

MUSE AND THE MASS
The Choral Repertory
and the Service of Holy Communion in the Anglican Church –
Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
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An address delivered to the Church Music Society in the Chapter House, Salisbury Cathedral, on 6th October 1990, Professor Gordon Reynolds LVO in the chair.

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow somehow conjures up recollections of the Paschal Vigil – that extraordinary liturgy where ancient mingles with modern, words with music, sound with silence, and all shot through in a very remarkable way by the primeval symbolism of light overcoming darkness and good transcending evil.

Something of such a mixture of *ambience*, a juxtaposition of opposites has a curiously familiar ring to the student of, and enthusiast for, liturgical choral music in the Anglican choral tradition. This is a tradition at once expensive and essential: the expense being calculated in terms of time and talent as well as money, and the essence being that of the expression of the spiritual and verbal in the music – arguably the most emotional and certainly the most evocative of art forms.

Liturgy, as such, is clearly a response to a human need to worship and *to some extent* the music of Anglican choral worship fulfils that need: The avoidance of terms such as English Church Music, or Anglican Choral Repertoire is especially advisable when considering that music which accompanies the sacrament of Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Mass or the Eucharist. Professor Thurston Dart's admirable metaphor designated music as the bicycle upon which the liturgy rides – in the Church of England, our Cathedrals, College Chapels and greater City Churches are still committed to a provision that is gloriously extensive and probably sustained in a manner more diverse than ever before. Certainly theirs is the perambulation of the best Raleigh Roadster model. In the parish setting, the past half century has seen a spectacular adjustment in terms of musical provision for the Communion Service (especially that form known as the Parish Communion or Family Eucharist); choral music for the Ordinary of the Mass is generally restricted

with an emphasis on increasing congregational participation, while the extensive use of hymnody – sometimes bordering on over use – ensures that scarcely a minute or two passes without musical input of some kind. The dangers of these trends are well known and scarcely need rehearsing here, but the tendency has been for choirs and the music which they sing to be consigned into a background package during the administration of the sacrament itself. Despite determined efforts to achieve music of sufficient quality – and interest – involving choir and congregation (or more correctly, choir and the remainder of the congregation – for surely every choir is merely an element in the worshipping community as a whole), there has been a general reluctance on the part of churches to adopt such music – of which there is a regrettably small tally available. Led by this Society and its commissioning of the late Professor Leighton's setting, it has been surprising how seemingly unenthusiastic churches have been to take up such a duality of performance. A strangely large number of foundations seem to have opted for a reduction in the number of choral portions allotted to them, and to sing those to the settings of previous generations.

The collegiate and cathedral choirs have, happily, not felt so constrained in terms of repertoire. Since the mid 1960s there has been an ever-increasing trend to incorporate Eucharistic music of all periods and all nationalities into a service that has, almost invariably, become the principal service of the Sunday in 'quires and places where they sing' as well as Parish Churches.

It was not ever thus, of course. The days are long gone when the provision of the Sunday morning service as Eucharist rather than Morning Prayer was a 'party' or even a social matter. The increasing demands of higher educational standards and outside employment since 1945 have seen the virtual disappearance of weekday Choral Matins, while foundations in which the morning office on Sunday does still survive have invariably allotted it a second best schedule in terms of timing, understandably preferring to afford the best possible position to the now almost universally central Eucharist.

But it is the service of Evensong – Evening Prayer with a choir present – that is now by far the most frequent liturgy in terms of the number of services per week. Evensong is, and has probably always been, the happiest union of words and music to arise from the vernacularisation of English worship at the Reformation. In England it has been the settings of Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis that have often provided the greatest artistic stimulation to

composers and performers of all periods, while the peculiarly Anglican system of psalter allocation by morning and evening does – with a very few notable exceptions – result in selections in the evening psalmody both more evocative and of greater interest and variety than those selected for the morning office. The glorious and developing tradition of English anthem composition has been a further factor in the huge appeal of Choral Evensong: an excerpt from a ‘standard’ oratorio or cantata, an elaborate polyphonic motet, or a simply harmonised Lutheran Chorale (generally none of those just mentioned from the directly ‘Anglican’ stable) seem just as happy in the context of Choral Evensong as the more strictly correct ‘Anthem’ of whatever style and period. Here again, Evensong has proved the greater stimulus: with the exception of settings of hymns such as Charles Wesley’s ‘Christ, whose glory’, how many specifically ‘morning’ anthems can one reel off at a stroke? – with the ‘evening’ repertoire the situation is very different.

