will be the foundation of a living, thriving Christian life—'… that I may go unto the altar of God, even unto the God of my joy and gladness'.[2]

We do not shirk this general vocation. Neither do we abandon the specific one of sustaining the use of the Prayer Book, both in familiar and in new ways.

Today, my sisters and brothers, we give thanks that we continue to pray the Prayer Book. May God bless you in this sacred endeavour, and I thank you for your part in it. Amen.

A sermon preached at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Prayer Book Society on 8th October 2022 at St James', Garlickhythe (Ephesians 3:13–end; St Luke 7:11–17).

1 Ephesians 3:19 KJV.
2 Psalm 43:4, The Psalms of David, BCP.

‘Godly and Decent Order’: the Book of Common Prayer in the Age of Choice

HUMPHREY SOUTHERN

The place: a quiet and beautiful country parish church; the occasion: an 8 o’clock celebration of the Holy Communion according to the Prayer Book rite; the celebrant: a young curate just a year into ministry, perhaps two weeks in priest’s orders. What could possibly go wrong? Well, not much, provided you are prepared to blink at a relatively minor liturgical error in one so inexperienced. The curate presided faultlessly, save for omitting the Collect for the Sovereign that follows the rehearsal of the Ten Commandments and precedes the Collect for the Day. An unfortunate error, of course, but understandable (none of the *Common Worship* orders, nor the *ASB* rites, nor the so-called ‘Series’ that preceded them, nor even the 1928 proposed revision, having retained this prayer), and hardly a hanging matter.

Were it not for one other possibly relevant fact that I have not yet mentioned. This is that the churchwarden of this parish church, a godly and faithful person who had fulfilled that role for a great many years since she had ‘inherited’ it from her mother, also happened to be a lady-in-waiting to Her Majesty, regularly worshipping alongside the Supreme Governor, as well as being in the loyal and firm habit of praying for her.

Mercifully, the wise warden held off from remonstrating against this mistake until after the service, but when the time came she was not slow to make the point.

‘Hilary,’ she said at the door to the young curate, ‘you didn’t pray for the Queen.’

‘I’m terribly sorry,’ came the reply. ‘I didn’t know she was ill!’

Now, as the incumbent responsible for training the curate in question (whose name I have changed here to spare blushes), I should no doubt hang my head in shame. But I cannot help but be rather impressed by the quick-wittedness of her reply, especially as I am convinced that it was motivated neither by impertinence nor republicanism, but merely instinct. I am happy to be able to relate that the incident was evidently looked on kindly in more exalted circles also. A few years later, someone who had no reason to know of my connection with the principals related the story to me (with no names or topical detail). He had been

a guest at a luncheon at Buckingham Palace and had heard it on that occasion—amid considerable merriment—from none other than His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. Evidently our Sovereign Lady The Queen (and her consort) had, unlike her forbidding forebear, been amused!

Time was, of course, when an error of this nature would have been very unlikely indeed. Time was, not only when the Prayer Book was the only legally authorised liturgy available in the Church of England, and so hugely familiar to all who worshipped regularly but also when many, many more people (whether or not frequent worshippers) would have had considerable familiarity with it dinned into them by a great deal more exposure to it, Sunday by Sunday, at school and elsewhere from childhood. It was, quite simply, part of the ordinary experience (to some degree or another) of many more people, and not just the religiously 'keen'. I expect we are inclined to romanticise the past a certain amount, and I am sure there is a lot of exaggeration in estimates of the frequency of churchgoing, but I think we can nevertheless be safe to assert that generations previous to ours knew the Prayer Book a very great deal more intimately than most of our contemporaries do. (You will understand that I am excepting present company, of course!)

And not just the Prayer Book. The basic story and grammar of the Christian faith—the Bible, its stories and language, the doctrine and ethics that flow from it—all of these were better known, even by relatively new or occasional churchgoers, than can be automatically assumed in our time. There was breadth, as well as depth, to this knowledge, even among people whose lived or conscious Christian allegiance was not necessarily well developed. It was not just the enthusiastic, signed-up, self-identifying Christian disciples who could be relied upon to have a working knowledge of Scripture (the King James Bible, of course) and the Prayer Book, but many others also. These were part of the shared cultural frame of reference for English-speaking people of Anglican allegiance (however loose) for some four centuries, more or less.

This is an aspect of what sociologists of religion have taken to calling 'Christendom', a term with which many here may well be familiar. 'Christendom'—originally generally a word used of the Christian world to distinguish it from non-Christian worlds (Islamic, Jewish or whatever)—has become shorthand for the paradigm (another jargon word, I'm afraid) under which it is effectively deemed that all members of a given society in a given period—for our purposes, the world of Mediaeval and Modern Europe—could be held to be in some real sense Christian. Not specifically (necessarily) as a consciously chosen religious

identity but because they had been born into and raised within a society indelibly shaped and given character by the Christian faith, its grammar, story and values. In Christendom (understood thus), Christian culture was dominant beyond any real competition and (as Tom Holland has very effectively argued in his 2019 book *Dominion*),[1] it has left a powerful and influential legacy in European and North American patterns of thought, political and social institutions and even what modern thinkers have come to describe as 'universal human rights'. In the Christendom paradigm, the grammar and narrative of the Christian faith could reliably be expected to provide a shared language and cultural framework for a whole society, including for those who might not be particularly religiously observant or enthusiastic. This was the world in which the essentially non-religiously aligned (in England) would confidently and unblushingly tick the C of E box in the census, this being what they 'were', even if—in terms of practice—they weren't anything very much. People 'talked the talk', in other words, whether or not they 'walked the walk'. The Book of Common Prayer, at least for English people, was a very important building block and cement for this monolithic culture (or coherent culture, if you prefer), this shared language and frame of reference.

The story of the disintegration of 'Christendom'—when, why and how—is complex and contested. I do not propose to explore it here. Suffice to say that at least by the middle of the twentieth century and with increasing rapidity since the Second World War, 'Christendom' has been in significant retreat, a retreat which some would say has become a rout. Increased cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, social mobility, confident assaults on the intellectual bases of Christian belief, a decoupling of religious practice from what might be called 'social respectability', some pretty shameful behaviour within the established Churches—all of this and more has played its part in the story. We are now in a place where there is a distinct dividing line, either to be welcomed or deplored, between the community of the Church and what is not-Church. This is the insight (putting it in highly generalised terms) behind the emphasis in our times on 'mission' in its many and various forms. 'Mission' occurs where the Church encounters and seeks to communicate with cultures and individuals that are identifiably not Christian. In a 'Christendom' paradigm, this happens elsewhere, away from the Christian home base, amid (as the hymn had it) 'Greenland's icy mountains [and] India's coral strand | Where Afric's sunny fountains

1 Tom Holland, *Dominion*, London: Little, Brown, 2019.

| roll down their golden sand': where Christendom is no more, the mission field becomes ubiquitous and the mission imperative arguably all the more pressing.

There are several implications of this and I propose to explore just two of them, if I may, in relation to the Prayer Book: one that has particular significance in the world of theological education and formation (where I earn my crust) and the other—which is related—which may pose some interesting challenges for the Prayer Book Society, with its avowed intent to champion, promote and (in the best sense, I hope) 'popularise' the Book of Common Prayer.

I will start with what I might claim to know a bit about, which is generally a sound policy.

A significant implication of the decline of what one might call religious—or specifically Christian—literacy among the population as a whole is that there is much that earlier educators in the field of training clergy could assume by way of knowledge and familiarity in students entering training that it is not safe to assume now. 'Hilary' in an earlier generation would not have needed detailed and exhaustive training in the Prayer Book Order for Holy Communion: she (though 'she' would have been 'he', of course) would simply have known it. Not, of course, necessarily its history, theology or significance for mission or Christian education or devotion: these things would still have been a part of the theological college curriculum in some form, but the basic shape—what elements followed which, including when the Sovereign was prayed for—would very likely be something that could be taken as read. The modern Hilary, including the bright and devoted young priest in my story, has not necessarily had that kind of grounding, either in the Prayer Book (or, necessarily, any other publicly authorised liturgy) or in a great deal more of what we might call the 'basics'. Long gone are the days when a significant proportion of children attended Sunday School to be instructed in the faith, or when R.E. in school essentially consisted of 'Scripture Knowledge'.

You will understand that I am not offering any particular comment on these developments: I merely offer them as observations. In some respects, there are aspects to welcome, or at least to be impressed by. For an individual to experience, hear, test and be obedient to a vocation to public ministry when they have comparatively little grounding in the detail of the faith, the institutional Church or the culture that goes with it is no mean achievement and a more diverse cadre of ministers (which one may hope to be the result) is, surely, a good for which to aspire. I well remember a friend at university asking me, when he discovered

that I was considering taking Holy Orders, how many clergy there had been in my family—only a single uncle by marriage in my case, as it happens—and divulging (when I reciprocated the question) that he couldn't offhand think of a single male relation of his who was not ordained! I cannot but admire him for resisting the pull and remaining lay (as he has), and similarly admire those who have heard and answered the call in a much less 'churchy' environment than my friend's (or mine, for that matter, deficient though it was in the matter of vicars as uncles), and wish to see many more of them.

But what this means is that a higher proportion of those coming forward for training for ministry, faithfully and obediently following the call of God, are doing so with much less ingrained familiarity than their predecessors would have had of Bible, liturgy, doctrine, culture and the like. To put it crudely, much ministerial training (including familiarising trainees with formal liturgies such as the BCP) starts much 'further back' than it used to, *and* at a time when the Church is greedy for the 'job' of preparing such people for ministry to be done in shorter time and for less money than ever before.

In these circumstances—where knowledge of the Prayer Book, as of much else of the shared grammar and vocabulary of the Christian faith, cannot be taken as 'given', either among ordinands or others—there are questions to be considered in how we approach and consider—categorise, indeed—the Book of Common Prayer. No longer the undisputed and effectively exclusive manual of worship and spirituality, it has become (as it were) one 'resource' among many. Instead of being *the* basic and fundamental text and guide for public worship, it now has to be defined, defended and championed in a much more competitive environment. This is, of course, a reality of which members of the Prayer Book Society are very well aware and very well focused on.

Obvious though this is in a sense, it is still worth dwelling upon for a moment or two. The Prayer Book, from its inception in the middle of the sixteenth century and (arguably) still more when it was restored in 1662, was specifically designed to provide uniformity of practice and usage within a 'Christendom' environment. It was set up (and hedged about with pretty draconian legislation to protect its exclusivity) to regulate and limit diversity of practice and thought within an essentially monolithic (albeit potentially and often actually divided) Christian society. It was *not* set up to be a resource among many in a market place of choice and preference, or—in that sense—a 'tool for mission'. The Preface to the 1662 Book makes this very plain, albeit affecting to be a bit more accommodating of difference than, in fact, it is.

> It hath been the wisdom of the Church of England, ever since the first compiling of her Publick Liturgy, to keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much easiness of admitting any variation from it. For, as on the one side common experience sheweth, that where a change hath been made of things advisedly established (no evident necessity so requiring) sundry inconveniences have thereupon ensued; and those many times more and greater than the evils, that were intended to be remedied by such change: So on the other side, the particular Forms of Divine worship, and the Rites and Ceremonies appointed to be used therein, being things in their own nature indifferent, and alterable, and so acknowledged; it is but reasonable, and that upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigency of times and occasions, such changes and alterations should be made therein, as to those that are in place of Authority should from time to time seem either necessary or expedient.

