"Complete in the Beauty of Holiness": Anglican Identity and Aesthetics

A lecture given by Bruce Russell on 5 February 2003 at Saint Mark's Church, Saskatoon, as part of a series, Anglican Distinctives, organized by the College of Emmanuel and Saint Chad for the Diocese of Saskatoon.

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN with a quotation from a poem about the English Church written in the seventeenth century.

> The beauteous Church outspreads its wings and sheds
> Its radiance unto heaven. Far and wide
> Neighboring nations wonder, and, inspired,
> Seek to learn a ritual in harmony with ours.
> Hosts of Angels swell our company;
> And Christ himself, watching from the skies,
> Taking in the houses of the world at a glance,
> Says that only England offers a finished worship.

How startling the triumphal certainty of such an assertion seems to our ears. So conditioned by the cultural relativism of a pluralistic society, even if we have the courage of our convictions, we are likely to be too inhibited to boast of them. Yet this poem was written by a modest and courteous man, a loving and deeply pastoral priest, one of the most holy and creative voices of Anglican tradition. It is a translation of one of George Herbert's Latin poems, from a collection called the *Musae Responsoriae*. Critics have contrasted Herbert's English and Latin poems, finding the latter bombastic and rhetorical. There is something of the Caroline court propaganda in this verse, but I think it still warrants consideration as being consistent with more familiar and equally partisan expressions of Herbert's love of his Church. For example, when another priest enquired what prayers he used, he replied, "O, sir, the prayers of my Mother, The Church of England: no other prayers are equal to them." The most famous of Herbert's polemics of this type is the poem *The British Church*, a classical articulation of Anglicanism as the middle way, a *via media*, between Rome and reform: "*I Joy, dear Mother, when I view / Thy perfect lineaments and hue / both sweet and bright.*" (I shall return to the usefulness of the idea of *via media*, which has recently become the subject of much contention, at the end of this talk.) Herbert was never shy to debate his Recusant Roman Catholic or Puritan

compatriots. Yet the strident assertions of the *Musae Responsoriae* today seem almost hubris. Were these claims in some sense truer in Herbert's own time than we realize, and more to the point, what are the implications of that possibility today? Dare we own such certainty and conviction in this age of Ecumenical *rapprochement*? Hold on to that question, it is Herbert's challenge, not mine.

I think it is accurate to say that Anglican self-confidence is at as low ebb as it has ever been. There have been episodes of profound adversity throughout the past five centuries of Anglican autonomy: the Civil War and the Commonwealth, the crisis of the Non-Jurors, hostility to the Wesleys and to the Great Awakening, the vicious party wars of the Victorian era, or the deep despair which followed the defeat of the 1928 Prayer Book. Nonetheless it seems that never has the Church been so torn internally on such a scale as it is today. All sectors of our Church are deeply troubled and apprehensive of our future. While the older Churches become increasingly marginalized, the Churches of the former Colonial world are experiencing unprecedented growth, but that growth seems to propel us towards greater and greater disunity. While the developing Churches are contemptuous of what they consider the apostasy of their elder sisters, Anglicans in the United Kingdom, North American and Australia are locked in what seems an increasingly acrimonious generational war between aging liberals and younger evangelicals and traditionalists on such issues as liturgy, the nature of scripture, moral theology, and, fundamentally, of ecclesiology itself.

Is it simplistic to see all of this, to a great extent, as an identity crisis; can a solution be found in a search for the parameters of Anglican identity? Are there signs in our history of an ability, like any body, for our Church to heal itself? I believe there can be an affirmative answer to these questions. However, it seems fair to suggest that since theological speculation has so largely contributed to these divisions, the most useful locus in which to search for a *consensus fidelium*, a unity of belief is not in doctrine, or ideas, but rather in exploring what we do and have done as Anglicans. One could raise the issue of the relationship between the abandonment of common prayer and our increasing disunity, Common prayer implies a liturgical, and possibly a doctrinal consensus we have lost, but do we still have a common heritage, and at least traces of certain attitudes and habits.

What Anglicans do, and what we have done, might be a surer test of who we are than what we say we are or what we profess to be. This is not an unprecedented Anglican approach; our theologians have long had an almost nagging affection for the old saw *lex orandi, lex credendi*, that as we pray, so

we believe. What I want to do here is to explore some of the underlying assumptions implicit in the design and form of places of worship and of the objects made for use in Anglican worship over the past four centuries for clues to Anglican identity and to consider their evolution as indicators of how the Church has grown and heals itself, and of how *via media* achieves equilibrium.

What might be *Anglican* about Anglican liturgical or sacred art? How can we learn about the nature of Anglican faith and tradition from the objects to be found in Anglican places of worship? What of those simple but precious objects associated with the hallowing of life's momentous transitions, such as a christening cup or a marriage ring, or even those objects that express the faith of Anglicans and which are found in their homes, a Stafford shire figure on a mantelpiece, or a scripture passage worked by a girl in an heirloom needlepoint sampler? When we consider the rather heterogeneous diversity of the community, both past and present, for which these diverse objects have been made, would such an attempt be justified? Are these objects Anglican simply in their *raison d'etre*, or are they tangibly Anglican in their essence? It would perhaps be less contentious to assert that something is an Anglican object simply or primarily because it is used or made or owed by Anglicans, and then to concentrate on tracing a historical sequence of external influences of taste and fashion which have effected the appearance of such objects over time. I am, however firmly convinced that such an argument would be, to a very considerable degree, not only facile but also misguided. For the art historian the contemplation of simple objects leads step by step to an interrogation of their meaning within the society or cultural community which made them, and by due process, to consider the most fundamental assumptions held by its members, and onward until one faces the great intellectual issues which confront that society or culture in each generation, for these too are reflected in the life and perspective of the artist or artisan and find expression in their work. And incrementally the bigger issues return in the contemplation of even the humblest object. Ultimately, it is impossible to make any sense of objects or architecture, however distinct or original they might be, abstracted from the ideological and historical atmosphere in which they were created: in short any part can stand for the whole.

