

‘Old Wine in New Skins’: The Place of Tradition in the Mission of the Church – a Case Study of the Anglican Choral Tradition.

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Abstract

This essay examines how the Church can use its inherited traditions as a resource for mission. Using the example of the Anglican choral tradition, particularly in cathedrals, I argue that tradition can play a central role in the Church’s mission. The ‘far-horizon’ of this tradition is examined in critical relation to the ‘near-horizon’ of current Church of England thinking on mission, particularly that developed in the *Mission-Shaped Church* report. By the critical interplay of these two ‘horizons’ in the life of the contemporary Church, I argue that tradition, and specifically the Anglican choral tradition, can still play a vital role in the life and mission of the Church. I also argue, however, that guardians of these traditions need to work more assiduously to interpret traditions to a pluralist world which is increasingly removed from the shared inheritance that has informed and maintained traditions, such as the choral tradition, in the life of the Church.

Key Words: Tradition; Mission; Church; Cathedrals; Music.

Introduction

How does the Church make sense of its traditions in a changing world? In his book, *Memory and Salvation*, Charles Elliott argues that tradition plays a vital role in the life of the Church because the Church provides a collection of shared and individual memories through which the individual and the community can come to know themselves individually and collectively in relation to God.¹ The danger of dealing with tradition is that we can fall into the trap of believing that tradition is a fixed entity that cannot be changed or modified for fear of unmaking the virtues of that tradition. Elliott’s argument is helpful because he does not argue that the traditions of the Church make it a complete entity which cannot be changed. Rather he argues that the traditions of the Church mark it as a provisional institution; one that does

¹ Charles Elliott, *Memory and Salvation* (London: DLT, 1995), 1, 29.

not exist for its own benefit, but for the worship and glory of God, and the ushering in of his kingdom.² This dilemma is brought into even sharper focus by the collective recognition by the Church that many of its traditional models of worship are increasingly perceived to be out of step with contemporary society. The fear is that the Church, as an institution, is not engaged with, or offering, a viable alternative to the experiences of many in contemporary society.

As a test case for this dilemma, this paper will examine what role the Anglican choral tradition can play in the work of the mission of the Church, and the particular form that that mission takes in the Church of England since the publication of the *Mission-Shaped Church* report.³ A study of music is fitting for this essay because music has always been central to the worshipping life of the Church. Michael Sadgrove, in his recent book, *I Will Trust in You*, has argued that the use of psalms by a worshipping community places them in a direct lineage moving backwards through the discipline of medieval monasticism, the desert fathers, and eventually to the practices of the pre-Christian synagogue which had a profound influence on the worship of the early Church.⁴ This small example allows us to draw on two important themes for the subject of this essay. First, that the worshipful action of the Church is always built on, and defined by, the practice of previous generations; even if this action is a reaction to the past, worship by definition exists in a dynamic relationship with the traditions of the Church. Secondly, that music, and sung music at that, has always held a central role in the worshipping practice of the Church. The use of music is not simply an aesthetic choice made by the worshipping community, but also a means by which the worshipping community communes with the creative love of God. Timothy Hone has argued that ‘the use of music in Christian worship is an affirmation of human creativity as a gift of God’.⁵ It is no surprise therefore to find a worshipping community, such as a cathedral, describe its choir as its ‘life blood’.⁶

To understand the role that tradition can play in the theological reflection of a practical issue, this essay will draw on Andrew Todd’s development of a dialectical model for theological reflection.⁷ In this model, Todd argues that tradition should never be understood as a fixed entity, but as a position, or ‘far-horizon’, which is in constant dialogue with the ‘near-horizon’ of contemporary experience. To make sense of this far-horizon I will first present an outline of the choral tradition through the four marks of traditional church developed by Elliott – Ark, Symbol,

² Elliott, *Memory*, 237.

³ Church of England, Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

⁴ Michael Sadgrove, *I Will Trust in You: A Companion to the Evening Psalms* (London: SPCK, 2009), 2.

⁵ Timothy Hone, ‘When in Our Music God is Glorified’, in Jeff Astley, Timothy Hone and Mark Savage (eds.), *Creative Chords: Studies in Music, Theology and Christian Formation* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), 147.

