

'The Gospel and the Catholic Church'
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The Character and Gifts of Anglican Worship

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Introduction

'No Christian shall deny his Christian experience, but all Christians shall grow more fully into the one experience in all its parts',¹ wrote Michael Ramsey in his *Gospel and the Catholic Church*, his great work that has inspired this conference bearing the same title. It is a book that has been a significant influence on me personally, on how I seek to do theology and live out Christian discipleship in ecclesial form.

Although Bonhoeffer is not mentioned in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Ramsey's method is not far from Bonhoeffer's project in his own defining early work *Sanctorum Communio*: 'With Luther we want to be sure that the sound core, which is in danger of being lost, is preserved in Protestant theology'.² What drew me to Ramsey's work was not only his dual and fair commitment to both the *Gospel* and the *Catholic Church* but his ordering of their relationship, glad as he was to quote one of Luther's original theses: 'The true treasure of the Church is the Holy Gospel of the Glory and Grace of God'. So although Ramsey may have agreed with Gregory of Nazianzus that 'there is no salvation save in balance', he knew that balance in the Church's theology and practice was not easily won and that in the sixteenth century, 'only through deep disturbance could the recovery of Catholicism take place'.³

Over seventy years after the publication of *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, I wrote a book after the manner of Ramsey's seminal work. I called it *Holding Together Gospel, Church and Spirit*. As the title suggests, it worked not only with the Ramseyesque rules that 'there is no gospel without the church' and 'no church without the gospel', but also with the Pentecostal principle that there is 'no gospel without the Spirit' and, because Christ comes to us by the Spirit, certainly 'no church without the Spirit'.⁴ Ramsey's references to the Spirit in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* are somewhat subdued. One advantage of writing as an Anglican at the early stage of the twenty-first century was that the wind of the Spirit had blown powerfully through the world-wide church in the intervening years in a myriad of ways: the exponential growth of Pentecostalism, the ecumenical movement and Lesslie Newbigin's recognition of a third strand in *The Household of Faith*, the open windows of

¹ *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (SPCK, 1990, with foreword by Geoffrey Rowell), p. 223.

² *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church* (translated from the German edition edited by Joachim van Soosten; English edition edited by Clifford J. Green, translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens; Fortress Press, 2009), p. 193.

³ *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, p. 170.

⁴ *Holding Together: Gospel, Church and Spirit – the essentials of Christian Identity* (Canterbury Press, 2008), pp. 9-12.

Vatican 2, the response to Barth's theological challenge to neglect no longer the 'Third Article of the Creed', and the impact of the charismatic movement on the Anglican Communion in general and the Church of England in particular, not least its worship.

As an evangelical Anglican priest, theologian and liturgist, I experienced no pressure whatsoever 'to deny [my] Christian experience' but, by virtue of living out my faith and life in the Church of England, I could not avoid 'grow[ing] more fully into the one experience in all its parts'. Of course, Anglicanism is by no means the only ecclesial body in which evangelical, catholic and charismatic experiences of Christian identity connect and offer the chance to cohere but it is an environment which, because of its past history and present form, is characterized by an openness to the core characteristics of the different traditions that are themselves defined by their respective commitments to the gospel, the church and the Spirit. This *open reality* of Anglicanism is perhaps another way of expressing Ramsey's understanding of Anglicanism as a provisional reality, one that does not seek to promote itself indefinitely over time but rather seeks to serve a greater whole that is beyond its particular ecclesiastical status at any one point in time.

That is where I see Anglican patrimony lying, including the patrimony of its worship: in its reach into the roots of Christian identity, drawing deeply on them to shape and nourish a tree of Christian Faith that in which the form of Christ truly can be found. In this sense, Anglicanism represents *a manner of being Christian together* that by definition is always learning from others and is never self-sufficient – learning not just *between* Anglican Christians of different sorts but learning *from* other Christians living out their lives in Christ in other Churches with their distinctive ways of being. At the same time, Anglicanism represents a noble aspiration to the world-wide church to configure the core characteristics of Christian faith and worship in such a way that their capacity for competition is turned into a creative complementarity that forms a coherent wholeness, a genuine catholicity of the gospel through the Spirit.

