

## Beauty and Anglican Worship in Schools

### Abstract

*Anglicanism has a diverse and living tradition of beautiful worship which can cause embarrassment and accusations of irrelevance among those involved in youth ministry. Is it possible for worship to be at the same time beautiful, contemporary, relevant, inspiring and Anglican? Fr Toby will share some experiences, then facilitate an interactive session, where others involved in the challenge of ministering beauty for brokenness may share theirs.*

- Introductions – name and positive experience of Anglican worship – not just in school context
- Apology for being a reactionary Anglo-Catholic
- Share experience and research
- Share group's experiences

### What is worship?

Discussion first

Background: Evangelical Ang, URC, Methodism, Anglo-Catholic. Musician. Fascinated and inspired by Anglican worship, esp ritual, colour, buildings, sensual, mysterious.

Convinced this is true for many young people. Questioning, exploring, space to be free to explore God. Experience passionate worship, non-patronising, honest leadership. Relaxed within formal structure. Still human.

Kendrick: "Nowadays people campaign for a certain style - not because they want to worship God but because they want what they want and like what they like"

Not *receiving* entertainment or spiritual lollipops but an *offering* of self to God.

### Beautiful Worship

Theological foundations

**Incarnation** The Word became flesh and dwelt among us

Not just words but enfleshed. Need to give shape and form to the Word.

**Resurrection** – transformation of our earthliness

**Ascension** Absorbing humanity into God. God comes to us in a human way and we approach God in a human way

**Parable of the Sower** Seed flourishes on the good soil of God's grace; we are nourished by the Sacraments of HC and Baptism which are outward signs of God's grace – as defined in BCP.

Easy to create simplistic, banal or trivial experiences. Try to promote sophisticated experiences using mood, atmosphere, colour, texture, words, space, music, ritual action, subtlety which may affect subconscious level before the conscious. Brain processes these over time and makes connections with real life.

‘The barest alphabet of reverence for so divine a mystery’ Fr Mackonochie

Modern tendency to strip down to raw ‘meaning’ as if we know what that is! This can’t ‘compete’ with the colourful, attention-grabbing world. Need for richness, not plainness.

God’s communication: aesthetic more than cognitive, using metaphor, symbol, myth to promote deeper meaning than plain words.

- Beauty contrasts with the world’s ugliness as heaven contrasts with earth – worship should be a foretaste of heaven, an intersection between earth and heaven. Tuebrook, sparkling in midst of squalor. Beauty for brokenness.
- Sacredness: being ‘scared’ or in awe. Can be achieved by poets and musicians, artists etc – services can be dull if about intellectual agony of ‘doing’ services written by theologically expert liturgists, not poets, who develop a sense of the awe.

### **Contemporary Worship**

Contemporary means ‘with the times’, ‘of the same age’. Risk of imitating society or blessing its norms rather than transforming or critiquing it.

Tillich: “People are not *outside* of God; they are *grasped* by God on the level in which they *can* be grasped – in their experience of the Divine, in the realms of holiness in which they are living, in which they are educated, in which they have performed acts of faith and adoration and prayer and cult, even though the symbols in which the Holy is expressed may seem extremely primitive and idolatrous.”

Modern music may be too subjective: 73 hymns or songs in *Mission Praise* beginning with ‘I’. Can be hard to discuss because many have come to faith through this music – but it isn’t the only way. Children do attend and grow in churches with traditional music. Liturgy is counter-cultural – an experience wholly unlike other leisure and cultural interests.

Slide – comparing ‘secular’ values and Christian worship. What are we saying about faith and about God? Some worship follows culture so bound to be popular.

“The church ... contains repertoires of images and aspirations which are in various ways at odds with social requirements.”

ie the Church doesn’t exist to reflect societal trends. There will be partitions between world and KoG.

“The partitions code the real world in its fallen condition and the signs of the Kingdom of God co-exist with the partitions in creative tension. That tension is of the utmost importance and should be continually exploited, but to pull

down the partitions is only to pretend that the gap has been closed. In fact the 'mystery of God' is not finished."