Looking first at the service of Communion in terms of yesteryear, the strictly Anglican provision from 1552 onwards (repeated, with the exception of the Introit psalmody, in 1662) involved the Responses to the Commandments (these had superseded the Anglicised ninefold Kyrie provided in 1549), sometimes *Gloria tibi* before the Gospel (but not *Laus tibi* after it), *Credo*, *Sanctus* and *Gloria in excelsis*. From 1552, *Gloria* was positioned as a Post Communion paean rather than its 1549 – and historically pedigreed – place after *Kyrie eleison*. For at least a century and a half after 1662, the choral parts of the ‘Office for Holy Communion’ were frequently performed immediately following Matins. More often than not, such a service was essentially that of ‘Ante-Communion’ with the Nicene Creed as the final sung portion. So it was that between the settings of William Byrd in Latin, almost certainly designed for recusant performance in private houses, and the pioneering efforts of Basil Harwood and Charles Wood, no settings of *Benedictus qui venit* and *Agnus Dei* by English composers for English liturgy survive in current use. The reluctance of Stanford – probably the result of his Church of Ireland upbringing – to provide settings for the texts just mentioned has been well-documented; he was only persuaded to compose settings at the time of his relatively late C major Service Op 115 – these were in the usefully pivotal key of F and could thus be highly satisfactory alongside the earlier settings in A and B flat as well as the superlative and mature C major work with its Brahmsian use of thematic material. It is almost

certain that it was Harwood's involvement with the great London tractarian centre of St Barnabas's, Pimlico, which led to his comprehensive provision for Holy Communion in the A flat major service and its interesting allusions to the rubrics of the 1549 Prayer Book. The great majority of churches in the Anglo-Catholic tradition which had grown up alongside and subsequent to the Tractarian revival spear-headed by the leaders of the Oxford Movement relied on English translations of continental settings by Haydn, Hummel, Mozart, Schubert, Weber and others – translations still readily available in print well into the second half of the twentieth century. Churches for whom such music was too 'heady' in a secular sense opted for Anglicised plainchant, and often – later – for more simple polyphonic utterances, sung again to English texts. Besides the numerous settings published in Novello's extensive series of music for the Holy Communion originally under the editorship of Sir George Martin, Stainer's successor at St Paul's Cathedral, there were the important publishing enterprises for Eucharistic music undertaken by the Faith Press and – still more significant – the activities of the music department of the Oxford University Press.

Each of these three firms produced a huge corpus of musical provision, and each has one work of completely outstanding quality which still achieves almost universal performance. In the case of Novello, the standard work from their collection is John Ireland's setting in C, dedicated to his Vicar and Choir at St Luke's, Chelsea. Besides the Ireland – technically well within the competence of the good average choir and deftly-footed organist – Novello's corpus also included the remarkable setting in D by Bairstow, composed in 1913 for the Choir of Leeds Parish Church. This was, in many ways, the quintessential symphonic Anglican setting with its cyclic use of themes and extensive harmonic language; it still survives in frequent use today, but is of a much more 'festal' or 'occasional' nature in the context of contemporary worship and is one of the most difficult to incorporate by virtue of its *Gloria* being so much a summation of all that has gone before it. No such problem exists with the Ireland, which has for many years also been published to include a nine-fold *Kyrie* written later; interestingly, Ireland also sets a harmonised *Pater Noster*.

As far as the Faith Press publications go, the crown of that output was undoubtedly the setting for unaccompanied singing 'mainly in the Phrygian Mode' by Charles Wood, whose Irish upbringing does

not seem to have inhibited his provision of 1549 texts in the same way as Stanford's. Wood's extensively strophic treatment of phrases also rendered his setting peculiarly useful during times of liturgical revision in the 1960s with the omission of a *Qui tollis* stanza from the Gloria, and the ending to his *Sanctus* needing no adjustment to omit the Amen of 1662. Of especial interest in the case of what is known and loved universally as 'Wood in the Fridge' is an almost complete absence of the music to 'date' or, in other terms, to be possessed of a harmonic and melodic language especially associated with the liturgical practices or *ethos* of its period. As with Novello, so with Faith Press – and neglected, but similarly highly effective settings from their output include Henry Ley's in E minor, and several by Healey Willan of which the most stimulating is the 'Missa Sancti Phillipi et Jacobi'. All these are for a *cappella* singing and specifically designed for worship in the Anglo-Catholic tradition.