Geoffrey Rowell, who wrote the Foreword to the 1990 edition of *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, will be in the minds of many throughout this conference, mine included, for the plan was that he would respond to this paper. One of my memories of Geoffrey was him telling me several years ago that I should read Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. For love of Geoffrey, let me make brief use of this extraordinary study of neurology, philosophy and culture to explain that when I – as it were – add the Spirit to Ramsey's Gospel and the Catholic Church, I am not meaning to complicate the dialectic between the two but to remind us that the Spirit – the Spirit who as Calvin liked to say, is 'the bond of communion' between the Father and the Son and joins us to Christ – so relates the gospel and the church that they give life to each other. McGilchrist analyses the two hemispheres of the brain with great physiological and philosophical sophistication. He illustrates how they operate in distinct ways and how, at different periods in human history, their different characteristics have shaped western culture. Sometimes the focused rationality of the left brain, with its tendency towards the idea, the individual and the mechanism, has held sway. At other times the wider more intuitive perspective of the right brain with its tendency towards the material, the relational and the organic, has set the tone of the age.

It is not difficult to see the same being worked out in the life of the church, with evangelicalism's predilection for, let's say, the text and its clear meaning and catholicism's inclination towards, let's say, the table and the common, differentiated life around it. With that in mind, what makes McGilchrist's study especially interesting is when he describes the 'interhemispheric connectivity' between the two sides of the brain, the way they relate to each other and form a co-operative, common and coherent existence for the person whose brain they together are. Preeminent among the transmitters of information and their ordering towards actions is the corpus callosum. McGilchrist describes the role of the corpus callosum in ways that are not too far removed from how a theologian might describe the Spirit's work in relating that which is different in such a way that their particularities are both respected by and fulfilled through the other.

If one thinks of the relationship between the hemispheres as being like that between the two hands of a pianist (whose two hemispheres do indeed cooperate, but equally must remain independent [the theologian would say "distinct"]), one can see that the task of the corpus callosum has as much to do with inhibition of process as it is with facilitation of information transfer, and co-operation requires the correct balance to be maintained.⁵

By the Holy Spirit, the eternal Son became incarnate in the womb of Mary to be, as the Letter to the Colossians tells us, 'the head of the body, the church [and] the first born of creation', in whom 'all things hold together . . . for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Colossians 1.19-20). The heart of the gospel is Jesus Christ and his cross in whom all things are reconciled to God. The head of the church is the same Jesus Christ in whom we 'who were once estranged and hostile in mind' are 'reconciled in his fleshly body through death'. The test of Anglican authenticity in worship, and its value to the whole company of Christ, is the extent to which it truly allows the 'inspiration of the Spirit' to draw people, communities and society towards Christ as their centre so that 'we may evermore dwell in him and he in us'. That is the same test that Michael Ramsey would apply, the living reality of Christ himself in the heart of the worship of the Church proclaiming the mighty acts of God (cf. 1 Peter 2:9).

I would like to explore how this *open reality* of Anglicanism to the deep roots of Christian existence works itself out in three forms of Anglican worship: worship in word and sacrament, worship in the Spirit and worship in witness and society.

Worship in Word and Sacrament

The Church of England, and wider Anglicanism, has not always managed to balance word and sacrament. Nevertheless, the intention to do so is deep in the Anglican consciousness. I still find that evangelicals and charismatics in other churches do not think as immediately of the place of baptism in Christian conversion or the Lord's Supper in Christian discipleship than their Anglican Evangelical colleagues. And, despite the recovery of the word in the

⁵ *The Master and his Emissary: the Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (Yale University Press, 2009), p. 210.

Roman Catholic Church, the proportion of ‘mass time’ given by parishioners and priests still seems to me to be more unevenly distributed in Catholic worship.

It is not just the dual focus on pulpit and table, though, where Anglicanism has something to share with others. It is the way the post-reformation history of the Church of England, with its sensitivity both to the proper concerns of the reformation and the catholic inheritance, has shaped a way of understanding and practising word and sacrament that has – if I may use the metaphor – a certain polished character, polished in the way that pebbles on a beach are worn into a roundedness through always rubbing up against each other. The word, for example, in Anglican eucharistic theology, not only plays the sort of part it does in the Emmaus story, preparing the way for the risen Lord to make himself known in the breaking of the bread through the reading and expounding of scripture (that is there in other churches, of course). The word – in the sense of the gospel – is also the determining principle of the eucharistic liturgy and action (that’s why Cranmer felt the need to swing the axe at the Roman rite and why we continue to fight our battles in today’s liturgical revision). In services of the word, where the word is detached from the gospel sacraments, there is nonetheless a certain sacramentality to how it is used. By this I mean that scripture in Anglican worship is embodied in a distinct liturgical position and not embedded in the sermon, in a person who reads the scripture who is distinct from the preacher, in a season of the church’s year and set within a story, in certain ceremonies and, often, as a preparation for particular sacramental actions – healing, commissioning, enacted prayer and so on.