For all the cautious and elegant periphrasis, the sympathies and intention of the Preface are pretty clear: that 'those that are in place of Authority' have the responsibility and duty to provide a standard form of public worship, which admits as little variation and alteration as possible. The Book was to be *the* Book, rather than *a* book among others, with real virtue attached to uniformity of practice within its provisions.

Members of this Society will not need me to dwell for long on how much things have changed. *Common Worship*, with its rich or bewildering (select adjective of choice) array of alternative texts, seasonal and other optional material and explicit invitation to parochial liturgists to do their own thing using the smorgasbord of material provided, has shown very little 'stiffness in refusing' and a great deal of 'easiness of admitting' variation from a single liturgical standard; and those that have been 'in place of Authority' over the last half-century have found much cause to admit 'such changes and alterations' as have to them—but not, I suspect, to many here—seemed 'necessary [and] expedient'.

I have no doubt that I would be on pretty safe ground in this gathering if I were simply to join the chorus of regret, lament and sometimes anger that has attended on these developments from members of this Society and others. My possibly somewhat reckless instinct, however, is not to focus on that particular theme so much as to reflect a bit on where we realistically go from where we actually find ourselves now, acknowledging that it will not (and cannot) be backwards. Rather than

a conclusion, therefore, I might make so bold as to leave you with some prompts to further thought about how (in the terms of my title) we may develop our thinking about the Prayer Book in the context of a world that welcomes and appreciates choice and variety in ways that its framers did not. The world of the third decade of the twenty-first century is very, very different from that of the seventh decade of the seventeenth—that much is undeniable however much you do or do not accept the collapse of Christendom as a helpful organising narrative. It would be foolish and tedious to attempt a lengthy summary of the differences, but let me simply reiterate a couple of the implications of what I have said already. The Church—for us the Church of England—and Christianity more generally needs to operate very differently in terms of how it communicates, how it draws people into worship of God (which is, surely, its primary purpose, from which all else by way of service, witness and evangelism flows)—how it does its mission, in other words—in the diverse, competitive, questioning and febrile circumstances of contemporary culture. We are no longer about charting *the* way in which the common, unquestioned and effectively universal Christian identity shared by all should be regulated for the best. The 'exigency of [our] times and seasons' (in the terms of the 1662 Preface) calls for a very different kind of engagement, with sharper apologetic, more sympathetic and well-attuned dialogue and a more explicit recognition that choice is much more of a universally recognised good than the framers of the Preface would have appreciated. The task is different and so the way we use the tools must be different too.

I am emphatically not saying—please note—that the tools themselves need changing, and certainly not that the BCP has no place in the missional kitbag of the contemporary minister. This, perhaps, was the mistaken assumption of those who championed liturgical reform in the last century in the belief or expectation that new liturgies, as such, would stem the rapidly ebbing tide of Christendom. I do not believe that the Book of Common Prayer is a period piece—a kind of museum curio, like a vintage car, of amusement to those who like that sort of thing—but I do think that aspiring to a time when it can be restored to its monopoly position (or something like it) within the liturgies of the Church is probably a lost cause, and possibly (for the reasons I have tried to give here) understandably so. The task, therefore, is to promote it, and hope to win appreciation for it, in the context of that bewildering (or rich) array of other resources to which I have made reference. No longer assumed to be known and loved, it needs to be intentionally promoted.

This is why I welcome so much of the educational initiatives your

Society has been undertaking in recent years, not least in terms of outreach to ministerial students. Free gifts of the Book itself with good quality materials about how it can be used, including the Occasional Offices, as well as Matins and Evensong and the Holy Communion, are an excellent strategy and (in my experience) welcomed by ordinands. The little red pencil erasers marked 'for undoing those things which we ought not to have done' go down well also! Exposing ministerial students to good practice in relation to the Prayer Book as practically used is vital and I am always delighted when we are able to place students for parish placements and for curacies in places where the BCP is used confidently, stylishly and with imagination. (The same, of course, goes for the importance of exposing students to good practice in all sorts of other aspects of ministerial activity—in worship in a range of styles and cultures, in pastoral care, preaching, practical theological reflection, social outreach, parochial administration and so much more: there is, in a sense, nothing specialised about the Prayer Book, as such.)

The Prayer Book, as I said earlier, is now, whether we like it or not, but one liturgical and devotional resource among many that are available and it needs to be promoted as such. It also needs to be promoted in an environment where there is more and more suspicion of—and reluctance to use—organised and authorised liturgy of *any* kind, worship in increasing numbers of places and traditions appearing to be more and more homegrown and free-form, often not recognisably Anglican at all. Thus the task of promoting the BCP (or formal liturgy more generally) is not easy in ministerial formation, not least given the hugely overcrowded curriculum theological education institutes are expected to cover (in, as I have indicated, less time and with smaller budgets). Inevitably, among ordinands as among lay and ordained members of the Church more generally, of all ages, there are those who, upon encountering the Prayer Book, find it easy to love and a joy to use, while there are others who find it awkward, impenetrable or otherwise challenging as a resource. Our task in the colleges and courses, I would maintain, is not to attempt to *teach people to love* the Book, as such, (any more than it is to inculcate any particular feelings about any particular resource), but it is to ensure that this vital—literally 'vital', *living*—jewel within our heritage is something students are familiar with and understand, so that it can be used confidently and respectfully in the complex and pluralist circumstances of modern ministry. In this aspect of our task, I hope, believe and am delighted that we can look to the Prayer Book Society as an ally and a support in an enterprise which will be less about preserving one aspect of our inheritance as a 'special case' so much as allowing it

to inspire and play its part in our ongoing missional engagement with the contemporary world, which we are called to love and serve for the sake of the gospel.

And, by the way, 'Hilary' did not—so far as I know—make the same mistake again!

This paper was given at the 2022 Prayer Book Society Conference.

An Inclination Towards Eternity: Probing the Growth of Choral Evensong

SIMON REYNOLDS

Just over forty years ago, *The Musical Times* carried an article by the then-Precentor of Westminster Abbey, Alan Luff.[1] With the benefit of hindsight, it would be easy to satirise (in a *Private Eye* kind of way) the vision for the future offered by the person with day-to-day responsibility for one of England's most accomplished choral foundations. Written at a time when those responsible for liturgical revision over the previous decades seemed to be riding the crest of a progressive wave, Luff was keen to advocate wider use of the recently published *Alternative Service Book* (1980), even postulating that serious composers would be drawn to set the book's texts with increasing regularity, simply because they were published and authorised for liturgical use. He also fostered far greater congregational participation at cathedral worship, especially on Sundays, arguing that worship dominated by complex choral music would be unlikely to attract an emerging generation of worshippers. Regrettably, history does not record the reaction of the Abbey's then-Organist and Master of the Choristers, Simon Preston!

Dominant trends

In one respect, Luff was merely echoing a widespread assumption of the time, one common to most Christian churches. In the wake of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) in the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the (ecumenical) Liturgical Movement that evolved in the period following the First World War, an anthropocentric approach to liturgy was becoming privileged across the ecclesiastical spectrum. In particular, Luff was echoing the view that 'fully conscious and active participation' in the liturgy (as the Second Vatican Council documents prescribe it) meant specifically 'fully conscious and active *vocal* participation'. This was not simply about the democratisation of worship but also a tendency to assume that making the language of worship simpler, more precise and less poetic, would enhance its accessibility.

1 Alan Luff, 'Ways Forward in the Cathedral' in *The Musical Times* Vol. 122, No. 1666, December 1981, pp. 845–847 and 849.

This was all happening at a time when 'functional equivalence' was gaining traction in translations of the Bible (the Good News Bible being the iconic exemplar), along with the belief that the translated *meaning* of the text for contemporary readers would accelerate an understanding of literature originating in different languages, from different times and cultures.[2]

In the Roman Catholic Church across much of Europe and North America, this generated a horizontal approach to liturgical architecture, choreography and music. The favouring of informality, both in language and style, fuelled the inexorable growth of the 'folk Mass' as the regular demeanour in most parishes of the English-speaking world (often caricatured as 'out with *Kyrie eleison* and in with *Kum-ba-yah*').

In the Church of England, such tendencies would take another couple of decades to become widespread as the growth of Evangelicalism, accompanied by more 'popular' genres of music, has become predominant. In the 1980s, reasonably well-resourced choirs still existed in large numbers in Anglican parishes; and membership of the Royal School of Church Music, which encouraged high standards for parish choirs, was at an all-time high. Nonetheless, the emerging Church of England clergy of that period not only favoured the newly authorised liturgical forms as *de rigeur*, many were actively discouraging of a distinctively choral accent in parochial worship. Ease of expression, coupled to the belief that reserving particular liturgical texts to a choir limited congregational participation, began to spawn an increasingly one-dimensional, communitarian-focused liturgy. The future direction of travel seemed unchallengeable.

It is apparent how (especially among educationally minded clergy) the emphasis on congregations repeatedly needing to learn something new far outweighed any sense that worship was an invitation to simply glimpse the threshold of eternity and delight in the otherness of the divine. The description of worship as a meeting without an agenda, to focus purely on enjoying the presence of God, was not immediately evident. Cathedrals were often spoken of pejoratively, particularly by the parochial clergy, with their worship being rebuffed as elitist, outdated or exclusive. Little wonder that those who served in cathedrals at the time were beginning to absorb this disapproval and sought to respond to it in the register adopted by Alan Luff.

2 See Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Tabor, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden: Brill, 1969.

Retrospection and progression

It is easy to look back at aspects of the liturgical climate of forty years ago with a wry smile. If they can be found, copies of the *Alternative Service Book* are likely to be gathering dust in cupboards, after losing its authorisation in 2000. Rather than setting its texts, serious composers writing liturgical music have been drawn to a richer—and often more ancient—canon of poetry and liturgical texts. A brief survey of the work of Jonathan Dove, Matthew Martin and Judith Weir (to name three representative composers at random) illustrates this amply. The publication and authorisation of *Common Worship* as the successor to the *Alternative Service Book* gave the Church of England its richest liturgical provision since 1549. However, because of variable levels of liturgical formation in the Church's training institutions, this has resulted in multiple volumes of liturgical texts, available electronically to be cut-and-pasted at the whim of a self-appointed local élite. Fearful of repetition and boredom, the insights and instincts needed to discern how these texts might take root as part of people's praying and worshipping consciousness have not always been widely discernible.

The appetite for (what often passes for) more accessible forms of worship over the past forty years has been accompanied by escalating and widespread decline. At the same time, a self-evident growth in the numbers of people attending worship in cathedrals in the Church of England has been taking place.[3] There is also reported evidence that Choral Evensong, in particular, has become a focus for this growth in attendance, not only in cathedrals but in college and school chapels, as well as large churches in urban centres. The latest available figures indicate that around 18,000 adults are attending Choral Evensong each week—a thirty-five per cent increase on the 2007 figure. With this comes the strong inference that Evensong is appealing, to some extent, to a younger cohort.[4] What is less clear (simply because, while we have plenty of anecdotal testimony, there has been no evidence-based research published to date) is *why* this is so.[5] In the meantime, it is possible to make some reasonable assumptions (see below).