- Liturgical Worship not as attractive to newcomers
- We have a captive audience. Not an excuse to be boring, but we don't need to persuade them to come back. Over time the liturgy becomes normative.
- If we really believe in liturgical worship, and carry it out with passion, dynamism, character, humour, creativity, students will respond. It will be as normal as wearing their uniform and will gain their respect, if not their total enthusiasm.

'Traditional' doesn't equal 'old', but says we are part of a living tradition which has come to us from the apostles – hence Creed: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. States that God's kingdom has come and the world continues not to recognise it. Is not 'unchanging regularity' but lived and cared about.

Continuity in church contrasts with rapid change and upheaval in life and the frenzy of school life. Old Anglo-Catholic battle was in slums against hunger and squalor; fought with ritual worship. New battle is against hectic life, apathy and secularism – fought, as before, with transcendence, timelessness and transformation.

### **Relevant Worship**

The gospel is foreign to every culture. Christianity can easily become the religious dimension of the culture rather than a challenge to it:

"Listening to the Church, society hears only the sound of its own music." – *David Bosch*.

Making concessions is relatively easy in a school context with trained educators. Chapel can become another classroom, or another recess. Misleading to conduct fully 'relevant' worship then to tear them away from 'Sunday School' style into something unfamiliar. Prepare them for real church – but adapt language/length of readings to suit. Makes them work harder but gives longer term results. Risk of losing theological language and the ability to think outside scientific boundaries.

Liturgical worship demands much more of the homily; must be down-to-earth and relevant. Homily must make the rest of the liturgy relevant – not just the gospel but refer to other parts as well. Key moment for relevancy – must use contemporary concepts, media, current affairs and relate them to Christian message.

### **Inspiring Worship**

Risk of disenchantment. Children are prepared to see the world as full of the extraordinary. When we 'grow up' we seem to lose that.

Weber (sociologist) called it 'disenchantment'. The world loses its magical colouring as science provides our predominant world view. Universe seen as functional and mechanistic and liturgy can be too.

Schools run along management lines so liturgy seen as functional rather than enchanting. Get rid of images, mystery, 'staging' of catholic worship and you promote disenchantment – which is a gift to secularism. Children love enchantment – a sense of the numinous. Like Santa Claus – but true.

Trinitarian God = God's life is communal: possibility of encounter with God is strong when community worships

Worship can and should help us "experience the certitude of a divine meaning surpassing and enfolding ours"

"A signal witnessing to the world that God's kingdom has come in Christ."  
Cocksworth

Feelings reported during psychological research into music and liturgy:

- Glimpsing another world,
- timelessness,
- being bathed in warmth and light
- loss of sense of self

more from music than liturgy!

## **Anglican Worship**

Student at SSH: "We have a family service – it's called the mass."

Truth in this. People have spent years working on liturgy, calendar, lectionary. No need to reinvent the wheel. Disposable services engender the sense of disposable God. 'Themes' become boring – my students ask for an 'ordinary' service.

Incarnation: world-affirming, rather than seeing the world as primarily negative; gifts can be pulled together and different styles and tastes blended.

Catholic – so universal and shared. Part of something bigger, Anglican family. Not an isolated experience – can prepare students for the 'real' world of Anglicanism.

Ordered: Anglican 'orderliness.' Ritual re-orders participants who may be in a disordered environment (or a very traditional school orderliness). Familiarity brings release – not always having to think but increasingly able to reflect.

Do we believe Anglican worship is a 'valid' or meaningful approach? If not, probably shouldn't be in an Anglican School. If we have to apologise, or reinvent, or are ashamed, we will not encourage participation or confident faith.

Room for revision – need for children's Eucharistic prayer but following the Anglican shape and concepts. Need for interesting hymns without patronising or trivialising. Need for collects whose syntax is not confusing. Lectionary useful if very regular services – although readings are long.

## **Discussion**

- Experiences of beauty as part of worship
- Experiences of ministering 'beauty for brokenness'