Let me take this a little deeper with two illustrations. Wholesome eucharistic theology, in my mind, requires the tension between objectivity and subjectivity to be kept nicely taut. Keeping tension taut is not easy, and Anglicanism, along with other churches, has often let it slack, with unhelpful results. Nevertheless, I think we have a pretty good record of attending to both poles – what God does and what we do in the sacrament – and we’ve developed some categories (I’ve called them in the past ‘unitive categories’) that have helped the churches come to a common mind. Gift is one such category: Christ is truly given by means of consecrated bread and wine, and given to be truly and really received in order, as ARCIC put it, that ‘a life-giving encounter’ may take place.⁶ Cranmer did not, in my mind, secure the giftedness of the eucharist sufficiently but Elizabeth’s reforms helped. So did 1662’s Prayer of Consecration with its resounding ‘Amen’ and the seventeenth century divines, including the puritan ones, did their bit. The Wesleys finished the job without at any point obscuring the place of faith in the unbounded grace of God that was so dearly, and rightly, the concern of the reformers.

My second illustration of the inter-animation of word and sacrament in Anglican worship is the way scripture is used in Anglican liturgical life to form church *and society* into sacramental communities of the love and justice of God in which Christ can be found. It is always worth remembering that one of the early reforms of the Church’s life in the sixteenth century was the requirement that Coverdale’s English Bible should be placed in every parish church and chained to the lectern. I imagine that, if the reformation had been delayed half a millennium, Cranmer and Ridley would have insisted that the scriptures be

⁶ *Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission: The Final Report* (Windsor, 1981), p. 11.

downloaded onto every person's phone. I think, though, they would have still wanted the vernacular scripture to be installed in the building where the people of God gather in the midst of the surrounding society. Scripture edifies the individual but the Christian is part of a community that stretches through history that is addressed by God's word so that it may bear witness to God in the world as it is today. Anglicanism, at least in its English form, has been reluctant, like God's ancient people Israel, to draw boundaries around the faithful to mark them out from the surrounding society. I will say more about this later and how life as a bishop has shown me how Anglican worship brings scripture to bear on the world through its schools, chaplaincies and civic ministry. Forming individuals, Christian communities and society to be bearers – sacramental means – of the plan and purpose of God belongs to the Anglican understanding of the word in worship.

Worship in the Spirit

It could be said, fairly I think, that the English Church has a noble tradition of trying to tack the wind of the Spirit and reshape its worship accordingly, though judgements will be made differently on its success. Some will regret the decision of the Council of Whitby to follow Roman rule, custom and obedience in the seventh century, while others will regard the readiness of the bishops in the sixteenth to break with Rome in order to reform the liturgy and ceremonies of the church a failure in spiritual leadership and a capitulation to secular forces. Nevertheless, surely it is true that the Spirit was at work in Church and society in the late-medieval and reformation period, calling the people of God to restore what had been lost to its life and to renew its ministry and worship for the challenges of the age. The church in all its forms failed to manoeuvre with the sort of agility that these times of technological change, social upheaval and political turbulence required. Nevertheless, the Church of England, marred by the sins of those centuries as it was, lays claim to a style of renewal of its worship that, as Ramsey put it, recognises 'Catholicism always stands before the church door at Wittenberg to read the truth by which she is created and by which also she is judged',⁷ *while at the same time* remaining faithful to the structures that are built around the gospel and, as Ramsey contested, belong to the gospel: the ministry, the sacraments and the liturgical worship of the church. That was an achievement that programmed some principles into the practice of the Church of England that can, rightly used, serve the whole church well.

There's more that could be said about the work of the Spirit in shaping the Anglican approaches to the word and sacrament that I described earlier. There's the way the Spirit, the eternal of gift between the Father and the Son – whose very personhood, therefore, is *Gift* – impresses the graciousness of gift and the freedom of response on the eucharistic theology of the church. There's the way the Spirit, the *Spirit of fellowship* is always building up the common life of the Church so that Christ can be found in our midst, and as the *Spirit of the future*, is always impacting the world with the kingdom of God in and through the church and, as the *Holy Spirit*, therefore, is always using the word to shape a godly church and society. Limitations of time, though, allow me only those few comments on the interconnectivity that the Spirit brings to word and sacrament.