⁶ Wendy Wilby, ‘Safeguarding this Priceless Heritage: Bristol Cathedral Choir School – a Faith Academy’, *Cathedral Music*, January 2009, 18.

⁷ Andrew Todd, ‘What is Theological about Theological Reflection?’, *British Journal of Theological Reflection* 11, no. 1 (2000), 35–45.

Community, and Interpretation.⁸ This will then be contrasted with the ‘near-horizon’ of contemporary missiology in the Church of England as presented in the *Mission-Shaped Church* report. Following Todd’s method, I will show how this dialogue affects and defines the perception of the tradition within contemporary society. Finally, I will show how reflective action on this tradition, again following Elliott’s four-fold typography, can help develop and redefine that tradition in the contemporary context in which it finds itself. By way of conclusion this essay will not argue that the choral tradition deserves to remain unchanged simply by virtue of being a tradition. Rather I will present a series of practical recommendations which, although not exhaustive, show something of the changes that can be made when the far-horizon of tradition is drawn through and remade in a constructive encounter with the near-horizon of contemporary understanding. These practical recommendations can be distilled into two main conclusions. First, I will argue that there is great depth, wealth, and experience in the choral tradition which can, and in some cases is, being used as a great resource in the mission of the Church. Secondly, I will conclude that, great though these gifts are, they are in grave danger of being wasted if this tradition is not, in Elliott’s terms, interpreted in a more creative, imaginative, coherent, and inclusive manner to the wider world that the Church is called to serve.

The Far-Horizon – the Anglican Choral Tradition

Charles Elliott argues that the main strength of the Church is its ability to act as an Ark holding the memories of God’s dealings with, and relationship to, his people. The worship of the Church should always speak to this story of God’s faithfulness to his creation. As Elliott argues, in worship the members of the Church ‘hear the story told ... [as] an interchange between those who know the memory and those who value it but know it imperfectly’.⁹ One could argue that the Anglican tradition, and the Anglican choral tradition as an expression of this, is hard-wired to tell this story constantly each day. The main role of a cathedral choir is, after all, to sing the daily office. This is normally between four to eight times a week depending on the resources of the particular cathedral. Certain elements always remain the same: psalms, canticles, anthems and hymns are sung and Scripture is read following the cycle of the lectionary. Cathedral choirs take great pride in the fact that there is an order and constancy to the worship they offer. The numbers in attendance may, and often do, fluctuate markedly, but the worship remains constant. The tradition of worship, as Michael Sadgrove has pointed out, places cathedral choirs ‘into the distinguished company of men and women’ who have worshipped God ‘in this very English way month by month for more than four centuries’.¹⁰

The power of this tradition comes as much in the physical setting in a cathedral, as it does in the liturgical context of what is being sung. Elliott rightly points out that a central part of understanding the traditions of the Church is understanding the

⁸ Elliott, *Memory*, 221–225.

⁹ Elliott, *Memory*, 221.

¹⁰ Sadgrove, *I Will Trust in You*, 16.

symbols that the Church uses to mark and define itself as a worshipping community.¹¹ Although only an anecdotal example, it is interesting to note how many cathedrals use images of the choir, and particularly choristers, as the defining image of the cathedral on Christmas cards. The symbolic image of the choir exists as one of the characteristic tropes of Christmas, with the cathedral as the authentic location where these can be experienced. Churches, and cathedrals in particular, are what Elliott describes as ‘theatres of memory, with its scripts, its scenery, its proscenium and its music’.¹² If we accept the symbolic nature of worship then with regards to cathedrals, we need to accept the defining role that choirs play in the theatre of cathedral worship. To liken worship to theatre is not to cheapen or discount the validity of it, but to recognise the important role that the setting plays in bringing the gathered community into a worshipful relationship with God. The key question is, therefore, how effective are the symbols of cathedral worship in achieving this task? This is particularly the case since, as Elliott rightly points out, one of the challenges for the modern Church is that many of its traditional symbols are becoming increasingly detached from the experience and understanding of wider society.¹³