What can be said with a degree of confidence is that the current *zeitgeist* around Choral Evensong in the Church of England is part of a Europe-

3 See https://www.churchofengland.org/about/research-and-statistics/resources-publications-and-data#na for access to comparative statistics for Church of England attendances dating back to 2009.

4 See, for example, Jonathan Arnold, 'Evensong', *The Spectator*, 24th March 2018.

5 Kathryn King of the University of Oxford is undertaking research into the social and psychological dynamics of attendance at Choral Evensong, the results of which have not been published at the time of writing.

wide momentum that has seen large numbers of people attracted to long-established monastic communities. With this has been a growth in the numbers of people undertaking pilgrimages—whether along traditional routes such as the *Camino* to Santiago de Compostela, the Pilgrims' Way from Winchester to Canterbury, or along newly-devised routes. Not all of them would describe themselves as 'religious' in the accepted sense.

The significance of this is that, historically, Choral Evensong emerged as one element of a Reformed evolution of the monastic pattern of worship in England following the dissolution of the monasteries, as well as the destruction of shrines in cathedrals that were a destination for pilgrims until the first half of the sixteenth century. In that sense, Evensong, and the choral tradition that has flourished as a response to the challenges and opportunities of Reformed patterns of worship in the Book of Common Prayer, is just one way in which elements of a monastic pattern of worship have been transposed into a different social and ecclesial landscape. The desire for the sounds and spaces of monastic worship continued to persist, as does the search for beauty, artistic creativity and silence.

A contrasting element of this post-Reformation momentum can be discerned in Quakerism, with its strong emphasis on silence in worship. It became a reserve of silence, no longer available in monastic communities, in a post-Reformation world of increasing noise: generated as much by the debates of the Enlightenment as the mechanisation of the industrial revolution. Although the Quakers saw this very much in terms of an interiorising of the monastic pattern in the individual human heart, it is still possible to discern how a Quaker entrepreneur like George Cadbury created something not too dissimilar to a monastic enclosure in Bourneville, with its rule of life, green spaces approximating to the cloister and its garth, as well as the balanced rhythm of work, recreation and worship for its residents, at a time when industrialisation and the mass migration from the countryside to English cities was at its height. Diarmaid MacCullough is just one historian who suggests that what followed in the wake of the Reformation fuelled a noisy religion in a progressively noisy society, resulting in a period least attentive to the silence of God in European Christian history.[6] That is, perhaps, just another pointer towards the appeal of cathedrals today. Their space and silence, as much as their music, are drawing people at a time when several cathedrals are restoring or reinstating their medieval shrines

6 See Diarmaid MacCullough, *Silence: A Christian History*, London: Penguin, 2013, p. 136ff.

and welcoming greater numbers of pilgrims in addition to increasing numbers of worshippers.

Why is this? In the absence of published research, but drawing on trends identified by sociologists of religion, along with observed experience and practice, it is possible to have a reasonably well-informed guess.

Vicarious

We know that Europe is exceptional. Grace Davie is just one sociologist of religion to highlight how, as the influence of institutional religion has declined across Europe, fewer people are attending church with any regularity. At the same time, the world as a whole is becoming more—not less—religious. As emerging generations across Europe (and, increasingly, North America) are growing up in greater isolation from the language and rituals of Christianity, 'vicarious' approaches to faith continue to exercise a strong pull. This is the case both in the culturally Protestant states of Northern Europe that were most impacted by the Reformation as well as culturally Catholic countries like France, Spain, Italy and Ireland. In other words, wherever the churches are performing a function or a ritual on behalf of others, such as baptising people's children, marrying people, conducting a funeral, making it known that those who live in the parish are being regularly prayed for, keeping the doors of the church open for people to pray and light candles (even if most people don't avail themselves of the opportunity), this gives many of the historic churches far more social and cultural capital than they might otherwise have. Davie has described people who value vicarious approaches to faith as those who are 'neither involved with organized religion, nor consciously opposed to it…' which arises from her notion of 'believing without belonging'. Interestingly, Davie suggests that such people account for as much as fifty per cent of the population of most European states, including the UK.[7]

In England, the accessibility of worship on Sundays and weekdays in large churches and cathedrals in major centres of population, as well as chapels of higher education institutions, offering a style of worship that has a vicarious character, is clearly meeting the needs of those who 'believe without belonging'—as well as those who would describe their commitment in more decisive terms. Cathedrals[8] respond to the need that such people may feel for a reflective space in their lives, allowing

7 See Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates*, Oxford: OUP, 2000.

8 Any subsequent reference to cathedrals should be read as shorthand that includes larger churches, collegiate chapels and other choral foundations.

them to ponder life's deepest questions at their own pace, without the requirement to sign up to some kind of commitment. It is easy to slip in and out, without having to give an account of yourself to others—or conform to someone else's definition of what being a legitimate worshipper is. In that sense, cathedrals and their style of worship embody a fundamental Anglican character: they are there for the whole population, not just those who make up the committed core. Once inside, their generous spaces allow a measure of anonymity. The beauty of the music, coupled to the scale of the architecture, makes the experience of worship in a cathedral quite unlike any other we know from daily life and work. The choir and clergy are carrying a given liturgical framework, albeit clothed with different music each day, without requiring extensive vocal participation from worshippers, on behalf of others. Anyone encountering it (whether for the first time or as a familiar and repeated pattern) can simply receive whatever is being offered, which may be as surprising as it is consoling, allowing the body's other senses to engage the heart and mind in search of God. Others have expressed the view that worship in cathedrals might contribute positively to mental wellbeing.[9]

Counter-cultural

The widespread assumptions among those responsible for liturgical renewal forty years ago were that simplifying worship was the key to 'fully conscious and active participation' in the liturgy. For some, that meant so-called 'contemporary' language, or more popular styles of music; for others, a simplification of ceremonial. In many ways, it is possible to look back to a very different era and recognise how a progressive preoccupation with making worship 'easy' was largely about responding to the preferences and expectations of the already-declining inner core of most local churches. Such impulses were often justified as being attractive to 'young people' and habitually characterised by greater informality. The impression given was that the younger generations were uniformly attracted by popular music, liturgical casualness and an underlying dislike of anything that might be artistically or intellectually engaging. In particular, there was a tendency to debase the Book of Common Prayer and more ancient translations of the Scriptures as impenetrable remnants of a bygone age. Youth groups and informal music groups often replaced choirs by being marketed (usually by an older generation) as more attractive options. The rapid decline in

9 See, for example, Angela Tilby, 'Why Choral Evensong is so Popular', *Church Times*, 2nd November 2018.

membership of the Royal School of Church Music from the 1990s onwards, coupled to the difficulty many parish churches still experience in recruiting organists and choir-trainers, tells its own story.

This one-directional emphasis on the internal agenda of the Church, with its consumerist impulse, inevitably fed a measure of neglect for what was happening in the wider world. We can see how many of the attempts to make worship more attractive to those who were either drifting away or living their lives in complete isolation from the influence of the churches, did not connect effectively with a society where *any* religious vocabulary, regardless of whether it was contemporary or ancient, was becoming increasingly alien. Christian worship dressed in easy-going syncopation, underscored by primary chords, was already outmoded and the world had moved on.

Meanwhile, the counter-cultural ambience of worship in cathedrals seemed to be speaking to people for whom the well-intentioned attempts at accessibility and relevance were not meeting (in Philip Larkin's words) 'a hunger to be more serious'. For the emerging generations, who had little familiarity with existing patterns of worship, uncompromisingly challenging music by contemporary composers was as likely to be a source of fascination and attraction as Tudor and Renaissance polyphony. The public reaction to John Tavener's 'Song for Athene', sung at the conclusion of Princess Diana's funeral in 1997, is just one example. From the sixteenth century, Thomas Tallis's motet, 'If ye love me', is being asked for at weddings with increasing frequency. Because this generation had never previously encountered the sentimentalities of Victorian hymnody, they weren't clamouring for something deemed by an older generation to be more up-to-date. Consequently, the solid, symphonic and Edwardian character of music by Parry and Stanford is not instinctively regarded as outdated. More significantly, a number of chaplains in higher education institutions have reported that the language of the Book of Common Prayer similarly invites curiosity, precisely because it is different and, in some respects, demanding. Because it is so unlike the language of everyday life, and certainly more expansive than that used in electronic communications, it lends itself more immediately to an encounter with the otherness of the divine. One participant in a survey in the United States echoes the British experience: 'I want a service that is not sensational, flashy, or particularly "relevant." I can be entertained anywhere. At church, I do not want to be entertained. I do not want to be the target of anyone's marketing. I want to be asked to

participate in the life of an ancient-future community.'[10] This is just a hint at the extent to which worship that is formal, combining humanity with intelligence, where choral music is an integral component, can prove inviting to people who can relate to it in a variety of ways. As one musicologist has identified:

> … because music is musical, it can speak to us of things that are not strictly musical. This is how we hear music speak… by allowing it the opacity of its own voice, and then engaging that voice in ways that reflect both its presence and our own, much as we allow others a voice when we converse with them.[11]

Mixed economy mission?

Another milestone for the Church of England during the 1980s was the publication of the 'Faith in the City' report, with its trenchant analysis of social disadvantage and disintegration in the deprived areas of England's inner cities. Alongside this analysis were proposals for how the Church, in partnership with other agencies, could enable greater mobility and aspiration, as well as contributing positively to social cohesion. One astonishing omission from this report was the contribution of choral foundations serving inner cities like Derby, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and Southwark, none of which had dedicated choir schools, with many drawing choristers from across the social spectrum. This, despite accounts of young people joining choirs in deprived areas over the intervening years having repeatedly accentuated their importance in galvanizing life skills, such as teamwork and socialisation (alongside the musical advantages), improving learning skills more widely, raising aspiration and improving social mobility.

Around twenty years later, the Church of England, now in a different place, published the report, 'Mission-Shaped Church'. It was one of a number of initiatives over the past decade to analyse and address the decline in church-going. This report made no mention of the contribution of cathedrals as 'models' of worshipping communities attracting increasing numbers of worshippers. Even by 2005, the statistics were beginning to suggest that, as well as Charismatic and Evangelical congregations in urban centres (and their suburbs), cathedrals were resolutely bucking

10 Cited in 'Want millennials back in the pews? Stop trying to make church "cool"', *Washington Post*, 30th April 2015.

11 Scott Burnham, *How Music Matters: Poetic Content Revisited*, Oxford: OUP, 2009, p. 215.

the trend of decline—not least by their capacity to attract a younger generation of worshippers. The authors of the report had little difficulty in describing how the Charismatic model was proving attractive, along with multiple permutations of 'Fresh Expressions' of church, notably their capacity to offer an 'experience', but seemed unable to identify how cathedrals were doing precisely that, albeit within another liturgical, architectural and theological context. This suggests a myopic and theologically insular mindset, perpetuating some of the assumptions (and prejudices) evident in previous decades. It left me wondering how many of the 'Fresh Expressions' described in the report might appeal to the hesitant and shy, the questioning pilgrim who is not yet ready to sign along the dotted line of doctrinal certainty; or those for whom the language of growth and success might judge their poverty, or their unresolved shame; and how a closely defined sense of 'fellowship' in such churches might exclude those whose lifestyle and identity does not conform to pre-determined cultural expectations. The report certainly failed to acknowledge that cathedrals are not only welcoming centres of worship and prayer, where liturgical stability and creativity are held in resourceful tension, but are also robustly creative places of learning and enquiry, inviting a broad range of people to engage with the Christian faith in an intelligent and humane way, celebrating science and the arts, whilst also contributing to the cohesion of their cities and regions as they engage with key influencers.