⁷ *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, p. 180.

Let me, now, move to more specifically liturgical references to the Spirit in Anglican liturgy. Western liturgy is traditionally light on the Spirit, and the reformation did not help and sometimes hindered the necessary correctives. However, the Collect for Purity, other collects that refer to the Spirit, the retention of confirmation were a start. Lancelot Andrewes and others with their openness to the Eastern Church, William Law with his notion of the perpetual inspiration that had such an influence on John Wesley, the charismatic movement in the twentieth century paved the way for much for explicit attention to the Spirit in the liturgical reforms of our own age, reforms that have included among others the introduction of Eastern style eucharistic prayers.

It is not just the liturgical texts of the Church of England's Common Worship that deserve to be noted in this connection. It is the character of that whole liturgical project and the liturgical culture it seeks to promote. Certain liturgical preferences became institutionalized in English Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Puritans looked for freedom to construct forms of worship appropriate to circumstances, drawing on the guidance of liturgical wisdom and making use of a minimal number of common texts. Quakers and others wanted maximum space to follow the Spirit's lead, and they jettisoned established pattern and familiar words in the process. The Anglican settlement after the turbulence of the seventeenth century insisted on conformity to invariable patterns and inviolable texts. Common Worship liberates the liturgy of the church from its BCP straitjacket and learns from Puritan wisdom and Quaker instincts. Certain texts are required, sometimes with alternatives offered. Patterns are provided, and good reasons are expected from departure from them. Permission is given and space is left for liturgical leaders to respond to the Spirit in the dynamic of worship. Some will say Common Worship has gone too far. Others will say that it has not gone far enough. I say that if Common Worship has helped to create a liturgical culture in which there is commitment to commonality with other Christians in the past and present, guidance to those charged with enculturising worship in the array of contemporary contexts, and encouragement of leaders of worship to listen and respond to the movement of the Spirit among the people of God, then that is evidence of the Spirit's wisdom at work in Anglican worship.

My extolling the virtues of Common Worship might lead one to think that I am describing a peculiarly English form of Anglican worship. My exposure to the Anglican Communion is lower than many other liturgists and bishops but I would say that in February I took a team from Coventry Diocese to explore the possibility of a link relationship with the new Diocese of Kapsabet in the Anglican Church of Kenya. We found ourselves breathing the same liturgical air there as I have been describing here. We also experienced a form of worship sensitive to the needs of witness and open to serving society. It is to that theme I now turn.

Worship in witness and society

The Spirit of communion, who relates believers to Christ and his Father in word and sacrament, structure and freedom, text and silence, relates us also the world to which Christ came and for which he died. Proclaiming afresh in each generation the faith the church professes which is uniquely revealed in Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, is not a straightforward task, especially in the sort of mission environment that the Church of England finds itself that ranges from residual Christendom to virgin mission field. There is

no clear division of ecclesial labour whereby worship concentrates on building up the faithful in the scriptures and the creeds so that they can be sent out to speak and live their truth in contemporary mission. The relationship between worship and mission is not so linear. It is much more circular. Worship, perhaps especially in Anglican thought and practice, is a missionary endeavor. It is a primary way in which the church interacts with those at the edge of its reach. It is the main environment in which those new to faith begin to articulate their response to the gospel and, as time progresses, becomes themselves shaped for the missionary task of the church.

I said earlier that life as a bishop had opened my eyes wider to the engagement of the Church of England through its worship with wider society. In one very real sense, the Church of England's 4000 schools do not belong to the Church of England. They are funded by the state. They serve their local communities. Their students are drawn from the local community. These are not faith schools, and Anglican schools are different from Catholic schools. Their staff are of a variety of beliefs and none, and by no means all of the committed Christians among them will be Anglicans. In another sense, just as real, they do belong to the Church of England. They are of Anglican foundation and we have retained our stake in them. Clergy and faithful lay people have given their time and energy over more than two centuries to preserve their Christian ethos and promote the Christian content of their worship in the classrooms and assemblies.

The 18,000 children and young people in the 75 schools of my own diocese are greater in number than all of the people in our parish churches on a Sunday, and too few of those are young. Their acts of worship almost invariably bring stir my spirit and very often moisten my eye. I delight that as these are Church of England schools, I share a responsibility of care for the encounter with Christian faith, catechetical development and liturgical formation of their young people. This engagement with society is part of the patrimony of Anglican worship; and I saw the same in Kenya.