At the heart of the Church is a community of worshipful believers. Elliott argues that the tradition of the Church does not exist as a cognitive process or as a set of fixed rules and regulations. Rather the tradition of the Church exists in the acted memory of the community.¹⁴ The Church cannot exist unless the members of that community engage with the given traditions and forms of that community. The choral tradition often acts as one of the central terms that draws members into that community and holds them. *Heritage and Renewal*, the Archbishops’ commission report on cathedrals from 1994, comments: ‘When we asked individuals what was especially good about their cathedral, the first answer was invariably music.’¹⁵ Music provides one of the central terms of a cathedral community as it understands itself. However, it is also important to note that cathedral communities are a great deal more than the body of regular worshippers. Jeremy Fletcher notes that ‘most churches discover visitors at their services, but cathedrals know that on occasions the majority of worshippers will be “outsiders”’.¹⁶ Music plays a central role in defining and creating the ‘fixed’ community of believers in a cathedral, but how effective is it at speaking to the huge number of enquiring souls who find themselves, for whatever reason, in a cathedral?

If we accept that cathedral music is one of the defining principles of the tradition of worship that we encounter in our cathedrals, then it follows that cathedral worship needs to define itself, in part, through an engagement with the tradition and understanding passed down to us in and through its musical heritage. Elliott argues that at the heart of this understanding of tradition is a necessary hermeneutical

¹¹ Elliott, *Memory*, 223.

¹² Elliott, *Memory*, 221.

¹³ Elliott, *Memory*, 223.

¹⁴ Elliott, *Memory*, 221.

¹⁵ Church of England, Doctrine Commission, *Heritage and Renewal: The Report of the Archbishops’ Commission on Cathedrals* (London: Church House Publishing, 1994), 21.

¹⁶ Jeremy Fletcher, ‘Liturgy on the Frontiers: Laboratories for the Soul’, in Stephen Platten (ed.), *Dreaming Spires? Cathedrals in a New Age* (London: SPCK, 2006), 41.

relationship between the ‘professional’ members of the Church (the clergy, musicians, etc.) and the ‘people’, with the ‘professionals’ interpreting for the ‘people’ the ongoing form and meaning of that tradition.¹⁷ However, at the moment we are reaching something of a paradox in this relationship. At a time when contemplative music, very often drawn from the repertoire of Anglican choral music, is becoming increasingly popular, the daily experience and understanding of that music in its traditional setting is becoming lost.¹⁸ The power and popularity of contemplative music seems to suggest that there is still a great appetite for such music in the contemplative lives of many. It would appear, therefore, that it is not the repertoire of the Cathedral tradition that is at fault, rather it is the transmission of the repertoire through its traditional form that is failing. For this reason it would seem that it is, above all things, the delivery of the traditions of cathedral music that need to be examined if cathedral music is to be used as an agent of the kingdom of God in the twenty-first century.

The Near-Horizon – the *Mission-Shaped Church*

The standard against which traditional models of church are now required to define themselves is the ‘near-horizon’ created by the new impetus within the Church for mission and evangelism.¹⁹ This vision for a new process of mission has been driven by a recognition that the models and tropes of traditional church are failing to meet and understand the needs of modern society. As a result the Church is perceived to be out of step with, and potentially an irrelevance to, modern society. Cathedrals are not immune to this criticism. The Archbishops’ Council report *In Tune with Heaven* argues that ‘cathedrals cannot rest comfortable and content any more than the rest of us in times of change and challenge for the Church’.²⁰

Perhaps the most striking and controversial aspect of *Mission-Shaped Church* is its focus on and acceptance of the ‘consumer ethos’ of modern society. The report argues that where previously society understood itself through what it made, now society understands itself through what it consumes.²¹ The key value of consumer society is choice and so the Church needs to understand itself as an actor in this market place of choice. How the Church presents itself to wider society has a profound and defining effect on its ability to engage with contemporary culture. The challenge set by *Mission-Shaped Church* is for the Church to be ‘in’ consumer society, but not ‘of’ consumer society: to make its core values available in an open and

¹⁷ Elliott, *Memory*, 223.

¹⁸ Sadgrove, *I Will Trust in You*, 7. A good snap-shot of this is the Classic FM ‘Hall of Fame’ which, in 2008, had 34 out of 300 works which one could loosely term as ‘contemplative music’ with a Christian basis, of which 28 are regularly sung by cathedral choirs: ‘Website of Classic FM’, <http://www.classicfm.com> (29 March 2009).