From this rather restrictive missionary *status quo*, there has been a recent and welcome shift of perspective. The statistics alone were telling their own story and could hardly be ignored. Whilst it is true that grants from the Strategic Development Fund have tended to favour so-called Resource Churches that model 'Fresh Expressions', there is some evidence that dioceses are including churches that specialise in choral worship, along with music outreach programmes, where traditional patterns of liturgical worship and high standards of choral music are distinctive features, in their bids for funding. The Diocese of Portsmouth led the way, followed more recently by the Diocese of Blackburn. Such initiatives recognise what more sensitive and insightful approaches to mission have long highlighted:[12] that different people, from different backgrounds, with different life stories discover faith in different ways, sometimes over a long period of time, before they are ready to make any kind of decisive commitment. This alone suggests that there is a place

12 See, for example, John Finney, *Stories of Faith: Building Evangelism on the Experiences of 'Finding Faith Today'*, Swindon: Bible Society, 1996.

for large and generous spaces that welcome and encourage searchers and explorers, rather than prescribing programmed and formulaic outcomes, where traditional patterns of prayer, coupled to expansive music, poetic language and substantial architectural spaces, offer a spiritual and cultural freedom to discover the past and sense how it might shape the future. This is just one way in which cathedrals and their worshipping ambience enable people to live, learn, question and grow within a potentially transforming orbit. It is how cathedral worship brings a vital dimension to the Church of England's missionary impetus, not least by inviting people to simply take time to wonder at the mystery and generosity of God.

To be scrupulously fair to Alan Luff, in the article with which I began, he did allow that the Book of Common Prayer and its distinctive liturgical accent would continue to co-exist alongside more recent liturgies (how could a Precentor of Westminster Abbey not say this?). Nonetheless, the underlying tenor of his thesis was that it would become subordinate as an emerging generation discovered the new liturgical forms and felt more at home with their style and cadences. That has manifestly not been the case: particularly where the Prayer Book provides the liturgical framework for the choral offices, and also because there is evidence that an emerging generation of younger clergy is more positively engaged by its language and theology. At a time when the distinctive Anglican identity of the Church of England is being eroded, there is a welcome discovery of the liturgical and doctrinal locus that gives the Church its distinctive identity as part of wider society. This tendency can only affirm and celebrate the truly *mixed* economy that is necessary for the Church's future growth.

Inviting and challenging

In the final analysis, it is tempting to wonder whether one of the reasons why Luff's thesis was never fully realised was because little account was taken of the changing nature of society and of how traditional forms of worship can speak into an aggressively secular culture. Evensong expects little of us. It allows us to find our own level of involvement, inviting rather than compelling, allowing worshippers to gradually feel at home in its centuries-old contours, as they bring to it their deeply felt needs and persistent hopes. By allowing people to catch the echoes and resonances of God speaking through the beauty of what their senses receive, there is both consolation and challenge in the words and music, and encouragement to respond to it without specifying what

that response must be. There is freedom to simply *be* as a centuries-old composition continues to carry the hopes, burdens and prayers of the present moment. In the space given to reflect, receive and respond, an awareness of God is being deepened, however imperceptibly, as we begin to see the world and other people with the wisdom and compassion that is at the heart of God.

A full setting-forth of the arguments in this article can be found in the book Lighten Our Darkness: Discovering and Celebrating Choral Evensong *by the same author, and recently published by Darton, Longman & Todd.*

‘O Lord, Open Thou Our lips’[1]: the Popularity of Choral Evensong and the Book of Common Prayer in the Netherlands.[2]

HANNA RIJKEN

In the Netherlands, Choral Evensong, following the Book of Common Prayer, has become very popular over the last few decades. This paper explores the popularity of Choral Evensong in the Netherlands and the use of the Prayer Book in relation to religious dynamics in Dutch society.

‘A way to draw near the threshold of mystery’, is how Jon Riding wonderfully described Choral Evensong in his paper, ‘Touching Mystery’.[3] He explained, ‘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.’ And: ‘It is a moment when worlds touch and where music, language and space all conspire to draw us into the narrative of salvation.’ According to Victoria Johnson, Choral Evensong is ‘a jewel in the crown of Anglican liturgy’.[4] She wrote, ‘This jewel has begun to stir the souls of a growing number of people, perhaps because this kind of contemplative space is something increasingly needed in the chaos and confusion of the world. What is the attraction?’

Choral Evensong has become very popular over the last few decades, not only in the United Kingdom, but also in the Netherlands, which

1 From the preces, in the order for Evening Prayer, The Book of Common Prayer 1662. Based on Psalm 51:15.

2 This paper was delivered as a lecture at The Prayer Book Society Conference, 10th September 2022, Liverpool Hope University. The article is a summary of the author’s dissertation: Hanna Rijken, ‘“My Soul Doth Magnify”: The Appropriation of Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands’, Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2020. An earlier, shorter version has been published in *Cathedral Music* magazine: Hanna Rijken, ‘Beauty and Holiness: The popularity of Choral Evensong in the Netherlands’, 2022, pp. 44–47.

3 Jon Riding, ‘Touching Mystery: The Book of Common Prayer as Liminal Space’, *Faith & Worship*, Lent, 2019, pp. 36–46.

4 Victoria Johnson, ‘Choral Evensong: a Living Tradition’, *Cathedral Music* magazine, 2021, pp. 18–21.

prompts one to ask, 'What is happening in this supposedly secularised country?' We notice something remarkable: overcrowded churches (at least, before the COVID-19 pandemic!), chamber choirs which are transforming into Evensong choirs, and the establishment of 'Anglican' choir schools for boy and girl choristers.[5] Increasingly since the 1980s, Choral Evensong that follows the text of the liturgical order of The Book of Common Prayer 1662 is being organised in the Netherlands in and also outside the context of the Church of England. Dutch choirs are singing a complete, traditional Anglican 'daily prayer' liturgy: preces and responses, psalms, canticles, also hymns and an anthem, as well as lessons and spoken prayers. These Choral Evensongs are held in large, monumental church buildings with good acoustics, a beautiful organ and the singers' choir robes that look as though they have come straight from an English cathedral.

The services attract many people: believers, church-goers, ex-believers and not-yet believers. In some cases, participants are even willing to buy tickets to attend. This paradox—the popularity of a (semi-)ecclesial English Choral Evensong in a supposedly secularised country like the Netherlands—raises questions. What exactly is going on here? Why is Choral Evensong, following the Book of Common Prayer, so popular in the Netherlands nowadays? Is there a re-churching taking place, rather than a de-churching?

My Soul Doth Magnify

Research into the adoption or appropriation of Anglican Choral Evensong in the Netherlands in relation to religious dynamics in Dutch culture is essential for gaining insight into the paradox of its popularity in a supposedly de-churching country. A key concept in my own doctoral research was that of 'appropriation', being derived from the Dutch cultural historian Willem Frijhoff: 'Appropriation is the process of interpretation with which groups or individuals provide new meaning for external bearers of meaning, so that the latter becomes acceptable, liveable, bearable or even dignified.'[6] In my research, I took a two-pronged approach to the appropriation of Choral Evensong, focusing, on the one hand, on appropriation as a meaning-making process, i.e. how participants experience Choral Evensong and the meaning they

5 For instance Roden (1985), Gorinchem (1988), Sneek (1995) and Kampen (2000).

6 W. Frijhoff, 'Toeëigening, van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving', *Trajecta* 6, no. 2, 1997, pp. 99–118.

attribute to it, and on the other hand, as ritual appropriation, i.e. how Choral Evensong is 'performed' in the Netherlands.

Investigating Choral Evensong involved focusing on several aspects. After an initial period spent observing, I noticed that Choral Evensong in the Netherlands has many similarities with Choral Evensong in England, but there are also striking differences. For instance, in England, Choral Evensong is in English, which is the vernacular; this is significant because Evensong was established during the English Reformation, when Latin was replaced by the vernacular. The language used in most Choral Evensongs in the Netherlands is also English (following the Book of Common Prayer 1662), which represents a similarity, yet English is non-vernacular in the Netherlands—it is neither the native language of (most) Dutch choristers nor of the attendees. I will elaborate on this later. Another difference is the frequency of Evensong (only once a month instead of every day), and the awareness of, and use of, space in Dutch churches ('spatial practice'). In the Netherlands, Choral Evensong generally takes place in large, monumental churches—mostly in use as reformed (Calvinistic) ones—where the interiors have been turned around, 'disorientated' due to the sixteenth-century Reformation. The sacrality and eastward orientation of church buildings was mostly abandoned in the Reformation, with the pulpit becoming centrally positioned. As a result, the altered disposition of the inside of these churches has considerable consequences for the spatial practice in Evensong, such as turning East for the Creed.

As an analytical tool, I used four perspectives to look at the Dutch adoption of Choral Evensong and its particular characteristics: language, use of space, dress, and liturgical musical experience. The methods I used were ethnographic in character—'participant observation' (i.e. both the researcher and the congregation take part in the liturgy), as well as a detailed analysis of orders of service and websites, and interviews with key individuals. In order to investigate the meaning that participants attribute to Choral Evensong, I focused on the 'ritual-musical qualities' of Choral Evensong as formulated by the participants, using a concept of 'qualities' that was in accordance with Paul Post's description: 'identity-determining characteristics, traits, dimensions or tendencies in a ritual repertoire'.[7] The research offers insight into the popular appropriation of Choral Evensong and the transformation of religious practice in the Netherlands.

7 P. Post, 'Introduction and Application. Feast as a Key Concept in a Liturgical studies Research Design', in P. Post, G. Rouwhorst, L. van Tongeren & A. Scheer (eds.), *Christian Feast and Festival: The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture* (*Liturgica Condenda, No. 12*), Leuven, 2001, pp. 47–77.

Attribution of meaning

A participant in Choral Evensong described his experience thus: 'It was beautiful! The texts and music… everything. So warm! So bright! Heavenly… I cannot find words… I am deeply touched and… lifted up…' What ritual-musical qualities do participants attribute to Choral Evensong? The results of the fieldwork analysis show six elements: perfect beauty, holiness, rituality, transcendence, contrast experience and connection.

Perfect beauty is an important element; participants described the beauty of the language in the Book of Common Prayer and the high vocal quality of the sacred music, which seems to yield a transcendental experience. They also hold in high esteem the loveliness of the church buildings with their perfect acoustics.