I had an especially stimulating schools' experience in Holy Week. It left me with more questions than answers but gave me great encouragement in the process. I was visiting the oldest church school in the diocese. It had been founded by the vicar in 1750. The present incumbent is only a few months in post but like his eighteenth-century predecessor is immersed in the life of the school. The visit included the usual component, lunch with the children on small chairs (it's a primary school in a tough multi-racial area of Coventry) and a tour of the classrooms but the quality of Year 6's theological engagement with the theme of salvation was of a different order to anything I had seen before. I think it had been greatly helped by the learning resources provided by the relatively new 'Understanding Christianity' course, as well as by the vicar's engagement with staff and students. I was then taken back into the school hall for Year 4's Easter performance of 'The Three Trees' after which I'd been asked to 'say a few words' and give a blessing. If Year 6 stretched my mind, Year 4 moved my heart. It was not formally an act of worship but I have no doubt that it glorified God and edified the people – child participants and adult onlookers, including the bishop. It made it easy for my words to speak the gospel that they had just performed in song and dance.

When the school bell sounded many of the young people, and some of their teachers, linked up with their parents and carers and headed into the Church Hall for Messy Church. Messy

Church: it's not the sort of name that will endear itself to Anglican liturgists but what it loses in order it gains in life. The Hall was packed, the hot cross buns welcome and the fellowship real. The learning of the faith that I'd witnessed in the school continued, now at multiple activity tables. After a suitable time, we headed into church for the worship. Everyone seemed to come. It was chaos but it had a holy character. The lay leader was brilliant. The songs were boisterous. The bishop tried not to be boring and – I hope – managed to get a hearing. When I thought it was all over we went back into the Hall and had a meal before I was sent on my way with a loaf of bread baked by a group of refugees in a start-up company begun by a young Japanese Warwick University graduate entrepreneur and a local, ordinary Coventry mum.

Whenever the church engages the world in worship vulgarities occur and mistakes are made. There are plenty of those in the phenomenon of Messy Church, and it would be easy to dismiss it as a deviant of Christian worship not worthy of the name. I cite it because its popularity in parishes right across the range of the Church of England, and the investment of time made in it by clergy and lay leaders, is an outworking of a deep principle in the patrimony of Anglican worship that worship is for every parishioner, not only those already well-formed by its theological and liturgical tradition.

Finally, a few comments on Anglicanism's contribution to community and civic religion, of which I was once somewhat critical. Of the many engagements with civic life throughout the year, the two in my diary that I feel have the greatest potential for good are October's County Legal Service and November's City Remembrance Service. The former takes place in St Mary's Warwick, and though we are occasionally asked to make concessions to other Faiths we never do and, so far in my ten years, it has not paled in popularity. It is unapologetically Anglican in a matins sort of way and is a sustained opportunity to lift the hearts and minds of Warwickshire's legal fraternity and the shapers of the county's civic and political life in a robustly Christian direction.

The City of Coventry's Remembrance Day Service is a very different sort of liturgical event. It takes place in our Memorial Park around Coventry's cenotaph with a congregation of thousands. Other ministers are involved but it's led by the bishop who, over the years, has extended the time allowed for his welcome to become a short sermon without the British Legion seeming to notice. The liturgy has little that is recognizably Anglican, though its formality and ceremony give it an Anglican feel. What makes it Anglican in my mind, though, is that here the Church of England is entrusted – as it is up and down the country – with leading a community's remembrance of war and nurturing its commitment to peace and reconciliation. You can imagine that in Coventry, with our history, it all takes on an intensity born out of our history and that I am very conscious of standing on the shoulders of war- and post-war giants of the Faith, lay and ordained, who taught the city that still speaks to the world about reconciliation rather than revenge, friendship rather than enmity and hope rather than despair – resurrection hope, rising from the ashes of despair and the crucifying experience of death. The prayer they wrote onto the walls of Coventry's ruined Cathedral and into a Litany of Reconciliation used across the world, 'Father, forgive', is an example among many others of the calling of Anglican worship to shape the society of which the church is part.

'Father, forgive', a simple prayer inspired by Jesus' words from the cross, is also very close to another prayer that Jesus gave to us – the Lord's Prayer, the Prayer of the Lord – that lies at the heart of all forms of Christian worship. I end where I began by saying that the true test of Anglican worship and the quality of its patrimony, is how far it works with the Spirit of the Lord to draw people, communities and society towards Jesus Christ and his prayer of praise to the Father and his intercession for the healing of the world.