¹⁹ Quoted in Steven Croft, ‘What Counts as a Fresh Expression of Church and Who Decides?’, in Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 7.

²⁰ Church of England, Archbishops’ Commission on Church Music, *In Tune with Heaven: Report of the Archbishops’ Commission on Church Music* (London: Church House Publishing, 1992), 216.

²¹ Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture* (London: SPCK, 1996), 174.

attractive way to an enquiring society, but not to compromise those values and beliefs in the vain attempt of attracting more consumers to this product.²²

The response of *Mission-Shaped Church* to the challenge of consumer culture is, in itself, a working out of the missiological theory of ‘inculturation’. This theory, which is sometimes termed ‘contextualisation’, argues that there is no single form through which the Gospel has been transmitted and revealed to the world, rather the Gospel is retold and remade in each of the contexts in which it is proclaimed.²³ Missiologists like Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch argue that the role of the Church is to recognise the appropriate form for the Gospel to be proclaimed in, and help create the seed-bed from which the fruits of the Spirit can be revealed in that given culture.²⁴ *Mission-Shaped Church* follows this theology when it argues that ‘the Spirit ... inspires and directs the particular form the gospel community takes within each culture’.²⁵

This understanding of the importance of contemporary culture provides a useful lens through which to view the place and relevance of traditional forms of worship, such as the choral tradition, in contemporary culture. It would be incorrect to view the conclusions of *Mission-Shaped Church* as suggesting that traditional church was anathema to the mission of the Church as now understood. Indeed in *Mission-Shaped Church* it is noted that not only is there a place for traditional church, but that certain models of traditional church, particularly cathedral worship, have shown a growth in recent years.²⁶ In the terminology growing out of the *Mission-Shaped Church* report, there is a need for a ‘mixed-economy’ of worship in the Church which both respects the traditions of the Church, and also pushes the boundaries of worship into contemporary ‘Fresh-Expressions of church’. Two interesting conclusions can be drawn from this ‘near-horizon’ when we reflect back on the ‘far-horizon’ of tradition. The first is the important recognition that no one form of church is adequate in itself to bring the Gospel to the wider world. The logic of the mixed-economy thinking is that there must be a mix of expressions of church which respond to the different needs and experiences of those called by the Spirit to explore their faith and commitment to God. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, *Mission-Shaped Church* has provided a litmus test by which the Church can come to judge its practice and worship.

Tradition in Mission

Whether it is a good thing that this litmus test is based on the ethos of consumer choice has become the source of much recent debate. Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, in their recent book, *For the Parish*, have argued passionately for a rejection

²² CofE, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 9–11.

²³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 142.

²⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 447–457.

²⁵ CofE, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 86.

²⁶ CofE, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 74.

of the analysis of consumer society which lies at heart of *Mission-Shaped Church*.²⁷ There is not space in this essay to engage at length with this argument. However, the existence of this argument in current Church of England debates shows the insights of *Mission-Shaped Church* to be an accepted, if not universally welcomed, way of understanding the near-horizon of contemporary church experience within the Church of England.

The central role of *Mission-Shaped Church* has been to provide a wake-up call to the professionals of the Church: to make them realise that it is not simply the content of worship that is important, but the perception of that worship by those who encounter it from the outside which has to be taken into account. A focus on perception may seem frustrating, even unfair, when considering the huge amount of work which goes on simply to maintain the *status quo* in the choral tradition. With a few notable exceptions, the maintenance of an acceptable standard of choral music in cathedrals is a huge and often daunting task for the clergy and musicians who work to maintain it. Constant pressures presented by not only the recruitment of children of a suitable standard, but also with parents willing to support them (both in time and financially), presents a recurring problem. In addition to this, it is proving increasingly difficult to recruit and retain adults (almost exclusively men) to sing in choirs. Wages are often very low, and the role of Lay Clerk (the generic term for an adult male singer in a cathedral choir) demands a time commitment which puts a strain on maintaining certain secular career paths and the maintenance of a reasonable personal or family life. Certainly these pressures have warranted a great change in the traditional form of cathedral choirs in the last fifty years. For instance, during the week choirs now only sing evening services where it was common until about thirty years ago for sung matins to be part of the weekday discipline of a cathedral choir. The educational requirements of schools, and the working pressures for the adults, have meant that this part of the tradition has now completely disappeared. In addition the problems of chorister recruitment, as well as the completely fair accusation that cathedral choirs were institutionally sexist, have been somewhat eased by the addition of girls’ choirs to the musical staff of most cathedrals. Despite the growing pressures on the choral tradition it is important to note that, arguably, the standard of cathedral music has never been higher than it has been over the last thirty years.²⁸