Holiness (sacrality) was another key quality: not just the sacred music, but also the sacred space and rituals, e.g. processions. The English language (Book of Common Prayer 1662) was described as a sacred language, evoking an experience of holiness. An important notion in this context is the reconquering of sacred space; the participants preferred the majestic church buildings (*domus Dei* rather than *domus ecclesiae*), explaining that the silence in the church building is a quality that is part of the sacrality. In some Choral Evensongs in reformed (i.e. physically/architecturally altered) contexts, we noticed a 'new' attention to the East as a sacred direction (re-sacralisation).

Rituality is an important attribute. Interviewees explained that the rituals in the liturgy are themselves important. They also mentioned the ritual quality of using a non-vernacular language, which enhances the feeling of mystery and holiness, as opposed to intelligibility, yet the use of 'formal language' was also described as a quality. Before we go to the next element, I will elaborate on the aspect of ritual language.

Ritual language

In Choral Evensong in the Netherlands, the language from The Book of Common Prayer 1662 is used. This preference for formal, encoded and traditional language is in contrast with recent developments in, for instance, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in which the emphasis is on language that is accessible, approachable and everyday, i.e. informal. An example of this is the use of the Dutch Bible translation, *Bijbel in gewone taal* ('Bible in everyday/normal language'). Why do participants in Choral Evensong in the Netherlands prefer the language of the Book

of Common Prayer 1662? In my research, I investigated the language of Choral Evensong as a ritual language and used features of ritual, which anthropologist Roy Rappaport formulated, namely: it is encoded by others than the performers (i.e. it is prescribed in the Prayer Book); it is also formal, performative and invariable.[8] I added a fifth feature, that of aesthetics. In the research, I noticed a desire for the experience of holiness or sacrality and mystery. When encoded liturgical text is fixed, after centuries it becomes a sacred language, as Richley Crapo explained.[9] He uses the word 'aura' to describe the sacred dimension of the language. The use of the non-vernacular in Choral Evensong in the Netherlands contrasts with the original intentions of the Book of Common Prayer. Intelligibility was one of the motivations behind the newly created order during the Reformation 'to signal and spread the vernacular' and to make the liturgy understandable for everyone.[10] Christine Mohrmann, in her investigation into the use of liturgical Latin, explains that in the use of liturgical language other elements are also important, for instance 'elements preferred for their artistic or spiritual potentialities…'[11] Words can have considerable power to move, explained Marius van Leeuwen: 'Sometimes the religious feeling attaches itself so strongly to such words, that the sound itself raises an emotion, like a ray of light through a church window...'[12] A minister in the Netherlands called the language of the Book of Common Prayer 'a lifebuoy' for the Protestants in the Netherlands: 'The Netherlands have become very small, on account of the reformed orthodoxy. People have become tired of ecclesial quibbling. They are now presented with a language that connects them intuitively with a large organic past. It is a kind of a lifebuoy for them to see that Christianity is bigger than the Netherlands…'[13]

The research shows that the language of the Book of Common Prayer is used in Evensong in the Netherlands because of the perceived beauty, the connection both with the past and also with the worldwide Church and the evocation of an experience of holiness.

8 R. A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 110), Cambridge, 1999, pp. 23–68.

9 R. H. Crapo, *Anthropology of Religion. The Unity and Diversity of Religions*, New York, 2003, p. 155.

10 K. Stevenson, 'Worship by the Book', in: C. Hefling and C. Shattuck, *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer. A Worldwide Survey*, Oxford, 2006, pp. 9–21.

11 C. Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin: its Origins and Character. Three Lectures*, London, 1957/1959, p. 6.

12 M. van Leeuwen, 'De onalledaagse taal van de liturgie', in: M. Barnard and N. Schumann, *Nieuwe wegen in de liturgie. De weg van de liturgie – een vervolg-*, Zoetermeer, 2002, pp. 65–82.

13 Interview with minister, 11-10-2015.

Transcendence is evoked by the beauty of the music and the texts. As one director of music explained, 'To be lifted up above yourself so high, because it is a kind of primal feeling, is how it is meant to be… For me, this is heavenly. A paradisiacal feeling...'

Contrast experience is closely related to transcendence. The participants described the whole experience as contrasting with the usual Sunday morning services. They criticised the post-Reformation emphasis on spoken words, the use of everyday language and the noisy atmosphere of chattering people at Protestant Sunday services. In contrast, there is silence at Choral Evensong—more *domus Dei*. According to the interviewees, the high quality of the music at Choral Evensong also contrasts with the music at most Sunday morning services.

Connection is the last of the important qualities. People described a connection between believers throughout the entire Church—from strictly reformed to Roman Catholic. As Rowan Williams says: 'The Book of Common Prayer 1662 is unique among the worship books of Christendom in having become the touchstone for… the unity of a whole church.'[14]

People also describe a connection between believers, former believers and non-believers. Jonathan Arnold explains in *Sacred Music in Secular Society*[15] that music as a bridge plays an important part in this connection, and the participants also felt a connection between heaven and earth.

Ritual appropriation

Concerning the ritual appropriation of Choral Evensong in the Netherlands, three notions can be formulated: (1) England as a model; (2) a 'cathedralisation' of reformed (Calvinistic) worship; and (3) a transformation of Anglican Choral Evensong. Most of the Evensongs in the Netherlands are organised in contexts that are strictly reformed, i.e. Calvinist (comparable to Puritans) or Protestant.

First, '*England as a model*'. England, and especially the perfect beauty of Choral Evensong in cathedrals, abbeys, minsters and college chapels in England, serves as a model in the Netherlands. People experienced the perfect beauty of Choral Evensong in England, were touched and inspired by it and wanted to introduce the tradition to the Netherlands. A director of music explained, 'In England, in the cathedrals, I feel as though I am dwelling high on a mountain top. Very close to heaven. And I stay there. Once I have to return, by ferry from Dover, it is like descending from

14 In: Hefling and Shattuck, 2006, xiii.

15 Jonathan Arnold, *Sacred Music in Secular Society*, Farnham, 2014, p. 153.

the mountain, down, back to daily life. It makes me sad.' 'England as a model' can also be seen in the use of the English language in Dutch Choral Evensongs. Even the prayer for the Queen was sometimes taken to the Netherlands, despite the Netherlands having a king!

'England as a model' also continues in the choice of the choir's dress, sometimes literally. Another director of music explained, 'If you do something from England, you have to do everything from England. Not half-heartedly, but all the way! And the clothing is part of it.' Of course, not all choirs follow it precisely, or they adapt it.

The interior of the English cathedral is also copied in some settings by the introduction of portable choir stalls, and choirs in the Netherlands have started to emulate the high quality of English choirs by beginning vocal education for both boys and girls.

Secondly, in the adoption of Choral Evensong, there is what I call a '*cathedralisation*' of choral concerts and of Calvinist-style worship through Choral Evensongs in which the rituals from the Anglican cathedral liturgy are copied. This cathedral-like liturgy is performed even in small Dutch village churches. The 'cathedralisation' is interesting because the cathedral liturgy contrasts significantly with that of the reformed Dutch Sunday morning services.

Thirdly, '*transformation*': there are changes to Choral Evensong as practised in England, such as in what is included or omitted, e.g. there are often more hymns and usually no Creed; and also in the use of space in the building.

Reflection

In this research I have looked, through the lens of the appropriation of Choral Evensong, at the dynamics and religiosity of Dutch contemporary society. An important conclusion is that in (most) Dutch Choral Evensongs, three types or cultural systems come together: Anglican Choral Evensong, a Dutch reformed (Calvinist) service, and a choral concert. These merge into a new format, a Dutch 'Choral Evensong ritual', and it's very popular! Many choirs sing Choral Evensong, and many people, both believers and non-believers, attend. Sometimes these Evensongs are offered as worship, sometimes they combine both worship and a concert, and sometimes they are offered simply as a concert. We can explain these different realisations by means of the merging types or systems. We noticed a yearning for beauty and holiness in both the Dutch non-believers who attend Choral Evensong and the Calvinist believers. The popularity of Choral Evensong points to a changing religiosity, both

in Dutch society as a whole and in Calvinist contexts specifically, with a turning towards perfect beauty and holiness.

'Fresh Expression' and further Choral Evensong research

In 2017, inspired by the conclusion of my own research, I started a new initiative: an ecumenical weekly 'Choral Evensong & Pub' on Thursdays in the inner city of Utrecht, to which hundreds of people came. Although Choral Evensong is a traditional form in the UK and a few other places, Choral Evensong in the Netherlands is regarded as part of the 'Fresh Expression' movement, which is essentially a missionary movement. I feel certain that following this route of cathedral liturgy, with its attention to beauty and holiness, will be fruitful for the future of both Church and society in the Netherlands: an Oxford Movement or Cambridge Camden Society here would be significant.

In 2019, I started a new piece of international research entitled 'Choral Evensong Experiences (UK & NL)', together with Kathryn King of the University of Oxford. In the research, we are investigating the experiences of participants in Choral Evensong in both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and I will offer here a first glance at the findings. In the Netherlands, ninety per cent of Evensong attendees are highly educated and love classical music; significantly, one third of Evensong participants do not go to church on Sunday mornings, another third—ranging from Roman Catholic to Protestant—do attend, while the remainder are from Calvinistic congregations. Which part of the Evensong do participants prefer most? Well, the *Magnificat* comes first, then the Psalms, and thirdly the hymns, and the favourite composers are, in order, Purcell, Rutter and Tallis. Why do people come to Choral Evensong? There were twenty-five options to choose from and the most highly scored were 'the quality of the musical performance', 'the style of the music and texts' and 'the opportunity to reflect, meditate or contemplate the peace and quietness'. As Jonathan Arnold explained, 'Through musical beauty, the sacred is encountered'.[16]

In a later phase I hope to elaborate further on these findings. The most important so far is that the popularity of Choral Evensong, together with the use of the Book of Common Prayer in the Netherlands, reveals a deep yearning for the beauty of holiness.

This paper was given at the 2022 Prayer Book Society Conference.

16 Arnold, 2014, p. 151.

God's Visitation: the Proper Response to Affliction is Repentance

GARY THORNE

The title of my talk is its argument. In the Prayer Book tradition, illness is affliction and the proper response to affliction is repentance.

One of the results of the stay-at-home protocol of the pandemic was that people had time to write. In the Anglican world, laity, deacons, priests and bishops suddenly had time to write. Not long into the pandemic, books, thoughtful articles and scholarly conversations appeared that explored every aspect of the pandemic. Only a few months into the pandemic in the spring of 2020, The Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada solicited theological reflections from fifty Canadian Anglicans. The stay-at-home-grown weighty tome, called *Eucharistic Practice and Sacramental Theology in Pandemic Times*, was published early in 2021.[1]

Is there anything left to say?

My paper will be less academic and more focused on the practical daily living during a pandemic of a Christian in the Anglican Prayer Book tradition. I shall consider how that tradition understands a pandemic within God's providential care, and how the Prayer Book tradition provides a means of faithful response.

Luther's common sense

Before I begin to look at our specific Anglican tradition, a glance at Martin Luther will help to contextualise a more general Reformation response to pandemics. An open letter that Luther published in 1527 titled, 'Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague',[2] was sometimes referenced during the recent pandemic as addressing practical questions of how Christians should live through a plague as members of civil society, and particularly how a Christian ought to respond to government protocols.

1 Eileen Scully, ed., *Eucharistic Practice and Sacramental Theology in Pandemic Times*, General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, 2021.