When coming to the Oxford University Press, pride of place must go to Harold Darke's setting in F – like John Ireland's, written for its composer's own London parish, and like Ireland's provided later with a nine-fold *Kyrie eleison* in Greek as an alternative to either the choral responses to the Decalogue or an Anglicised *Kyrie* (either three or nine-fold). Though described as being in F major, Darke's harmonic language makes extensive use of modal excursions and frequent use of the flattened seventh. Less expansive in utterance than the eloquent Bairstow, Darke nonetheless incorporates quotations from music already heard in his *Gloria*; but, unlike Bairstow, they are less of a disadvantage when the component movements are presented in an order different from that originally intended. Still easily obtainable, and much more overtly romantic than Darke's somewhat restrained Edwardian expression, is George Oldroyd's 'Mass of the Quiet Hour' from the same publisher. Dedicated to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1928, it would be hard to find a greater contrast with the Darke of Darke in F – or the Vaughan Williams of the *Te Deum* in G (first sung at the 1928 Enthronement at Canterbury) – than with Oldroyd in D. This is emotional music – straightforward in appeal to singer and listener. The gentle lilt of the *Sanctus* somehow conjures the swinging of the censer more readily than Darke's, whereas there are solo portions in the *Agnus* which are frankly ecstatic rather than restrained. Combined with effortless harmonic shifts in *Gloria*, the overall effect is very much akin to the atmosphere of a non-communicating Mass celebrated in the 1920s and 1930s according to the 'interim'

rite: essentially Anglican, but with heavy overtones of pre-Reformation catholicism.

Examples such as those just quoted are, in the nature of things, only representative of a particular period in Anglican development – and, even then, of the commentator's personal experience and upbringing. Their importance may be seen principally in terms of their retention of a place in the cathedral and collegiate repertory, and in the part they played – albeit somewhat indirectly – in the general movement for liturgical reform between 1871 and 1928 (both landmark years in the history of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer). The Irelands, Bairstows, Woods, Willans, Darkes and Oldroyds all had their disciples and imitators – but few reached their eloquence, their sure sense of vocal sonority in the years between 1900 and 1945. Alec Rowley and Walter Vale spring at once to mind as deserving of more than passing mention, and both prompt the suggestion that much of this fine and expressive music for the Eucharist came from the pens of London parish, rather than provincial cathedral organists (whose output of canticle settings has never been equalled by their London colleagues). All of the music accompanied a service at which kneeling was the normal posture for much of its duration; to some extent, their artistic utterance reflected this sense of awe and wonder, rather than active involvement and declamatory or antiphonal participation. An additional importance of such repertoire was the wide range of choral abilities which tackled it. With the possible exception of Bairstow (and of Howells later, of whom more anon) the upper voice part loses nothing from being allocated to girl trebles, or lady sopranos rather than the head-voice resonance of the boys for which it was all conceived.

The tradition developed extensively in the post-War years. Many foundations experienced pressure from chapters, church councils and governing bodies to release to the people parts of the service previously regarded as the unassailable preserve of the choir. Most notable of these was the Nicene Creed. Even as early as Wood's Phrygian service, composers were printing a plainchant unison *Credo* for use (either choral or congregational) with their harmonised settings. Later composers, most notably Francis Jackson, had their Creed settings published separately, while many did not provide any music for that part of the service at all – the text being sung to a simple congregational setting such as *Missa de Angelis* or the music of John Marbeck or Martin Shaw. More

recently, it has become far more common still to involve *everyone* by having both *Credo* and *Pater Noster* said by all present. The term 'Sung' is thus rather more accurate than 'Choral' Eucharist, though the latter does convey the message of the presence of the Choir! Some establishments, most notably Southwark Cathedral, also involved congregational participation in *Gloria in excelsis* – though in 'quires and places where they sing' this was never as general as the treatment of the Creed just described. Parishes however, have generally effected a compromise between the portions allotted to choir and congregation which reflects local custom and practice as much as liturgical tradition and practical preference. It seems strange that so little use has been made of the centuries' old *alternatim* practice – line by line or stanza by stanza – which is so easily achievable in settings combining plainchant with polyphony and seen at its most effective in the many *fauxbourdon* settings of the Evening Canticles in current use. Some composers have essayed this antiphonal treatment in music for the Alternative Service Book: Martin How for example has been particularly successful in a setting of the Rite A Eucharist for Choir and Congregation which takes Gerald Knight's hymn tune 'Valley' as a motto theme; in that setting, he also devises a splendid *Gloria* – a true *perpetuum mobile* – which utilises a refrain incorporating the first stanza ('Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth') which is used in a through-composed manner very much in the same style as that sustained by Colin Mawby in his psalm settings of the *Grail* translation used earlier (but to recitation rather than metric rhythm) by Father Joseph Gelineau. How's gift for easily memorable melody has been important to his success with choirs in parishes and schools. At this juncture it is necessary to avoid becoming concerned in too great detail with what might be termed the 'who sings what' debate – as between choir and congregation – but to return to the liturgical developments of the immediate post-War period and the latter half of our fast vanishing century.