The choral tradition, however, is in danger of falling into the trap Elliott argues the Church falls into when it disconnects from its cultural context, by setting itself up as a ‘self-sufficient art form’.²⁹ By doing so, the musical offerings of cathedrals, although of an extremely high standard, become what Timothy Hone has called, ‘*music as object*’ rather than ‘*music as process*’.³⁰ From my own experience working in

²⁷ Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish – A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

²⁸ Richard Shepherd, ‘Music in These Stones’, in Stephen Platten and Christopher Lewis (eds.), *Flagships of the Spirit: Cathedrals in Society* (London: DLT, 1998), 75–81. CofE, *Heritage and Renewal*, 21.

²⁹ Shepherd, ‘Music in These Stones’, 74.

³⁰ Hone, ‘When in Our Music’, 146.

cathedral music, I remember the very high value that some in the choir placed on the object of getting the music right, rather than the process of bringing the gathered community prayerfully to God. A successful service was not one where the Spirit was perceived to be alive in the prayerfulness of the singing, but one where no wrong notes were sung! When this occurs, music does not become a means to bring the prayerful into God’s presence, but an end in itself which readily and rightfully ‘leads to the charge of idolatry’.³¹ This might be overstating the problem a little, but the fact remains that if the choral tradition is something that is worth saving, then the tradition cannot exist as an object in and for itself. Rather it must, like all expressions of church, act as an agent and messenger of God’s mission in the world.³²

The Choral Tradition in a Missional Church – Some Suggestions

The great irony of this debate is that in a changing church culture, which increasingly respects and responds to the consumer ethos of society, the choral tradition presents an extremely popular church ‘product’ to the wider world. The potential tragedy is that the Church, in seeking to be relevant, fails to recognise the great gifts it already possesses.³³ If we accept Elliott’s first mark of tradition – the Church as an Ark – then more needs to be done to meet the obvious desire for the musical expression of that tradition that exists in wider society. Tim Sledge, writing about the place of liturgy in the context of *Mission-Shaped Church*, uses the metaphor of ‘cross-over music’ to explain how traditional models of liturgy could be translated into more comprehensible contemporary forms.³⁴ It would be very easy for cathedrals to take this metaphor and make it a reality. Taking the popularity of music often sold as ‘spiritual’ or ‘relaxing’, cathedral choirs could easily perform the most popular pieces from their repertoire, either in the context of a traditional liturgy, or in a more informal manner, as a vehicle through which to speak of the true meaning that lies behind the music. This would obviously have to be done in a sensitive and intelligent manner. Given the popularity of cathedrals during large festivals such as Easter, and particularly Christmas, it seems obvious that there is a public interest in out-reach events such as this, whether they be held in cathedral buildings, or in alternative venues.

This first recommendation leads us to the second area in which Elliott argues tradition should express itself in contemporary culture: that of the symbols of the Church. As already stated, one dilemma for the Church is that many of its traditional models and symbols are becoming foreign in an increasingly pluralistic and secular world. That being said, certain symbols of Christian worship are often most recognisable when a choir is involved. It is clear though that cathedrals are not always as effective as they should be in playing to this strength. In particular I

³¹ Hone, ‘When in Our Music’, 148.

³² CofE, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 74.

³³ Hone, ‘When in Our Music’, 143.

³⁴ Tim Sledge, ‘Mission-Shaped Worship’, in Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge (eds.), *Mission-Shaped Parish: Traditional Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 44.

would argue that there needs to be more effort made to use the choir as a mobile body within the large ‘theatrical space’ of a cathedral building. This could be in the simple act of placing the choir around the building to describe and define the liturgy: for instance using distant and moving voices to mark the ‘coming of the light’ in an Advent service. Alternatively the choir could be used in various spaces, splitting the choir, placing voices out of sight, to respond to the spoken word of Scripture or preaching: for instance taking the role of the ‘crowd’ in a semi-dramatised reading of the Passion narrative. In short anything to move away from the static, east facing, distant structure of much traditional cathedral worship.