I am acutely aware that trying to define something as eclectic as Anglican identity has defied wiser and more experienced authors than myself. Surely defining the aesthetics of Anglican material culture would be no less daunting a task. Perhaps the most appropriate approach would be to present a

series of anecdotes and observations that seem to underscore certain recurring characteristics suggested by the objects themselves.

Primary among these is an evident reverence for sacred objects and spaces that is rather at odds with the approach of other churches affected by the Reformation. Admittedly great violence was done to the ancient churches, cathedrals and abbeys of England during the Reformation era, and subsequently. What is significant is to see the care with which that damage was repaired, or what was destroyed, replaced. The devotion and love given to the care of places of worship is as evident after the Reformation as before, although the arrangement of those sites changed to facilitate new forms of worship. Richard Hooker, Anglican tradition's greatest systematic theologian, argues clearly that "solemn duties of public service to be done unto God, must have places set and prepared in such sort as beseemeth actions of that regard." [Book V: 11] From this sense of the holiness of places and things proper to worship derives a further understanding: that the making and care of objects used in worship is itself a form of worship.

One of the implications of these two notions is that designated, or consecrated, objects and architecture must be worthy of their sacred use in the quality of the materials from which they are made, and in terms of the labour and care expended in their production. I will argue, perhaps surprisingly, that this is a peculiar instance of the survival of the Benedictine tradition of *work as prayer* in the English church and a distinctively Anglican response to the great Reformation debate on faith and works. Another element of persistent Benedictine influence to survive in the Anglican Communion is the centrality of the Psalter in public prayer; and I will argue that the language and cosmology of the Psalms, as much as anything else, constitutes to a significant degree the language and grammar of the Anglican design tradition. And lastly, I will consider the two distinctive liturgical models suggested, on one hand, by the Last Supper, and on the other by the Jerusalem Temple worship and the heavenly worship as described in Revelation and the Prophets. Although I will focus more on the domestic/parochial side, it is good to bear in mind that this pair of tropes has served as the respective shores between which the rather serpentine *via media* of Anglican liturgical discourse has wriggled its way down the centuries. Perhaps the dialectic that these represent resembles the magnetic poles in an electric motor, constituting the very engine of Anglican discourse. The Church's ability over time to contain and sustain a creative fusion of such disparate elements is Anglicanism's greatest achievement.

These two poles of Upper Room and Temple find appropriate expression in the Anglican embrace of both Cathedral and parish worship, and we fail to understand this distinction at our peril. We are all too familiar with the confusion of these two models. There is nothing more liturgically embarrassing than a small parish trying to ape the grandeur of Cathedral worship, of a scrawny vested choir trying to carry off musical repertoire beyond their abilities, when good congregational singing would far more appropriate. How many little cruciform plan churches have been built like dollhouse cathedrals across this country, a complete misunderstanding of the goals of the Victorian Ecclesiologists. These have mini-transepts useful for the nothing more than accumulation of clutter, and chancels as deep as their naves but half the width, invariably cluttered with too much furniture, and where there is room to swing neither a cat nor a thurible, let alone conduct worship in a seemly and dignified manner. Recent generations have taken the other extreme and recast Cathedral worship after the contemporary norm of suburban parish churches, with improvised furnishings that have long since become permanent.

Seemliness

Visitors to Anglican churches throughout the Communion will see that generations of Anglicans believed in offering the best of human labor in the fittings and decor of their churches, within the parameters of distinct and identifiable canons of taste. By the middle of the twentieth century, furnishing began to be ordered from the catalogues of commercial ecclesiastical outfitters, and manufactured products, often intended for Roman Catholic use, began to be seen in increasing numbers of Anglican churches, especially in this country. The differences were subtle, but the distinctiveness of Anglican visual culture began to disappear as older the generation of artisans and small-scale workshops were no long employed. The prevailing assumptions that hand work and good design were beyond the capability of contemporary workers, and or at least too expensive for ordinary congregations, to a very deep hold on the new congregations which proliferated in the suburbs growing up across the country. Some of the new churches were well designed and furnished in attractive and fitting modern expressions of the traditions of Anglican worship, but these were sadly the exceptions. How did we get from an ethos were Anglicans offered in worship the best that they could imagine and create, to a situation where indifference, mediocrity, and kitsch prevail, and a glorious tradition was debased into an uncomfortable, arid and graceless caricature.

When was the last time a Canadian Anglican church won the Governor General's award for Architecture? One can count on the fingers of one hand the Anglican churches in this country that have commissioned a significant work of art in the past twenty-five years.

Traditionally Anglicans begin Morning and Evening Prayer with short passages selected from Scripture known as *Sentences*. Similar quotations, such as the famous *Comfortable Words*, are placed within the Canon of the Communion liturgy. In doing so Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and the other authors of classical Anglican liturgy demonstrated the degree to which they were saturated with the rhetoric of the Humanist revival of learning of the Renaissance era. This was the era in which emblems, *impressa*, and the creative employment of the epigraphic tradition was raised to the level of an art. To express an idea in a phrase borrowed from sacred or classical literature was a clear indication not only of the user's erudition, it was also an invocation of time tested value or truth itself. In this milieu such citations and epigrams, referred to as *sententiæ*, were the equivalent of citing precedents in jurisprudence. Given the instability of the times, perhaps such appropriated phraseology gave post-Reformation Anglican liturgists and laity alike a sense of confidence in the novelty of their new forms of worship.