If Stanford's was the greatest contribution to the cathedral repertory of service settings in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, then that distinction for the reigns of George VI and Elizabeth II must be afforded to Herbert Howells. From 1945 he produced a stream of Canticle Settings – most notably of Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis – for specific buildings, choirs, and organists. His eucharistic contributions were fewer in number but no less significant; of them, the Communion Service *Collegium Regale* and

the Coventry Mass deserve special attention. The former is a glorious summation of the best techniques of the Edwardians combined with ecstatic use of *melisma* and upper vocal register resonance (often at subdued dynamic levels). If Oldroyd evokes the swinging censers at High Mass, Howells' output is kaleidoscopic with the colour of light shining through stained glass – his is a musical version of Ninian Comper's great philosophy of 'unity by inclusion'. Energy and repose follow effortlessly, each as important to the other in the cumulative effect. Influenced early by the work of Herbert Brewer at Gloucester to whom he was articulated, Howells developed a highly personal and individual style. For him the contemplative was as important as the dramatic gesture – arguably rather more so in many instances. Another composer who has ploughed a highly successful, yet individual, furrow is York's Francis Jackson. As might be expected from a protégé of Bairstow, his music is confidently crafted and immensely idiomatic for both voices and organist. Although his most significant contributions to the Anglican repertory have been anthems and motets, his service settings sustain an enviable position in the choir lists of cathedrals and greater churches. His Communion Service in G (including a choral Creed) was composed for the Minster Choir at York in 1949. There are important differences in atmosphere in the central movements – *Sanctus* is heralded by a fanfare on the tuba stop which becomes ever more urgent by dint of a diminishing number of pulse beats in the musical sequence, while *Benedictus* is hushed and reverent. A rare sense of urgency pervades the central part of *Agnus Dei*, and genuine contrition is expressed in the nine-fold *Kyrie*. *Gloria* is less marked by distinctive features, though there are few settings in which the interplay between choir and organ and the use of unison and single vocal strands is handled with such imagination. A similar security of utterance is found in the music of Arthur Wills of Ely, whose Communion setting in D (the 'Missa Eliensis') follows the more recent precedent of omitting the Creed altogether on the assumption that it will either be said or sung to a traditional or straightforward melody of the type to which reference has already been made. Wills achieves an impressive, and somewhat daring, momentum in his *Gloria* – similar to that essayed by Jackson, but rather more extrovert in expression in the outer sections. Again, as with so much music devised for a rite based on that of 1662 but drawing heavily on 1928 and the Alternative Services, First Series, of the mid and later 1960s, it has to be regretted that the placement

of *Gloria* at the very beginning of subsequent Rites to some extent involves the shooting of the compositional bolt; much of the carefully judged effect of the setting as a whole was to be found in the cumulative effect of the movements one following upon the other. This is an important matter, yet one which receives scant attention from those who schedule the liturgical placement of such music.

The developments in general liturgical practice in terms of the Eucharist have, of course, involved far more than merely an order of placement of portions of the Ordinary which may be said to work against repertoire of a finite period in the long history of Anglican Church Music. There have been hugely important changes in the conduct and atmosphere of such services and many have been made for sound theological and pastoral reasons. The desire to involve the whole of the worshipping congregation, rather than merely a portion of it (a trained professional choir) had already led to a great reduction in the once more widespread practice of having the Creed chorally sung, and a further development has been the adoption of responses at the Preface or Thanksgiving which are sung (or, indeed, said) by all. The posture of worshippers has often changed during the period of the most important part of the service – the Canon of the Mass, or the Thanksgiving/Prayer of Consecration. In periods of earlier liturgical change, it was often common to find longer settings of *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* placed no longer concurrently but at either side of the Prayer of Consecration. Exigencies of time and singing-length frequently involve the omission of *Benedictus* altogether, and *Agnus Dei* is consigned to a place during the communion of the people – often alongside motets, anthems and hymns. The success of such adjustments is directly related to the attention that has been afforded them before they were made; logistical and architectural considerations are also involved and many choral foundations have evolved a highly successful *modus vivendi* which effectively incorporates music not designed for the newer liturgies within such worship in a manner which has fast become one of the most satisfying musical developments in Anglican worship since the War. And yet the almost universal retention of earlier music alongside more contemporary expression, utterance and atmosphere is a matter of real regret. The small number of composers who have been drawn to the newer Rite A texts by whatever means (normally commissioning by enterprising choirs and organists than by inner personal compulsion it has to be