Music can also play a vital role in reaching out into the wider community. In recent years music has played an increasingly important role in the educational outreach of cathedrals. In both *In Tune with Heaven* and *Heritage and Renewal*, educational outreach was recognised as one of the key roles and developing strengths of cathedrals and the missionary role that this outreach speaks of.³⁵ The main area of growth for cathedrals in this area has been educational outreach with children. It is an often overlooked fact that one of the defining characteristics of cathedral music is that, in the main, children are always involved. Although the recruitment of children to sing in cathedral choirs is, as has already been mentioned, a continued problem, cathedral choirs present a test case of the excellence in standards that can be achieved by children in our churches.³⁶ In a world where children are increasingly distrusted and sometimes feared in wider society, the extremely high value that is placed on the ministry of children in cathedrals is something that the wider Church, and world, could learn from.³⁷ There are inherent problems with the ability of all children to gain access to the immediate benefits of cathedral music at the moment. For instance, many cathedral schools are fee-paying and often boarding establishments. Although scholarships are available to choristers, choir schools are perceived to be, and in reality usually are, beyond the means of the vast majority of families. Some cathedrals have already sought to rectify this problem through the use and development of cathedral schools within the Government’s Academy system. A good example of this is Bristol Cathedral Choir School, which is, in many ways, a test case for this new initiative. If it does work then it could provide the model of how the music education of cathedrals could become free at the point of access.³⁸

Beyond the narrow focus of the experience of the cathedral choristers, more work is being done to use cathedrals as centres of excellence to encourage singing in schools. Developed from the Government’s *Sing Up* campaign a ‘Chorister Outreach Programme’, run in conjunction with the ‘Choir Schools Association’, has now developed forty-three outreach schemes around the country.³⁹ One such scheme run

³⁵ CofE, *In Tune with Heaven*, 215. CofE, *Heritage and Renewal*, 26.

³⁶ CofE, *Heritage and Renewal*, 51.

³⁷ Fletcher, ‘Liturgy on the Frontiers’, 48.

³⁸ Wendy Wilby, ‘Safeguarding this Priceless Heritage’, 19–20.

³⁹ Sing Up, ‘Chorister Outreach Programme 2009-2010 begins’, <http://www.singup.org/news-local-events/news-article/view/17-chorister-outreach-programme-20092010-begins/> (20 June, 2012)

through Durham Cathedral led to a headline in the diocesan *Newslink* which stated proudly: ‘Cathedral reaches out through music.’⁴⁰ There is certainly no denying the popularity and initial success of these schemes. There is, however, a need to maintain and encourage this work, particularly when the political will or financial backing of the Government disappears. The work done in chorister outreach programmes would seem to be a classic example of how cathedrals can use their inherent strengths in the work of mission. Even if it did take a Government and not a Church of England initiative to begin this work, it should not require Government will alone to ensure that schemes such as this continue.

There is no doubt that music can play a huge role in developing the popular appeal of cathedrals, their worship, and the development of a broader community touched by the work of the Church. However the question still remains as to whether or not music can in any way foster and encourage new believers: in short, can music be missional and evangelical? There is certainly plenty of evidence to suggest that many people, of many different experiences and backgrounds, find great spiritual and emotional solace in music of all kinds. Timothy Hone has argued that ‘music serves to fill time with meaning, and in doing so offers a structured alternative to the ultimate loneliness of silence on the one hand, and the chaos of noise on the other’.⁴¹ There is a fundamentally incarnational aspect to the making of all music, and particularly music in a liturgical setting. In making music, musicians are taking something which lies dormant on the page, and recreating it in a new time and a new space. Each musical utterance is a powerful expression of the human potential to remake ourselves constantly in the image of Jesus who died and was raised from the dead. The unique role of music is that it does this by taking something of the past, the written music, and remaking it in this present. Jeremy Begbie crystallises this unique power in music when he says: ‘As musical occurrences anticipate their future they carry their past; as their future is *unfolded*, their past – and ours – is *enfolded*.’⁴² There is, in the form of traditional music-making, an opportunity to use the power of music to communicate the central incarnational truth of the Gospel. One of the key strengths of the Church, as Charles Elliott argues, is that it is an ‘acted memory’ of ‘re-remembering’ and ‘re-presentation’.⁴³ For me the great tragedy of cathedral music is not that it is not doing this incarnational work, but that it is failing to achieve the fourth of Elliott’s mandates to the traditional church: to interpret this to the world. This shortcoming is evidence that cathedral music is failing to meet one of the central challenges of *Mission-Shaped Church*, in that it has become opaque and incomprehensible to the world that it is seeking to serve. Little is done in an average evensong, for instance, to guide an enquirer through the service, let alone to explain the wider theological significance or importance of what is being done through the worship. In focusing on this lack of adequate interpretation in cathedral worship I