As early as the mid-sixteenth century Anglicans began to inscribe sentences on the walls of their churches, seemingly as much for ornament as instruction. Like the tablets bearing the Decalogue, Creed, and Lord's Prayer, scripture sentences in elegant calligraphy served to relieved the plain white wash with which the Reformers had obliterated the chromatic and iconographic splendour of medieval parish churches. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras sentences were carved on Chancel Screens. By the time of William and Mary, when sacred murals were no longer prohibited, the decorative use of sentences was not abandoned. Inscribed on escutcheons or scrolls held by angels, sentences were incorporated into a hybrid form of sculptural decoration which persist from the ceilings of English Baroque churches to the stained glass windows of Victorian churches.

These *sentences*, fragments wrenched from their original narrative contexts and incorporated into *The Book of Common Prayer* are especially revealing aspects of Anglican identity. There is also the possibility that their use helped forge this identity. The sentence "*O Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*" which is provided for use in the Morning Prayer service in the Canadian Book of Common Prayer is a quote from one of the most widely used of the Psalms, the ninety-sixth, *Cantate Domino* . This presents us with an

interesting series of problems that reveal rather more than one might expect about Anglican history and sensibility. First of all, you won't find this phrase in older Prayer Books. It seems to have been first used in this country in the 1918 revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*. It was also included in the influential English revision of 1928. It would appear that we are simply dealing with a twentieth century addition to the morning service, one of many additions that date from that era.

But this does not account for the earlier wide spread use of the phrase. It was a favorite of nineteenth-century Canadian church decorators who prominently carved, painted or embroidered it in both the grandest and most humble places of worship. Let me just cite a few examples from the Province of Quebec. The British émigré architect and pioneer Ecclesiologist Frank Wills had it carved above the sedilia to the north of the high altar in Montreal Cathedral. It would be echoed in the early twentieth century, on the altar itself, traced in gold thread on the magnificent festival white frontal embroidered by Muriel Evans, the Diocesan embroideress. It is also appears painted above the arch which divides the nave from the chancel in Will's parish church of Saint Michael in Sillery near Quebec City. It can also be seen painted on tin presumably by a local sign painter, on the reredos of the tiny brick church at Pigeon Hill in the Eastern Townships.

Nor was the fondness for this phrase local or recent: it is already singled out in 1597 by Richard Hooker in Book V: 16 of his *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*. "As therefore we every where exhort all men to worship God; even so, for performance of this service by the people of God assembled, we think not any place so good as the Church, neither any exhortation so fit as that of David, O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." We encounter the phrase again in the words of Anthony Sparrow, the Restoration era Bishop of Norwich. Speaking of the "pious Christians in Primitive times... they built and set apart to God's holy service and worship by religious solemnity, Churches and Oratories.... And when persecutors at any time destroyed those holy places, as soon as the storm was over, those blessed Souls, the first thing that they did, rebuild and rebeautified them, that they might worship God, according to the psalmist's rule, in the beauty of holiness." In 1749 we find that the American priest and missionary Samuel Johnson, the founder of what would become Columbia University, published a work entitled *On the Beauty of Holiness in the Worship of the Church of England*. In the Victorian era the Reverend J. S. B. Monsell (1811-1875) composed what has remained for almost a century and a half one of the most familiar of hymns used in Anglican worship from this

psalm text. An article on the revival of eucharistic vestments in the English paper *The Church Times* in 1865 describes the clergy of Saint Stephen's, Devonport as "now resplendent in the beauty of holiness" in their new white vestments. Writing about the Edwardian liturgist Percy Dearmer, D. L. Murray asserts that he "was directed by a larger vision, the holiness of beauty serving the beauty of holiness." Clearly this phrase migrated from wide and popular use into the Prayer Book and not, as one might have expected, the other way around.

The phrase itself is a translation, and this offers another insight into its importance. The implications which made it a so important to Anglican identity disappear in modern English translations. *The New English Bible* offers, for example, "Bow down to the Lord in the splendour of Holiness." There are two significant divergences from Bishop Miles Cloverdale's 1535 metrical translation, retained by the King James Bible's redactors. *Bowing*, an act of reverence or humility is more ambiguously rendered by Coverdale with the more dignified *worship* , while *splendour*, suggesting awe, is made more appreciable as simple *beauty*. The effect is a kind of leveling achieved by both elevating our action and making its object more familiar. Subtler is the divergence in the New Revised Standard translation but it is still significant: it becomes "Worship the Lord in holy splendor." Coverdale's insistence on beauty is absent. Such deliberate choices are consistent with the Humanist and Neo-Platonic values espoused by the English Humanists, the influenced of Pico della Mirandola and Erasmus was as much in the air as that Martin Luther.

Work as Prayer

Frederick Engles once observed that the English would never make a revolution until they learn to walk on the grass. The English Reformation was equally an affair of half measures. Very much one step forward and two steps back. The progenitors of the English Church were almost alone among the Northern European reformers in keeping such things as canon law and the ancient orders of bishops, presbyters and deacons. And when I say two steps back, I am not speaking figuratively. The English church wanted to go back to ecclesiastical models anterior to the consolidation of papal authority. Other differences were more subtle. One of the rallying cries of the Northern European Reformation was justification by faith, not works. Following the teaching of Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther and his associates reminded Christians that they were brought to salvation by Christ's redemptive sacrifice and not through their own initiatives. While susceptible to the theology of justification, in the spirit of the

via media, the Anglican *Articles of Religion* emphasized that although "Good Works ... cannot put away our sins... yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God... that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit." [XII] In doing so they perhaps had recourse to another classical strain in the Western Christian tradition. Luther's personal rejection of his early monastic experience resulted in a widespread libel of the actual monastic understanding of works. While late medieval monasteries were often rich and sometimes decadent, it is wrong to dismiss the whole system as Pelagian. Benedict's rule says a great deal about the importance of good works, but he is also clear, and orthodox about their nature. The Prologue of *the Regula Sancti Benedicti* warns:

> It is they who, fearing the Lord (Ps. 14:4), do not pride themselves on their good observance; but, convinced that the good which is in them cannot come from themselves and must be from the Lord, glorify the Lord's work in them (Ps. 14:4)...Thus also the Apostle Paul attributed nothing of the success of his preaching to himself, but said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

For Saint Benedict and his monastic progeny, work was not a means by which salvation, or grace, is earned, it was understood as a form of prayer. It is often contended that Anglican ethos is strongly imbued with Benedictine tradition, deeply imbricated in such national institutions as the Cathedrals, many of which were monastic foundations, and the university colleges which were also often of Benedictine origin. The survival of these institutions meant that aspects of the Benedictine tradition brought to England by Augustine of Canterbury in 597 were unaffected by the dissolution of monasteries. One example of this was the recasting of the monastic offices for the laity by Bishop Thomas Cranmer in Morning and Evening Prayer. It is also arguable that something of the Benedictine understanding of *ora et labora*, work and prayer, survived in the Anglican approach to the making of those things necessary for liturgical use. [1]

In his popular hymn, "Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness" referred to above, J. S. B. Monsell wrote "*Truth in its beauty and love in its*

[1] Martin Thornton elaborates the resonance of Benedictine ethos in Anglican tradition in "The Anglican Spiritual Tradition." *The Anglican Tradition*, Richard Holloway, ed. Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow Co. / Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1984.p. 86-87; see also Dom Bede Mudge in: *Canterbury and Rome, Sister Churches*. Rob ert Hale, editor. London, Longman & Todd, 1982 .

tenderness, These are the offerings to lay on his shrine." For Anglicans, it seems, it is not enough to simply bless or consecrate objects for use in worship, the materials and the care with which they are made is of vital importance in determining their worthiness. Jeremy Taylor, in his famous manual on *Holy Living*, asserted, "We should intend God's glory in every action and design we do." An obvious illustration of this is the ecclesiastical embroidery laboriously produced by laywomen and members of Religious Orders beginning in the 1850's through the influence of the Ritualist revival. These works can only be comprehended as dedicated acts of prayer, and although they were some times produced for sale, the prices that were paid for them could not possibly have compensated their makers for the labour involved. An 1907 address by Father Arthur French to the Guild of Saint Anne, of the Parish of Saint John the Evangelist in Montreal, which was responsible for producing such church needlework suggests that "Every stitch put in [...] be '*pro Christo et Ecclessia*' for Christ and his Church'."

Creation as Revelation

One of the most ubiquitous traditions of the Anglican liturgical year is the Harvest Festival when sanctuaries overflow with sheaves of wheat and autumn leaves, pulpits metamorphosise into hay stacks, and altars cascade with torrents of fruits and vegetables. The pride in human endeavour, the ties to the land, and thanksgiving for the bounty of creation are given expression. Even urban churches participate in this still popular observance. This is an especially overt expression of recurring characteristic of Anglican liturgical art and architectural ornament evidenced in objects made over the course of four centuries—the frequency of motifs drawn from nature. Perhaps this is another instance of the continuity of post Reformation Anglicanism with older traditions of the British church—the natural motifs of Celtic Christian art through both the ornament and the biomorphic structural form of English Gothic. From the title page of the 1537 English Bible to the garlands carved in wood by Grinling Gibbons, in the floral embroidery of the Victorian era, or the Arts and Crafts church furnishings of Morris and Company, C.R. Ashbee or Omar Ramsden, and the popular nursery prints of Margaret Tarrant, a profound love of Creation is an almost obsessive preoccupation of Anglican liturgical and sacred art.

Nature, to pre-Enlightenment and post Romantic Anglicans alike, was revelation. Thomas Brown put it this way: "this visible World is but a picture of the invisible, wherein as in a pourtract things are not truely, but in equivocall

shapes, and as they counterfeit some more reall substance in that invisible fabrick." Jeremy Taylor, Caroline bishop and divine; is more expansive:

> The beauteous frame of heaven and earth was the glass in which God beheld his wisdom; he is glorified in the sun and moon, in the rare fabric of the honeycomb, in the disciplines of the bees, in the economy of the ants, in the little houses of the birds, in the curiosity of an eye—God pleased to delight in those little reflexes and images of Himself from those pretty mirrors, which, like a crevice in a wall, through a narrow perspective transmit the species of a vast excellency… [Works IV: 382]

John Ruskin would teach the same lesson, translated into Victorian moralistic positivism. For him, at least in his early years, the observation of nature was the only possible basis for great art. Anything less would fail because it could only be the expression of the artist's pride cut off from participation in real creation that is the property of God alone. The work of art, and beauty itself

> is either the record of conscience, written in things external, or it is the symbolizing of Divine attributes in matter, or it is the felicity of living things, or the perfect fulfillment of their duties and functions. In all cases it is something Divine; either the approving voice of God, the glorious symbol of Him, the evidence of His kind presence, or the obedience to His will by Him induced and supported"[2]

If the neo-classical sacred architecture of Bishop Taylor's Restoration era seems at first glance to belie the naturalism of earlier or later Anglican architecture, one need only look closer at, for example, the City churches of Sir Christopher Wren. (Taylor died the year after the Great Fire of London.) Despite their indebtedness to classical, indeed pagan, models as Pugin and the

[2] *Stones of Venice*, iv: p. 210. Ruskin, the child of committed Evangelical parents, was profoundly indebted to the canonic works of Anglican tradition. His own writings make reference to Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a work on which he modeled the style of the second volume of *Modern Painters*, (in the 1871 preface to *Sesame and Lilies*, 18.32). Also in the tenth number of *Fors Clavigera*, which appeared in October 1871, Ruskin mentions his "affectation to write like Hooker and George Herbert" (27.168), See also Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, "Ruskin, Hooker, and 'the Christian Theoria,'" *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age* (Toronto, 1963), 283-301.