2 https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/may-web-only/martin-luther-plague-pandemic-coronavirus-covid-flee-letter.html

Luther's letter was written in the midst of one of the frequent reappearances of the bubonic plague—about every nine years from the end of the fifteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth. Luther already had lived through a previous instance of the plague as a student in 1505 in the university town of Erfurt. When the plague broke out in 1527 in Wittenberg, although the students and faculty were told to leave the city, Martin Luther remained: preaching, administering the sacraments, advising the city council, ministering to the sick, and even converting his own home into a makeshift hospital.

On the one hand, Luther was criticised by those who judged him to be reckless in remaining in the city when ordered to leave. On the other hand, Catholic opponents criticised those Lutherans who left the city, accusing them of abandoning their flocks in time of need. Asked for pastoral guidance as to the proper Christian response, Luther wrote the open letter, 'Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague'.

In this letter, Luther urged courage to embrace the Christian vocation of loving one's neighbour. Not only should city officials, doctors and pastors remain in place to fulfill their duty, but Luther insisted that every Christian has a vocation to serve his/her/their neighbour in love. Only if you cannot be helpful to your neighbour are you then free to choose either to remain in the plague-stricken city to accept death as your natural end, or to flee for safety. One interesting element of the letter is what Luther called, 'tempting God'. People in a plague tempt God by:

> disregarding everything which might counteract death and the plague. They disdain the use of medicines; they do not avoid places and persons infected by the plague, but lightheartedly make sport of it and wish to prove how independent they are. They say that it is God's punishment; if he wants to protect them he can do so without medicines or our carefulness. That is not trusting God but tempting him…
>
> No, my dear friends, that is no good. Use medicine; take potions which can help you; fumigate house, yard, and street; shun persons and places where your neighbor does not need your presence or has recovered, and act like a man who wants to help put out the burning city. What else is the epidemic but a fire which instead of consuming wood and straw devours life and body? You ought to think this way: "Very well, by God's decree the enemy has sent us poison and deadly offal. Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall

> avoid persons and places where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."

Luther found himself in a situation very much like our recent pandemic, but his counsel as to whether to flee a pandemic ultimately turns out not to be as helpful, nor one-sided, as we might like it to be. Luther's counsel that Christians should avail themselves of medicines led certain evangelicals to cite him as an authority to challenge those who declined the offer of the COVID-19 vaccine. But in fact, Luther's advice could be received as more nuanced. Many who refused the vaccine did so because they were not convinced that it was effective medicine at all. Nonetheless, Luther is clear that if a Christian believes that a medicine is available, he/she/they should take it because it is no different to our obligation to eat regular meals: 'Why do you eat and drink, instead of letting yourself be punished until hunger and thirst stop of themselves?' After all, reminds Luther, Jesus taught us to pray 'deliver us from evil'.

But Luther's dominant theme is that care for oneself is always secondary to our care for others. Whenever a conflict arises between saving self and loving neighbour, neighbour comes first. Our actions are determined in every instance by our vocation to love our neighbour. But which neighbour? And what does it mean to love our neighbour in a particular instance? Did Luther himself love his neighbour by remaining in Wittenberg? His family was also his neighbour. Did he truly love them by exposing them to danger by remaining in the plague-stricken city? A recent biographer of Luther suggests:

> Luther's decision to remain in Wittenberg was bold, but also revealed a reckless disregard for his own safety and that of his family. It may have been a residue of his wish for martyrdom, or, perhaps, another example of the remarkable courage that enabled him not to shirk what he felt to be his responsibility to his flock.[3]

3 Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*, London: Vintage, 2016, p. 318.

Neither Luther nor the Anglican Prayer Book tradition ultimately will resolve the practical questions of how to respond to government protocol during a pandemic. We must follow our conscience in discerning how best to live our vocation of loving our neighbour, putting their needs above our own safety. Inevitably there will be disagreements about how best to love our neighbour. Public discourse will assist in that determination, and secular authority should be obeyed unless we are convinced that it directly interferes with our vocation to love our neighbour.

But the Prayer Book tradition does teach us something more fundamental about how to respond to illness and plague. In all of the anxiety, physical affliction and mental suffering of a pandemic, we are to grow in holiness.

Illness and visitation

To understand the Prayer Book's response to illness and plague requires an appreciation of the changing attitudes to illness and suffering in the Prayer Book tradition from the sixteenth century to the present, illustrated by the revisions in successive Books of Common Prayer to 'The Office of the Visitation to the Sick', until it becomes 'The Ministry to the Sick' in the 1962 Canadian BCP. The earliest Prayer Book teaching was rooted in the sixteenth century's robust biblical understanding that saw illness as part of God's loving providence. That understanding gradually was eroded in successive Prayer Books until it was lost altogether. The history of this erosion of doctrine has been outlined by Matthew Olver, Professor of Liturgics and Pastoral Theology at Nashotah House Theological Seminary in the States.[4]

Olver correctly notes that the most significant shift in the Prayer Book theology of illness has been the rejection of the notion that sickness and plague can be understood as a visitation from God. Divine Visitation was the central theme of the Prayer Book Office of the Sick from 1552 through to 1662, and was retained in the first Canadian revision of the Prayer Book in 1918. The Exhortation from the older office of the Visitation of the Sick begins:

> Dearly beloved, know this, that Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all things to them pertaining, as youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness. Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness is, know you certainly, that it is God's visitation. And for

4 Matthew S. C. Olver, 'Divine Visitation: The 1662 Prayer Book's Theology of Sickness and Plague', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 2021.

> what cause soever this sickness is sent unto you; whether it be to try your patience for the example of others, and that your faith may be found in the day of the Lord laudable, glorious, and honourable, to the increase of glory and endless felicity; or else it be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father; know you certainly, that if you truly repent you of your sins, and bear your sickness patiently, trusting in God's mercy, for his dear Son Jesus Christ's sake, and render unto him humble thanks for his fatherly visitation, submitting yourself wholly unto his will, it shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life.

The emphasis here is entirely on trusting ourselves to be held within the life of God's providence, whether 'youth, strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness'. This sentence bears more weight than it might first appear. As was pointed out twenty years ago at this Conference in a paper by Robert Crouse, we constantly must be on our guard to avoid the heresies of the various forms of Gnosticism or Manichaeism. Rather, divine providence is all-knowing, all-powerful, unchanging, and absolutely good. This fundamental doctrine of Christian belief raises innumerable questions, including that of the relation of free will to divine providence, but in itself cannot be challenged. This Exhortation of the Visitation of the Sick reflects the doctrine articulated by St Thomas Aquinas that God's providence and knowledge embraces all particulars, as particulars, and that even evil, which is not from God, falls under His loving providence.[5] St Thomas quotes Augustine: 'Almighty God would in no way permit any evil to exist in his works, were he not so omnipotent and good as to make good even from evil.'[6]

True to such a notion of divine providence, the Exhortation insists that in whatsoever circumstance we find ourselves, we are to see the visitation of God and respond by putting on the mind of Christ and thus grow in holiness. We shall advance in the way that leads to everlasting life if: 1. we repent; 2. we treat our sickness with patience by trusting in God's mercy; 3. we render thanks to God for this visitation and opportunity to turn to Him; and 4. we submit wholly to His will.

But there is a second part to the Exhortation, to be said 'if the person visited be very sick'. Olver understands this second part of the Exhortation

5 '*non sub providentia approbationis, sed concessionis tantum*', i.e. 'not under his approving providence, but only under his concessive providence', Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, V.4, resp. and ad 1.

6 RDC, Providence, ATC 2002, Summa theol., I, XXII, 2, ad 2. Thomas quotes from Augustine's *Enchiridion*.

as having a different character to the first part, 'by placing a much greater emphasis on sickness as "the chastisement of the Lord", quoting Hebrews 12 about how the Lord loves those whom he disciplines'.[7]

In fact, there is no significant shift in emphasis in this second part of the Exhortation. The text makes clear that God 'loves those whom he disciplines', and chastens us 'for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness'. Thus, there is a continuing assumption throughout this Exhortation of the place of illness within the doctrine of sanctification, or continual growth in holiness in the Christian life. Further, in the remaining prayers in the 1662 Prayer Book Visitation of the Sick, the call for repentance remains central.

It is unfortunate that this splendid Exhortation has not been preserved in our 1962 Cdn Book of Common Prayer. The Exhortation presents a clear and coherent theology to the prayers and actions in the older tradition, giving an integrity to the office. Without the Exhortation and the following prayers that consistently urge repentance, the 'Ministry to the Sick' in our Prayer Book lacks the integrity of the ancient Christian tradition. There is little notion that sickness can be the instrument of one's growth in holiness. A final vestige of the older theme might be seen in a generous reading of the following prayer:

> O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee: Grant, we beseech thee, to this thy servant, that he may be sustained and sanctified by thy Holy Spirit, and strengthened in soul and body; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Nonetheless, generally the prayers in our current Prayer Book plead to God for healing, relief of suffering of body and mind, and grace to desire only God's will, 'that, whether living or dying, he/she/they may be thine'. That is, we seek divine intervention to escape from our affliction by healing or the relief of suffering.[8]

No Prayer Book throughout the Anglican Communion in the twentieth century (other than that of the Canadian 1918 BCP) retains the Exhortation that appeared in Prayer Books from 1552 to 1662. The theology that allowed this Exhortation to be understood and positively embraced had been forgotten. By the twentieth century, the Exhortation

7 Matthew S. C. Olver, 'Divine Visitation: The 1662 Prayer Book's Theology of Sickness and Plague', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 2021.

8 It is encouraging that the Collect for Holy Week is included in our Ministry to the Sick, in which all humankind is prompted to follow the example of our Lord's great humility and patience that we may be made partakers of His resurrection.

of the Office of the Visitation of the Sick could only be interpreted within the culture as suggesting that the suffering of the sick person was a direct punishment ('visitation') for individual, personal sin. Repentance thus was not seen to be the necessary first step of a positive and godly growth in holiness, but simply as the response demanded to please an angry God who would grant health of body and soul only in return for grovelling repentance.[9] Of course, any such interpretation that views suffering as the divinely imposed consequence of individual personal moral failing is reprehensible and amounts to nothing less than blaming the victim for their own illness.

But there is something odd in suggesting that the Prayer Book Anglican cannot embrace an interpretation of Scripture that affirms the Christian doctrine of Divine Visitation. For example, I wonder how those who reject the older Exhortation of the Visitation of the Sick interpret the Psalter that is sung or said in its entirety each month as the staple of the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer? The Anglican in the pew regularly recites psalms that make a causal connection between sin and bodily illness.[10] Consider Psalm 32:1–5, 11–12.[11]

> BLESSED is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven: and whose sin is covered.
> Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin: and in whose spirit there is no guile.
> For while I held my tongue: my bones consumed away through my daily complaining.
> For thy hand is heavy upon me day and night: and my moisture is like the drought in summer.
> I will acknowledge my sin unto thee: and mine unrighteousness have I not hid.
> I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord: and so thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin...