⁴⁰ Diocese of Durham, *Durham Newslink*, May-June 2009, 1.

⁴¹ Hone, ‘When in Our Music’, 159.

⁴² Jeremy Begbie, ‘Play it (Again): Music, Theology, and Divine Communication’, in Jeff Astley, Timothy Hone and Mark Savage (eds.), *Creative Chords: Studies in Music, Theology and Christian Formation* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2000), 61.

⁴³ Elliott, *Memory*, 221.

would like to conclude by focusing on three particular areas where attention could be paid by those called to interpret the traditions of the Church to the wider world.

First, there needs to be greater attention paid to those who are doing the role of interpretation. It is true that a great number of cathedral organists carry with them a deep and profound faith, but this cannot be said of many of the adults who sing in cathedral choirs. Whilst I would hesitate to recommend a faith requirement for all who work in the music departments of cathedrals, there is need for those in leadership in cathedrals, both ordained and lay, to communicate to music departments something of the meaning and importance of what the sung tradition can and should achieve as an instrument of mission. Jeremy Begbie expresses this need well when he says:

Mission is no less a corporate affair than worship, and it is unlikely that there can be a transforming Christian presence in society until the Church refinds its musicians and musicians refind the Church.⁴⁴

The second area of interpretation is a development of this first recommendation. Too often cathedral worship is seen as a ‘performance’ because the choir sings, while the congregation remains silent. Certainly in some church traditions a lack of participation by the gathered community is perceived to be a weakness in worship. Timothy Hone attributes this to the liturgical revolutions led by Vatican II, where the participation of the whole gathered community was seen to be essential; however, one can also identify this approach in the collective worship in the low-Church and free-Church traditions.⁴⁵ Whilst not diminishing the importance of the fully participatory tradition, there is a great gift provided when one can join with the gifts of others in the praise and worship of God. The powerful intercessory power of sung worship is something which is, in my experience, very little understood either by those engaging in church music, or by those who experience it. Again more work needs to be done to explain and interpret the power of this tradition to a new generation of believers and seekers who are increasingly unaware of this tradition of worship.

Thirdly, there needs to be more creativity and unity in the liturgy presented in a cathedral setting. Take, for instance, an average evensong. Normally the Organist and Precentor will work to ensure that the anthem chosen is sensitive to the season. However, if it is not in English, how often is a translation, or a suitable explanation as to why this particular music was chosen, given? Similarly services could be designed in a way to meet and speak to a particular social justice issue: for instance a week of services (normally evensong) which picked up on the themes and aims of Christian Aid week. This could be achieved not simply through the choice of anthem, but also in the readings, psalms, and hymns, used. By seeking greater unity in the liturgy, the greater story of God’s redeeming love for his creation which, as we

⁴⁴ Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (London: SPCK, 2007), 21.

⁴⁵ Hone, ‘When in Our Music’, 151.

have seen, the office of evensong tells each day, can not only become relevant to the world it meets, but also an agent for change in the world in which it exists.

The traditions of the Church provide a powerful and rich voice in the mixed economy of the worshipping life of the Church. It is important that these traditions are maintained. However, that maintenance must continue because of, and not in spite of, the near-horizons that the traditions of the Church encounter. If a fruitful and constructive relationship between tradition and contemporary culture can be maintained then it is possible for a great tradition, such as the Anglican choral tradition, to become an explicable and coherent agent of mission to people who, like countless others before, encounter this tradition day by day in our cathedrals.

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