Victorians would later insist, Wren's churches abound with natural motifs. The coffers of his ceilings writhe with the naturalistically rendered vegetation of the patera and garlands, and there is a telling habitual preference for the Corinthian order with its lush acanthus foliage in his church interiors. While these are all conventional elements of the classical orders, he avoids the more abstract Doric or Ionic orders. This naturalistic bounty found even freer expression in the furnishing of his churches, for example the magnificent gilt wrought iron screens of Jean Tijou or Grinling Gibbons' choir stalls in Saint Paul's Cathedral.

Contrasting Grinling Gibbon's church furnishings with Italian Baroque examples is illustrative of a significant demarcation from Continental Counter-reformation taste. The use of wood veneer in the reredos in Trinity College Chapel, Oxford, or Wren's Saint James Piccadilly, or Hampton Court Chapel all evidence a delight in the wood grain itself, employing it in an abstract manner, and never used in his secular works. Critics such as Addleshaw and Etchells point out that the scale of the reredos in a Wren church differs from those of the Counter-Reformation Baroque, in that they were meant to be seen by those who have come forward for Communion. They were lower, more intimate, and far less theatrical, but the effects were no less impressive. John Evelyn, who was certainly both an objective and well-traveled observer, considered that 'there was no altar anywhere in England, nor has there been any abroad, more handsomely adorned" than Saint James, Piccadilly.[3] A telling contrast is the use of variegated jasper in the famous altar rail of the Cappella Spada in Rome's San Girolamo della Caritá. Long attributed to Borromini, it is now thought to be the work of Antonio Giorgetti, a student of Bernini, and dates from 1654-1657, several decades prior to Gibbons' sacred works. Two kneeling angels hold what appears to be a naturalistically rendered houseling cloth of red and white stripped drapery that on closer examination is comprised of numerous sheets of sandwiched jasper. Here the delight in a natural material, a dense semi-precious stone, is expressed in mimesis of another substance. In contrast the geometric shapes of Gibbons' marquetry are arranged to give expression less to conventional forms of a nimbus or radiance, than to register in the lines of wood grain the vitality, the very pulse of nature and its creator. Above all the privileging of wood as the favoured medium of England's pre-eminent Baroque decorative sculptor aligns him with the intimate domain of furniture and domestic architecture rather than the public monumentality of marble or bronze. Writers on Gibbons have stressed that there is little to distinguish his sacred and secular

[3] *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship*, pp. 56-57, 160.

commissions. A surround with carved garlands for a nobleman's house is little different from the reredos projects mentioned above, with the exception that dead game birds are replaced with winged putti or the Christological pelican feeding its young.

If post-Tridentine Continental European liturgy focused on Eucharistic devotion, habitual recitation of the Morning and Evening offices in the context of cathedral, parish and home resulted in Anglican piety becoming saturated with the mind of the biblical Psalter and Canticles. Anglican faith was formed in a primarily rural culture, even the great Cathedrals, with few exceptions, were build in market towns virtually steps away from fields and hedgerows. The evidence that all creation is in constant and active worship of its maker seemed all around and became an almost obsessive preoccupation made abundantly manifest in the material culture of the Church. When we look to the details of carvings or embroidery and find motifs from nature, or even the pleasure evident in stone and wood as unadorned surfaces, (as we have seen in Gibbons,) it is evident that we are among a people who think and feel and speak the discourse of the Psalter. Praying with the Psalms one enunciates a desire to be as a young tree planted within the Temple sanctuary; one yearns like a deer for running water; and reflects that even the sparrow finds a house and the swallow finds a nest, within the altars of the Lord, and that the birds of air and the fishes that make their way through the sea, indeed all the works of the Lord praise him and magnify his name forever. Even the act of daily prayer itself has been conceived with reference to nature: Henry Vaughan, the Caroline silurist, speaks of the faithful offering their morning prayer like plants turning to the sun and at evening giving thanks like bees returning to the hive.

We need only look to Anglican churches across Canada to see the integration of natural forms in physical expressions of worship. There is a story that when the architect Frank Wills and Montreal Bishop Fulford revealed the plans for their Cathedral it was proposed that the capitals of the nave piers were to be ornamented with carved angels. Fulford's friend and allay Justice John Samuel McCord had another idea. He sent home for his wife's watercolours of the plants that grew in their garden on the side of Mount Royal and these, instead of angels, served as the motifs that were carved on the capitals. Another anecdote, from another Canadian Anglican cathedral, illustrates the sentimentality this sort of naturalism: during the construction of Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria, a robin built its nest near the capital of one of the nave pillars. In the words of the Cathedral tour leaflet: "building operations at that point were suspended until her family had been launched out into the world." A

carving of the bird and her nest was added to the capital to mark the spot. The swallow of the Psalm becomes a suitably Edwardian Beatrix Potter Robin Red Breast. The Cathedral in Winnipeg provides another potent illustration: one of the glories of the Aesthetic Movement design in this Country, an oak pulpit which seems to swell from naturalistic roots and trunks to support a legion of seraphs amidst a grand corona of sunflowers!