9 Olver, ibid, p. 49, points to Massey Shepherd's *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* for the 1928 American Book, where Shepherd notes that, 'In the older form of the Office [for the Visitation of the Sick], before the 1928 revision, the suffering of the sick person was described as "God's Visitation" for the purpose of either trying his faith or of punishing his sin. Naturally Christian sentiment rebelled against this point of view.' Massey Hamilton Shepherd, *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 308.
Marion Hatchett's assessment in his commentary on the 1979 American Prayer Book is similar: 'The essential theme is that sickness is God's chastisement to correct sinful humanity.' Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, New York: Seabury Press, 1980, pp. 460–61.

10 Cf. Ps. 6:1–3; Ps. 39:8–11; Ps. 41:4; Ps. 103:3; Ps. 107:17–20.

11 Here I follow closely the argument of Simeon Zahl, 'Sin and Bodily Illness in the Psalms', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 42, 2020, pp. 186–207.

> Great plagues remain for the ungodly: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, mercy embraceth him on every side.
> Be glad, O ye righteous, and rejoice in the Lord: and be joyful, all ye that are true of heart.

In this psalm, the body suffers through God's visitation until sin is confessed and repented of: 'thy hand was heavy upon me day and night'. The ungodly suffer plagues until they begin to put their trust in the Lord: 'Great plagues remain for the ungodly: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, mercy embraceth him on every side.'

Unable to reconcile the theology of visitation with the Christian Gospel[12], twentieth-century liturgists removed the Exhortation from our Prayer Books. But then how does the Prayer Book Anglican interpret the psalms that offer the same theology of that Exhortation that is said to be offensive to our contemporary ears? Twentieth-century Christian biblical commentators take a plethora of creative approaches to explain away the clear connection in the psalms between sin and physical illness. Contemporary biblical commentators go to extreme lengths to domesticate these psalms, but the problem reappears for the average Anglican layperson at least once each month for every psalm that makes that connection.[13]

Psalm 32, considered above, is one of the seven traditional penitential psalms, as is Psalm 38, that even more explicitly links physical illness to sin:

> PUT me not to rebuke, O Lord, in thine anger: neither chasten me in thy heavy displeasure.

12 Cf. James Martin, 'Where is God in a Pandemic?', *New York Times*, 22nd March 2020.
'Over the centuries, many answers have been offered about natural suffering, all of them wanting in some way. The most common is that suffering is a test. Suffering tests our faith and strengthens it: "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance," says the Letter of James in the New Testament. But while explaining suffering as a test may help in minor trials (patience being tested by an annoying person) it fails in the most painful human experiences. Does God send cancer to "test" a young child? Yes, the child's parents may learn something about perseverance or faith, but that approach can make God out to be a monster.
'So does the argument that suffering is a punishment for sins, a still common approach among some believers (who usually say that God punishes people or groups that they themselves disapprove of). But Jesus himself rejects that approach when he meets a man who is blind, in a story recounted in the Gospel of John: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," says Jesus. This is Jesus's definitive rejection of the image of the monstrous Father.'
13 In the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer, the entire Psalter is said each month at the lay offices of Morning and Evening Prayer.

> For thine arrows stick fast in me: and thy hand presseth me sore.
> There is no health in my flesh, because of thy displeasure: neither is there any rest in my bones, by reason of my sin.
> For my wickednesses are gone over my head: and are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear.
> My wounds stink, and are corrupt: through my foolishness.
> I am brought into so great trouble and misery: that I go mourning all the day long.
> For my loins are filled with a sore disease: and there is no whole part in my body.
> I am feeble, and sore smitten: I have roared for the very disquietness of my heart.

Psalms 32 and 38 clearly articulate a link between sin, physical and mental illness and pandemics that is troublesome for contemporary ears. But if there truly is something amiss in the theology of these psalms, the Prayer Book Anglican will become even more troubled as he/she/they recites their office. For example, this psalm is recited on the eighth day of each month, just a few minutes after the General Confession in which we confess that there is 'no health in us'. If we are not able to sing and say Psalm 38 without crossing our fingers, what about the notion expressed in the General Confession that 'there is no health in us', rooted in this psalm?

On the one hand we want to have confidence that these psalms are God's Word, shaping us into holiness by their plain meaning. Yet on the other hand we know that there must be no hint of blaming the victim: illness is not a chastisement for specific sin. A person who suffers is not more morally suspect than a person in good health. We are all morally suspect!

Well, to solve such a dilemma and to make it possible for Anglican Christians to have confidence in their praying, we need to understand the tradition more deeply, and to understand the theology of the Book of Common Prayer is to look to St Augustine.

Here is St Augustine's comment on Psalm 38: 2–3:

> Now [the Psalmist] begins to relate what he has been suffering, yet already the trouble he mentions is a consequence of the Lord's anger, because it derives from the punishment he inflicted. What punishment was that? The penalty [the Lord] imposed on Adam. Did he not truly punish Adam, did the Lord not mean what he said when he warned

them, *You will certainly die* (Gn 2:17)? Do we suffer anything in this life that is not a consequence of the death we incurred through the first sin? We carry with us a mortal body (though it should not have been mortal), a mortal body seething with temptations and unease, a prey to corporal pains and manifold needs, a body changeable and of puny strength even when it is well, because it obviously is not completely well yet. Why does the psalmist say, *There is no soundness in my flesh*, if not because what passes for good health in this life is no health at all to those who have true understanding…[14]

Our sufferings are indeed the consequence of sin—but not of the individual sin of the psalmist. Rather, our illnesses are all the result of Adam's original sin. Our sufferings are symptoms of our finite mortality, the punishment for Adam's sin. Augustine continues:

If you have not eaten, hunger causes you disquiet, and hunger is a kind of natural illness… [Y]ou will be hungry, and thirst kills you, if not relieved. The medicine that cures hunger is food, the medicine that cures thirst is a drink, the medicine for tiredness is sleep. Withhold the medicines, and see if living creatures do not die of these ailments. If you can give up these things and not be ill, that is true health. But if your condition is such that not eating could kill you, do not boast about your health, but await with groaning the redemption of your body.[15]

For St Augustine, hunger, weariness and bodily pain are all instances of God's wrath against sin. He continues:

the health I now have in my flesh is not yet true health, nor does it deserve to be called so in comparison with the health I shall enjoy in everlasting rest, when this corruptible nature has been clothed in incorruption, this mortal nature in immortality. Compared with the health I shall have then, the health I have now is no better than disease.[16]

Luther likewise follows Augustine in his comments on Psalm 38:

14 *en. Ps.* 37.5 English: Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: Volume* 2, trans. M. Boulding, *The Works of St Augustine* III/16, New York: New City, 2000, p. 148; Latin: *Patrologia Latina* 36:397–398.
15 *en. Ps.* 37.5 *WSA* III/16, p. 149; *PL* 36:398. Here Augustine is reading Psalm 38 in relation to Rom. 8:23.
16 *en. Ps.* 37.5 *WSA* III/16, p. 150; *PL* 36:399.

> the lack of soundness in the Psalmist's flesh refers not least to our bodily weaknesses and sufferings, sicknesses and ills without number, to which human nature is subject because of sin, as is clear from experience.[17]

Thus, each eighth day of the month the Anglican can sing/say this Psalm 38 and embrace it as God's lively Word, confessing that 'there is no health in us'. We all suffer in so many various and different ways from our shared human condition, which we describe as consequent of the original fall and sin of Adam.

Our proper response to *suffering experienced by others* is deep compassion and the giving of assistance to relieve pain and suffering in love of neighbour.

Our proper response to *our own suffering* is to turn meaningless suffering into an affliction in God's presence that leads to repentance, a trust in God's mercy, and a joyful submission to His will. In this way, says the older Exhortation, there will be increase of glory and endless felicity in the day of the Lord. Our affliction 'shall turn to your profit, and help you forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life… that we might be partakers of his holiness'.

Simone Weil tells us that: 'The greatest of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural cure for suffering, but a supernatural use of it'.[18]

Because of the Incarnation, as defined in the 451 Council of Chalcedon as two natures (human and divine) united in the one Person of Jesus Christ, our mortal baptised flesh is joined to the flesh of Christ and becomes part of His ascended flesh, and our human nature is taken up into divinity. Thus our affliction becomes the path to our sanctification and growth in holiness through meditation on the passion and cross of Christ. Without the Word having become flesh, our best hope could only be that any illness be healed temporarily until, in our mortality, we come to the sickness from which we will never recover.

Because of the Word made flesh, our sinful and mortal flesh can know its true end to be the resurrected body at the Second Coming of Christ. Christ suffers in all human suffering, and the baptised Christian embraces that identity. As St Paul says in Galatians 2:20:

> I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the

17 Martin Luther, *Dictata super Psalterium*, *LW* 10:177; WA 3:214–215.

18 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 28.

> faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (KJV)

This co-inherence of the baptised Christian with Christ was given expression in the Early Church in the words of Felicitas, an African slave girl imprisoned in Carthage for her faith in the third century. She was the slave of Perpetua, her mistress and fellow martyr, and as she faced death she cried out: 'Another will be in me who will suffer for me as I shall suffer for him.' Felicitas' suffering was not taken away, but rather it became the means of a deeper union with Christ. And thus our suffering can become so for us.

The removal of the Exhortation from twentieth-century Prayer Books is the proper pastoral move in our secular culture, because generally our culture is unable to understand sickness as 'visitation' to be anything other than 'blaming the victim' or making God out to be a monster.[19] For those who can only receive such an interpretation, to recite this Exhortation in a hospital room would be cruel indeed. But for Prayer Book Anglicans, the recitation of this Exhortation will remain a most efficacious comfort and consolation.

I have been speaking as if in our illness we have human agency to rationally understand affliction as a visitation from God and to fix our wills to repentance and growth in holiness. But in fact, so many physical and mental illnesses attack our very ability to respond freely to our condition. That is, our rational and emotional ability to reflect upon the love of God is hampered and our wills often paralysed by our physical ailments. For example, scientists and medical researchers are discovering increasing evidence of the strong relationship between the biomes in the gut and various forms of mental illness and emotional instability. The vagus nerve connects the gut and brain such that the bacteria in our gut are considered to be at least partially responsible for such debilitating conditions as schizophrenia, severe states of anxiety, bi-polar depression, delusions and many other psychological disorders. Truly such scientific research serves to remind us that we are fallen creatures and 'there is no health in us'. Grace is everything. In humility we pray that each day we might be increasingly aware of our utter dependence upon the redemptive love of Jesus Christ. To dare to judge another for their response to illness is itself terrible folly and precisely an example of our fallenness. Rather, our response to the blessed doctrine that 'there is no health in us' is to live and love by the grace of God, ever practising

19 Cf. footnote 12 above.

charity, humility and compassion. There is no health in us. Our very mortality that Jesus Christ took upon Himself in the Incarnation is the means of our return to the God who created us in His image. Because there is no health in us, we love, we bear one another's burdens, we forgive and we are forgiven. It is indeed a most blessed doctrine that leads to such a life of love.