said) have produced work of real quality and imagination – though it is work that can scarcely be said to have enjoyed widespread support.

The incorporation of sung music with Latin texts (rather than the adaptation to English words of polyphonic or classical settings originally set in Latin) has been a most encouraging trend. No longer a ‘party’ issue (it being thought by some dangerously ‘High Church’ to have a Sung Communion in Latin!), such an entry into current liturgical practice has been gained alongside the hugely successful revival in so-called ‘Early Music’. This is not to say that many choirs were not immensely persuasive in their singing of vernacularised polyphony – one has only to listen to Sir David Willcocks’s evergreen recording (taken from a live Choral Evensong at King’s college chapel) of the Alleghi Miserere to realise that – but rather that there grew up a consensus demand, led by organists of collegiate chapels in the first instance, to be able to incorporate the very best of all schools of music in whatever language such music was originally composed. Thus do many choirs have in their repertory today some half dozen or more settings apiece of unaccompanied masses not merely by Byrd, but including music from the pens of Palestrina, Lassus, Victoria and others – to say nothing of the melodic delights of the shorter masses of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert. Liturgical performance of Requiem settings by Fauré and Duruflé – once the almost exclusive preserve of ultra-montane London parishes with substantial music budgets – are now a commonplace in November, that great month of Remembrance. The public perception of Requiem settings is unparalleled, and the whole degree of interest in church music has been immensely encouraging. Church authorities, chapters, organists and choirs are more than ever conscious of the importance of the message of music through the media of broadcasting and recording. Choir schools now have an association with teeth collaborating with marketing and promotional *experts* as well as enthusiastic volunteers who have always done so much to sustain interest in the English choral tradition. And yet that tradition has to develop still further with regard to the conduct of eucharistic worship. It is too easy an answer to assert that the shorter polyphonic settings of the Mass encompass a directness of musical expression that is more at one with the *ambience* of contemporary liturgical celebration with its emphasis on dialogue between celebrant and faithful rather than the one acting on behalf of the other. It is, however, highly significant to

significant to examine the developments in the selection of music in the choral foundations of today and tomorrow. There is a possible extra-mural appeal of 'exotic' music – masses by Schubert, Haydn and Mozart spring to mind – but is it, week in week out, 'staple' fare? Of course not. The real challenge for the decades ahead is to achieve the universality of performance of the settings of Darke, Ireland, Jackson and Wills – settings not merely for the highest trained and most prestigious choirs in the land, but repertoire which transcended all 'divisions' of performance and vocal dispositions of male and female. It may possibly be that such 'new' music as will be forthcoming might be set to the 'old' texts but with proper and due consideration for their revised order; there has certainly been some hint of this in the published choral settings of Rite B for the Alternative Service Book.

Perhaps the lovers of the choral tradition protest too much! Maybe we have, in reality, reached that crucially Anglican position of compromise; the language, directness and the number (oh! the number) of hymns at choral celebrations combine with the increasing variety in and use of psalmody to satisfy the spiritual and participatory requirements of many congregations, who are consequently stimulated by a Stephen Oliver at Norwich or a Howard Blake at Worcester.

Who knows? But that, and the provision of music of many other and diverse kinds *within* the context of, but not specifically *for* the Mass is entirely another story. We would, however, do well to take on board the increasing universality of the Anglican Communion (the geographical one that is). Despite its divisions and difficulties, there is much to encourage – both on a day-by-day basis and for an increasing number of 'special' services (since when has *every* service not been special?).

Besides Ninian Comper's great philosophy of architectural and artistic 'unity by inclusion' maybe we should all keep in mind that in our liturgy God does not demand the extraordinary – merely the ordinary done extraordinarily well.