The deep resonance with which the critique of industrial production—developed by the English Romantic movement and concretized in the Gothic Revival and the Arts and Crafts Movement—imbued the builders of Anglican churches over the past two centuries is evident in Anglican churches throughout the Communion. John Ruskin, arguably the dominant English arbiter of taste of that era taught that the artist, and he considered craft workers artists, could not do better that to emulate the beauty of God's creation. The Arts and Crafts architect Charles Robert Ashbee, founder of the Guild of Handicrafts, expressed this same principle in his *Where the Great City Stands. A Study in the New Civics*, published in 1917. After quoting a long passage from *The Book of Ecclesiasticus* on craft workers that concludes by asserting that "the handiwork of their craft is prayer" (xxxvii, 34). He goes on to assert

> The nineteenth century, in destroying the workshop structure of society, changed all this, and the Arts and Crafts movement set itself to undermining the work of the nineteenth century. It sought to bring back again the quality of prayer, to find out what the new fabric of the world was to be.

The Arts and Crafts Movement looked back to the values of Humanists such as Erasmus or Pico della Mirandola and the Tudor intellectuals of the era in which the distinctive Anglican tradition began to emerge. In *The Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico wrote that "Man is the intermediary between creatures, that he is the familiar of the God above him as he is the lord of beings beneath him; that, by the acuteness of his senses, the inquiry of his reason and the light of his intelligence, he is the interpreter of nature, set midway between the timeless unchanging and the flux of time... and, by David's testimony little lower than the angels...."

In making of our churches a kind of visual equivalent of the *Benidicite*, filling them with the bounty of God's creation, we are made mindful of both our dignity and insignificance.

Table versus Altar

Christianity inherited two modes of worship from Jewish tradition: the elaborate temple ritual prescribed in the *Books of Moses*, and simple domestic prayer and observances such as the Passover *seder* and the Sabbath dinner centered on the family which had attained new and expanded vitality in the Diaspora era and the destruction of the Temple. The former were the models for the vision of heavenly worship described in *The Book of Ezekiel* and in the Christian Testament in *Revelations*. These scriptural concepts of heavenly worship equally inform the imperial Byzantine rite and the ritual of the Latin west, for example as elaborated by the Abbot Suger at the Abbey of Saint-Denis, or the monks of Cluny. The alternative vision was cherished by the northern Reformers who looked to the simplicity of the Gospel descriptions of the Last Supper or the breaking of bread at Emmaus. The Anglican divines sought to steer a middle course, veering sometimes in one direction or the other. And this brings us to another issue of central importance in understanding the objects associated with Anglican worship from the late Tudor era onwards.

It would be a mistake to conclude from this notion of seemliness that Anglicans made a virtue of excess, of intensive labour for its own sake or excessive costliness of materials. One of the longest of the Edwardian Homilies is entitled "Against the Peril of Idolatry, and superfluous Decking of Churches."

A degree of restraint, moderation, and seemliness has generally been a hallmark across the wide spectrum of Anglican worship. Writing about English pre-Victorian parish churches Percy Dearmer describes their "beauty and homelike charm" and his advice in *The Parson's Handbook* transposes a familiar domestic maxim to a parish context:

> *It is always better to get good things than many bad ones. It is better for poor churches to buy a good thing in simple material than a bad thing in more expensive material.*

Dearmer and his peers were paying heed to the advice of William Morris, which seemed as relevant applied to God's house as to one's own: "Have nothing in your houses which you do not know to be know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." This prevailing wisdom is reflected in the way in which the contents of both new and old world Anglican churches represent an accumulation, almost an accretion, of gifts and memorials presented by successive generations, rather like the contents of an old family home.

Archbishop Cranmer did a very curious thing when he was translating the collects for Trinity XXII and Epiphany V. They both derive from the same source, the Gregorian Sacramentary, which reads "keep thy Church continually in thy true religion"; but what is so strange that is that in both instances he adds one word that transposes the phrase becomes "thy church and household". [4] It is like Coverdale's subtle addition of beauty to Psalm 96. *This would be unremarkable in itself, except that it is part of trend, as it were, to domesticate the site of worship. Let me cite another example: in 1656 by the anonymous author of* "A Poem in defense of the decent Ornaments of Christ Church Oxon, occasioned by a Banbury brother, who called them Idolatries" argued that the niceties of domestic decor should not outshine places of worship:

> Tis only some base niggard Heresie
> To think Religion loves deformity.
> Glory did never yet make god the lesse,
> Neither can beauty defile holinesse....
> To have our Halls and Galleries outshine
> Altars in beauty, is to deck our swine
> With oriental pearl, whilst the deserving Quire
> Of God and Angels wallow in the mire...

This analogy is repeatedly underscored in classical Anglican texts such as the sixteenth century "*Homily for Repairing and keeping clean, and comely adorning of Churches*" which begins:

> It is a common custom of all men, when they intend to have their friends or neighbors to come to their houses to eat or drink with them, or to have any solemn assembly to treat and talk of any matter, they will have their houses, which they keep in continual reparation, to be clean and fine, lest they should be counted sluttish, or little to regard their friends and neighbors. How much more then ought the house of God, which we commonly call the church, to be sufficiently repaired in all places, and to be honorably adorned and garnished, and to be kept clean and sweat, to the comfort of the people that shall resort thereunto! [And further

[4] Barbee & Zahl p. 24.