Something fundamental to Christian belief is lost when the Church (those to whom the Spirit has been given) rejects the traditional notion that illness or a pandemic can become the means of sanctification and growth in holiness. Once repentance is no longer seen to be an appropriate response to sickness and pandemic, the possibility of spiritual growth in Christ through physical and mental affliction disappears. The second part of the Exhortation in the Visitation of the Sick could not be more clear:

> Shall we not be in subjection to the Father of Spirits… that we might be partakers of his holiness[?] These words, good brother, are written in Holy Scripture for our comfort and instruction, that we should patiently, and with thanksgiving bear our heavenly Father's correction, whensoever by any manner of adversity it shall please his gracious goodness to visit us. And there should be no greater comfort to Christian persons than to be made like unto Christ, by suffering patiently adversities, troubles and sicknesses. For he himself went not up to joy, but first he suffered pain; he entered not into his glory before he was crucified. So truly our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ; and our door to enter into eternal life is gladly to die with Christ that we may rise again from death, and dwell with him in everlasting life. Now therefore taking your sickness, which is thus profitably for you, patiently…[20]

The proper response to a pandemic (whether one becomes desperately sick from the virus or simply suffers through identification with others) is spiritually, with the eyes of faith, to gaze upon Christ hanging on the cross, and to see our suffering flesh hanging there in the one Christ who is both fully God and fully Man. Thus, what might appear to be an esoteric theological statement or doctrinal claim about the Person

20 Note the familiar language of the Collect for Holy Week in this Exhortation: 'ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.'

of Christ from a Church Council in the fifth century, turns out to be nothing more than what describes and enables effective and effectual prayer. Likewise, we have suggested that the truth and godly counsel of the Exhortation depends upon a notion of divine loving providence that embraces even what appears to be the evil of suffering, as well as an understanding of our finite mortality as a consequence of the Fall. Finally, the Exhortation looks forward to our glory and everlasting felicity in our resurrected bodies.

Our sanctification is nothing other than the continued remembrance of our justification. We are most blessed to know that there is no health in us. We know this by revelation and grace: not by our own efforts or will. Christ suffers and dies *for* me (my justification), and He suffers and dies *with* me and *in* me (my sanctification). He does not suffer and die in my place, but Christ transforms the meaning of my suffering. Our own suffering in body and soul turns our gaze to Christ on the cross, where we see our suffering in His suffering flesh. In that gaze, we remember how we are saved and we look forward to the glory of the resurrected body that awaits us. In that gaze, we grow into deeper union with Christ.

Job spoke in his affliction: 'Though he slay me yet will I trust in him.'

I conclude with a poem in which the seventeenth-century Puritan divine Richard Baxter (1615–91) speaks of that spiritual maturity we all must seek in sickness and suffering:[21]

Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And this Thy grace must give.
If life be long, O make me glad,
The longer to obey;
If short, no labourer is sad
To end his toilsome day.
Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before;
He that unto God's kingdom comes
Must enter by this door.
Come, Lord, when grace hath made me meet
Thy blessèd face to see:
For if Thy work on earth be sweet

21 This poem appears in many hymn books, quoted in an unpublished sermon preached by Father Dr Robert Crouse on the Feast of Luke at St James' Church, 18th October 1981.

What will Thy glory be!
 Then I shall end my sad complaints
And weary sinful days,
 And join with the triumphant saints
That sing my Saviour's praise.
 My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim;
 But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.

This paper was delivered at the fortieth annual Atlantic Theological Conference, Canada in May 2022.

Our Only Saviour, the Prince of Peace

JO KERSHAW

Today, we find ourselves unable to avoid thinking about kingship—to a degree that, I think, may have surprised some of us. Many people have been taken aback at the depth of their own reaction to the news of the death of Her Majesty the Queen.

Now, the Christian understanding of kingship is a very rich one—as we see reflected not least in the liturgy of the Prayer Book and will see over the next days of mourning, and again when we approach the coronation of His Majesty the King. We'll doubtless have many opportunities to reflect on that. Who can, for instance, think of a British coronation without thinking of Handel's majestic anthem, 'Zadok the Priest', which is, in fact, derived from an antiphon used in one form or another in the coronation of every English, and later British, monarch since Edgar was crowned in Bath Abbey in 973. That antiphon, of course, is drawn from 1 Kings 1:38–40, and the description of the anointing of Solomon.

This is simply one example of that theological and liturgical richness. I could go on, but I won't, because this is a sermon, not a lecture on the liturgy of the coronation. And you might, perhaps, be wondering what this has to do with the lessons we have just heard read—but bear with me for a moment.

Because what is also striking is that, despite the deep biblical roots of our ideas about kingship, the Old Testament is, at best, a bit ambivalent about kings. When the Israelites demand a king, it is 'to be like their neighbours'. But while God humours them, they are cautioned against it and, given that those neighbours were idolators, there's just a whiff of suspicion about the idea. Saul, indeed, after a glorious start, goes wrong. David and Solomon are both, in their own ways, deeply flawed, particularly in the conduct of their private lives (I have always loved the possibly apocryphal story of the Victorian lady who, reflecting on Solomon's relationships with his wives and concubines, concluded, 'How different from the home life of our own dear Queen!'). Things got worse in the generations after Solomon, and the books of Kings and Chronicles are largely a depressing series of national divisions, and of

rulers whose selfishness and infidelity to God bring down the Lord's judgement on the nation—interspersed with the odd light relief of a monarch who does what is right in the sight of the Lord, but whose son will relapse—until the whole thing collapses into national failure, death and mass deportations. And we see that misery and failure reflected, very vividly, in the reading from Ezekiel.

All this is to say that our sense of shock at the Queen's death, despite the fact that we know that all princes die as men do, would have come as no surprise to the children of Israel, though I have no doubt that the chroniclers would have recorded the deeds of her long reign with approval, and delivered the verdict that she 'did what was right in the sight of the Lord'.

But the Israelites and the Judeans knew—or at least they were continually reminded by the prophets—that kings are made of frail and uncertain stuff. Even the best (and there was no guarantee that's what you would get) would die.

The passage from Ezekiel reminds us quite how bad it got. However shocked we were to hear of Her Majesty's death, and I don't want to minimise that, the passage puts it into perspective. The news from Jerusalem of the city's final destruction reaches Ezekiel and the other exiles in the form of a traumatised refugee. Ezekiel is so horrified by the enormity of what has happened that he is, quite literally, lost for words—and when the Lord gives him words, He has no words of comfort, but only judgement and despair.

> Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance.
>
> Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?
>
> Ye stand upon your sword, ye work abomination, and ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land?
>
> Say thou thus unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely they that are in the wastes shall fall by the sword, and him that is in the open field will I give to the beasts to be devoured, and they that be in the forts and in the caves shall die of the pestilence.
>
> For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through.

> Then shall they know that I am the LORD, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed. (Ezekiel 33:24–29, KJV)

There is a glimmer of hope, but only a glimmer: and that hope is nothing to do with the power of princes, but that 'Then shall they know that I am the LORD'.

The only hope, Ezekiel tells us, is in knowing that God is God; in His righteousness, His judgement, and—ultimately—His mercy.

So, for Jews of Ezekiel's day, and beyond and to this day, princes and kings were unreliable, delusive hopes. What remained constant, what stood out with true majesty, was the Law. The Law which was God's guidance offered to His people; the Law which, in its keeping, made them truly God's people and able to draw close, for a little while, to the unapproachably holy and awe-inspiring God.

A well-catechised Jew of the time of our Lord might have demanded, what was a mere human king compared to the Divine Law? (Though he probably wouldn't have asked that anywhere Herod could overhear him—unless he was John the Baptist and we know what Herod did to him.)

And it's actually not a bad question. But it is one which St Paul would, I think, have said doesn't go far enough. You may recall his words about the law, the flesh and the Spirit from yesterday's second lesson at Matins.

Paul's understanding of the Law is rather complex. It brings a knowledge of guilt and sin—indeed, he goes so far as to call it 'the ministration of death'. And yet Paul is emphatically not treating the Law as a bad thing. It is just that it is not the end in itself; the Law does not exist to point to itself, but to point to Christ, who we know through the Spirit. Paul reminds us that, compared to Christ, nothing else matters. But we miss the force of what he is saying if we are quick to write off the Law. Paul uses the respect that Jewish Christians (or those Gentiles who had been drawn towards the teachings of the synagogue) had for the Law in order to make his point for him, with a reminiscence of how Moses' face shone with the glory of God. 'Glory' and 'glorious' here are almost technical terms—they don't just mean 'respected and honoured', they mean a sign of God's presence, which is so intense that it's *visible*. Indeed, he concludes, 'For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth' (2 Corinthians 3:10). That is to say, even though Moses has been made glorious—God's presence, as it were, rubs off on him—that is as nothing compared to

the glory the Spirit shows us in Christ. For in Christ we see God face to face, as the Israelites could not; for Christ is God, and it is only the encounter with God in Christ that can transform and save us.

As I have said, we miss what Paul is saying if we think he is disparaging the Law. The point, surely, is that nothing can be so excellent that it can exceed the excellence of Christ. Nothing is more important than Christ, and if we forget that, if we put anything higher than that, then we have gone badly astray.

And so, in the passage we heard this morning, he goes on to remind the Church in Corinth that 'by faith ye stand'. Now, as Paul says elsewhere, faith is about things that are not seen. Faith is about having confidence in Christ, not because everything is going smoothly, but because we know that our only security is in Christ, and not elsewhere. And we should take that seriously; it is our *only* security.

And that, then, brings me back to kings, to queens, and to where I started.

We have, this week, lost a most excellent—dare I say, with the full weight of the term, a *glorious* monarch. Many of us feel bereft, ill at ease. Even people who wouldn't describe themselves as enthusiastic monarchists have found themselves saddened, and feeling as though the country is somehow less stable than it was.

But one of the ways in which the late Queen was *glorious* was in her deep, unfussy but heartfelt Christian faith. And although it is right that we reflect on what we have lost, we should allow the Queen's faith to point us in the right direction.

For true stability, true glory, true life are found only in Christ. Nothing, however excellent, however beautiful, can compare with that. It is in looking to Christ that we are saved. Even the glories of the Prayer Book can become what Paul would call a 'ministration of death' if we are not looking to Christ and to being transformed by Him. All else is of no account. It is Christ in us, through the Spirit, who brings life.

And, therefore, we have hope. For here is stability nothing can shake; here is glory nothing can veil.

A little earlier, I alluded to Ezekiel's promise that all will know that the Lord is God. But how is that prophecy fulfilled? Not by any earthly ruler, but in Christ, the offspring of David and Solomon, who were anointed as kings over Israel, but also their Maker. No earthly monarch can take on the role of saviour and renewer—though, at their best, they might help us to grasp something of the greatness of the one true King.

There are, I suspect, turbulent days ahead; the country, and our world,

were not in an easy or comfortable place even before the events of Thursday evening. But, as we have been reminded by a number of our speakers, sometimes turbulence and discomfort can rouse us and make us realise that we are not self-sufficient, and that we need more than this world can give us. In short, they can remind us that we need the hope, the liberty, the transformation that only Christ can bring.

So, as we go forth from this place, we are not without hope. Let us, as we go, keep our eyes fixed on Christ. For He is, as the Accession Day service reminds us, 'our only saviour, the Prince of Peace'; it is He who can lead us, transform us and deliver us. In Him alone we find security. It is He who creates, preserves and sustains us; and it is to Him that we owe all honour, glory and thanksgiving—not with our lips only, but with our lives.

A sermon preached at the 2022 Prayer Book Society Conference.

ISSN 0309 - 1627