> on...] It is a sin and shame to see so many churches so ruinous, and so fully decayed, almost in every corner. If a man's private house, wherein he dwelleth, be decayed, he will never cease till it be restored up again...And shall we be so mindful of our common base houses, debuted to so vile employment, and be forgetful towards that house of God, wherein be ministered the sacraments and mysteries of our redemption? ... The second point, which appertaineth to the maintenance of God's house, is to have it well adorned, and comely and clean kept: which things may be the more easily performed, when the church is well repaired. For like as men are well refreshed and comforted, when they find their houses having all things in good order, and all corners clean and sweet; so when God's house, the church is well adorned, with places convenient to sit in, with the pulpit for the preacher, with the Lord's table for the ministration of his holy supper, with the font to christen in, and also is kept clean, comely and sweetly, the people are more desirous and the more comforted to resort thither and to tarry there the whole time appointed them.

The latter portion of this passage delineates the basic necessities for the services of the church, and is in effect a tropic inventory of the essential contents of Anglican churches great and small that one encounters through subsequent literature such as George Hebert's Temple, or in the meticulous inventories kept by generations of conscientious church wardens.

There is something of this domesticity in the habitual preference of Anglicans for silver rather than gold chalices and other sacred vessels. Clearly something other than economy is implied by this choice. After all, even relatively humble continental churches could afford gold plated sacred vessels. The art of the silversmith is one of the most characteristic glories of English decorative art. The liturgical use of this medium by the English Church implies a deliberate link to the widespread domestic use of silver. The Eucharistic theology of the first generations of English Reformers shifted emphasis from eternal recurring sacrifice to commemoration of the Last Supper "once offered"; altars became tables. Although subsequent generations evolved a more balanced Eucharistic theology, something of the domestic remained. But if communicants were to gather at the Lord's Table, it would not be the quotidian table of the Edwardian reformers or the Puritans, but a festival table such as would be prepared for honored guests.

Sacred versus Liturgical art

Art historians make a distinction between liturgical art and sacred art. Works of liturgical art are objects, often of brilliant design and great creativity made for use in worship, which in a secular context likely would be termed decorative art, sacred art are likely to be paintings or sculpture that depict sacred subjects: usually paintings or sculpture depicting biblical or allegorical subjects or the lives of the saints. Anglicans, and I would argue that this too is a reflection of this domestic emphasis in worship, have habitually excelled at the former, and relatively speaking, ignored the latter.

The Iconoclasm unleashed first by despoilers of the era of Henry VI and Edward VI obliterated the heritage of centuries. What they did not destroy was left to the ravages of the Puritans who did yet more damage. In the process the English acquired a deep distrust of sacred art. In 1563, the same year as Council of Trent promulgated it's teaching on the importance of sacred art, a "Homily on the Peril of Idolatry" was published in England. During the trial of Archbishop Laud the prosecution presented his patronage of sacred art as damning evidence of his culpability.

This sentiment ran so deep that prejudice triumphed over middleclass thrift when the House of Commons issued a directive in 1643 to purge from Queen Henrietta Maria's Chapel at Somerset House of "superstitious Pictures and Matters." Unlike other works of art from the royal collection, Commonwealth soldiers cast Ruben's celebrated reredos from the Queen's Chapel into the Thames. The same year paintings and sculpture in the Chapel Royal at Whitehall were defaced, and the stained glass smashed. [5] In 1684, after the restoration, the Court of Arches ruled in favor of the lawfulness of pictures provided they were not used for superstitious or idolatrous purposes." [6] But it was too late, little really changed. Many Canadian Anglicans still harbor a deep suspicion of images, especially sculptural images.

I can think of no more telling illustration of Anglican ambiguity towards sacred art than the failure of the various schemes, both realized and abandoned, to decorate the vaults of Wren's Saint Paul's Cathedral. At the time of its completion, a completion was held and the painter James Thorndike was chosen to paint a mural by depicting episodes from the life of Paul on its the

[5] Roy Strong, *Lost Treasures of Britain*, p. 107
[6] H. E. Symonds, The Council of Trent and Anglican Formularies. Oxford: H. Milford, 1933; Charles Henery. *A Speaking Life: The Legacy of John Keble*, p. 137

dome, but the other ceilings were left bare. In the eighteenth century, with the founding of the Royal Academy, it was proposed that six of the leading Academy painters including Sir Joshua Reynolds and Benjamin West should demonstrate the new glory of British art by completing the project. This ambitious plan was still born when the Bishop of London, Dr. Terrick announced that he would not permit "the introduction of popery" in his Cathedral. In the Victorian period the scheme was again revived and in 1863 several artists contribute designs for an unrealized mural depicting the Transfiguration for the Eastern apse of the Cathedral. In the 1880's Sir Frederic Leighton, who had participated in this project, was invited to submit further designs along with E. J. Poynter and Hugh Stannus based on a scheme by Alfred Stephens, which might have been worthy of the architecture had they be realized. Eventually, decorative mosaics by Sir William Blake Richmond were installed in the chancel. Richmond was certainly capable of monumental sacred art, but instead he produced designs in a fussy neo-Byzantine style. But neither Thorndike nor Richmond's murals can honestly be said to contribute or hold their own against Wren's architecture. This cannot be said of either Stevens' Wellington Monument or the work of Gibbons or Tijou, all of contribute to the ensemble.

The two British most profoundly absorbed with sacred art, William Blake and Stanley Spencer, were both Non-Conformists. The only Anglican artist, to seriously undertake ecclesiastical murals projects, as a sustained preoccupation, was Benjamin West, an American. Although he was a long time British resident, and the second president of the Royal Academy, he was a favorite of George III and received numerous commissions for murals for the Chapel Royal, the difficulties, and ultimately the failure he and his Hanoverian patron encounter in realizing their dream of a vast mural sequence depicting "The History of Revealed Religion" is rather telling; t was somehow "unBritish".

Victorians masters such as Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Albert Moore, and Leighton, all contributed murals to various churches and cathedrals. And Twentieth century English artists such as Duncan Grant and Venessa Bell, John Piper, Graham Sutherland, Jacob Epstein continued along the same lines. But the sacred work none of these artists, with the exception of Burne-Jones, cannot be said, in terms of either quantity or quality, to be of particular significance in the development of their careers. Perhaps the most devout Anglican of the Pre-Raphaelites, Holman Hunt, did create a significant body of religious paintings, but none of these paintings are murals or altarpieces, and although some of them are to be seen in churches or chapels, in form they are

no different than his other works. Most of the best Victorian religious art, and a great deal of very fine work was done in those years, was intended for domestic use.

Although Anglican have produced great architecture, magnificent music, profound sacred poetry, sermons that are considered among the glories of English literature, and an enormous corpus of liturgical decorative art, there can not be said to be an equivalent body of sacred art painted or sculptured for use in churches.

Via Media

Over the centuries of its development the Anglican body has given birth to distinct ecclesial entities such as the Puritans, Non-Jurors, Unitarians and Methodists whose own development meant that they could no longer survive in honest observance of their faith within Anglicanism. Yet in each of these instances identifiable traces of the belief systems of these tendencies remain and enjoy a legitimate place with the spectrum of Anglicanism. A healthy organism can heal itself, and an ability to do so is clear indication of its vitality.

Let me illustrate this. I suspect that there is not a single incumbent of any Anglican church in this county that could not be charged under the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874, passed by the British Parliament to curb what were then regarded as the outrageous excess of the Ritual Revival. Despite the fact the Anglo-Catholicism has always been a relative unpopular and isolated minority with in the Church, it is fascinating how great its influence has been. Since its beginnings in the early Victorian era it has incrementally effected Anglican worship far beyond the sphere of its partisans. According to surveys done by the English Church Union in 1882 candles were used on the altars of 581 Churches in England and Wales. By 1901 that figure had changed to 4765 churches, while use of the eastern position by the priest at the Eucharist had risen from 1662 to 7397. The use of vestments during the same period had risen from 336 to 2158 and the use of incense from 9 to 393. Here we see the *via media* at work! Anglicanism was in its inception the sum of a series of compromises that resulted from the tumultuous contraries that beset the England church during the late Tudor and Stuart eras. Anglicanism is not a confessionally constructed project, unlike the churches of Luther or Calvin. We are not Cranmerists, and to think that the process of defining Anglicanism is done, complete, is to forget, or willfully ignore, our history.

Given time, Anglicans have always managed to steer their *via media*, to learn from each other, and to worship in the beauty of holiness. Liturgical art serves the same function as any other liturgical action. It is at once a public act of faith and thanksgiving, but it is also an instrument of grace and revelation. Perhaps the thoughtful commissioning of sacred and liturgical art and architecture at this difficult time in the history of the Anglican Communion would serve, as it always has, as an offering of the best of human endeavor to God, as well as an act of faith both in ourselves and in the future.

Before concluding, we should return to the challenge of Hebert's poem with which we began. How glorious, how enviable was beloved "Mother", The Church of England? The classical Anglican dream of an entire people, a nation, united in faith, praying in common, never really caught on. And Anglicans soon realized that they lived in a pluralistic society, tolerating, living with and exchanging ideas with both differing tendencies within their own communion and with non-conformists of various stripes and with Roman Catholics. But great art, like faith, or sound theology, must be rooted in certainty, which is not to be confused with arrogance, or bad manners, or intolerance. But if one has doubts in matters of faith, they had best be resolved, and one's convictions resolutely followed. If I'm not right I have a responsibility to get it right. A society can be greatly enriched cultural diversity, and members of a pluralistic society should be open to its gifts, but individuals in that society must know what they stand for, and that is something that many North American Anglicans have either forgotten or never realized. I think we have to stand with the sentiments of Herbert's poem.

Consider the luminous and brilliant order of a building like Christopher Wren's Saint Stephen's Holbrook. What of the simple intellectual clarity of a statement of faith like Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, or the way in which faithful religious observance is embrocated in the life of a busy and fashionable courtier like John Evelyn as recorded in his Diaries? How many thousands of samplers, stump work and embroidered pictures worked by a English girls, all typical, yet each unique, carefully chosen and lovingly worked with emblems of the bounty and beauty of creation, as much to evidence their knowledge of scripture as the needle arts. In such works of prayer, all offered from the devout hands of lay people, we can mark the sum of how deep and rich was the resonance of a coherent national religious culture. By no means isolationist: Purcell, or Wren, Gibbons, or Evelyn, or Herbert, or Cousins were acutely aware of contemporary continental developments in design, music, theology, or literature, and made free use of what inspiration these offered, as would any

confident and creative mind, but within the secure confident matrix of their own identity. Such creativity can only flow from certainty.

Sadly the visual arts, in any form, have too often fallen far behind, for example the arts of music, in the contemporary Anglican patronage. What lies ahead at a time when we are more likely to close rather than build churches is hard to know. Despite the deep continuity that united Anglicans over the course of centuries, each generation contributed to the arts of worship. This might seem an almost irrelevant concern given the degree of discord within contemporary Anglicanism, and the wide spread indifference to its history and tradition, both within the Communion, and in society at large. History teaches us to expect the unlikely. Christian teaching asserts that despair, a sin against the Holy Ghost, is unforgivable. Why is it a sin of such magnitude? Because it denies the agency of the Spirit of God at work in what is too easily perceived as a hopeless muddle. The course of Anglicanism, which like a great sailing ship must tack back and forth to achieve its true trajectory, is far from finished. Let us take *lex orandi, lex credendi* seriously again and optimistically, reverently, creatively, and worthily, offer *worship complete in the beauty of holiness*.