

2000 Keene Lecture 3

'Gospel and Culture'

The Revd Graham Cray

Foreword by Andrew Knowles, Canon Theologian

The Millennium, when it came, was a year of uncertainties. The Dome was unprofitable, the Bridge was soon closed, and the initial celebrations in London were grid-locked and under-resourced. Jesus Christ was celebrated in '*Seeing Salvation*' - a memorable exhibition at the National Gallery - and in many acts of Christian worship and witness, included a moving and effective ecumenical gathering in our own cathedral on New Year's Eve.

There was a concerted *Jubilee 2000* campaign, urging First World governments to cancel Third World debts. But as the Northern Ireland peace process stalled at Stormont, our transport infrastructure derailed at Ladbrooke Grove and *Concorde* crashed near Paris, it was

a time to reflect on the shortcomings and pitfalls of human endeavour rather than the dizzy heights of our achievements. In the Church it felt as though, after the high days of Christendom, we were back to basics: a minority seeking to stand for God against a tidal wave of materialism, self-absorption and fragmentation. The final dispiriting (but symbolic) episode was the closure of Bethlehem for Christmas!

Into this medley of impressions came our Keene lecturers. Their overall theme was '*From Here to Eternity*': what will endure in this Third Millennium, in terms of faith in the Historical Jesus, his Gospel and his Church? Our speakers were from the Evangelical wing of the church, but not all conservative, ordained, or Anglican. Each in his way revealed a radical streak - a readiness to challenge those traditions which have outlived their usefulness, a rooted confidence in the reality of Jesus Christ, and a quiet assurance that the Gospel is as necessary and relevant for every individual and society as it ever was.

Keene Lecture Three
Gospel and Culture
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Andrew: Our third and final Keene lecture in this Millennial series is by the Revd Graham Cray. Graham is the Principal of Ridley Hall in Cambridge, where he not only endeavours to train candidates for the ordained ministry in the Church of England but helps to steer an entire Federation of Theological Colleges ranging from Orthodox through Anglican and Free Church to Jewish. He also has to juggle the complex and demanding requirements of several universities.

Graham read Theology at the University of Leeds, trained for the ministry at the London College of Divinity and St John's Nottingham and was ordained to serve his title at St Mark's Gillingham.

In 1975 he became the Northern Area Co-ordinator for Youth Work with the Church Pastoral Aid Society - a rôle for which he was based in York where he found a spiritual home with the celebrated Anglican Evangelist David Watson at St Michael le Belfry in the shadow of York Minster.

In 1978 Graham joined the staff of St Michael's as curate and became Vicar on David Watson's untimely death in 1982.

In 1992 or thereabouts, Graham became Principal of Ridley Hall, a rôle he has filled with grace and a fine grasp of detail, and on 20 March next year he is to be consecrated Bishop of Maidstone in succession to Gavin Reid.

Graham is in demand to speak and write on the contemporary scene - having an encyclopaedic knowledge of popular culture and credited with coining the phrase 'Pick and Mix' to describe the moral and religious values of Postmodernity. He is the ideal lecturer for our subject this evening which is 'Gospel and Culture'.

The subject of Gospel and culture has become hard to escape. We are all aware of the great variety of cultures around the world, and within our own country. It is no longer possible to think of the particular form of Christianity with which we are familiar as 'the only way it should be.'

I think that's the hardest thing for loyal Anglicans to do - to imagine a form of Anglicanism in which people will come to living faith but which is not necessarily church as we know it.

We are increasingly aware of a widening cultural gulf between the church as we know it, and a rapidly changing society. Often faithful Christian people find themselves caught between their loyalty to the church's tradition and their perplexity over their children, friends and neighbours' distance from the church. If we have only known the Christian faith in one particular cultural form we tend to '*fuse (or confuse) the meaning and forms of the Gospel,*'¹ failing to distinguish the faith, which we long for people to share, from our preferred or lifelong forms of worship and piety.

I think actually that's the hardest thing for loyal Anglicans to do - to imagine a form of Anglicanism in which people will come to living faith but which is not necessarily church as we know it.

¹Lausanne Haslev Consultation: 'Contextualisation Revisited' Unpublished report

There is of course no such thing as culture-free, 'pure' Christianity. Charles Kraft has written '*Our culture is within us as well as around us. We cannot escape it, though it is possible to ... transform ... our use of the culture that we have received.*'²

Until comparatively recently, careful thought about the cultural form of the Faith was seen as '*a strategy for cross cultural mission*'. In other words, you had to think about this if you were going to another country to be a missionary. Now it is '*a necessary practice of all churches in mission within their own cultures.*'³ All Christians contextualise or enculturate - they're the preferred Protestant and Catholic words for embodying the church - in an appropriate culture, but trying to be faithful to Christ at the same time. All churches do it. What we now realise is, it helps a lot if you're aware that you're doing it, rather than insisting *your* form of Christianity is the way to be a Christian. All cultures change and Western culture is undergoing profound changes at the moment. The German theologian Helmut Theilicke in the '50s, I think, put the issue clearly: '*The gospel must be constantly forwarded to a new address because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of residence.*'⁴ If the culture shifts, we must adapt the ways we address it with the eternal Gospel of Christ.

1. WHAT SORT OF SOCIETY DO WE HAVE TO ENGAGE?

It is a new discipline for British churches to have to ask questions about the form of the church and the practice of its mission in culture. What then are the key characteristics of our society that most need to inform Christian mission?

Two stand out - consumerism and globalisation.

A CONSUMER SOCIETY

We have moved in my lifetime from a society based on what people produce to one based on what they consume. The sociologist David Lyon sums it up well: '*Where once Westerners might have found their identity, their social togetherness and the ongoing life of their society in the area of production, these are today increasingly found through consumption. It's not that companies are producing less, or that people no longer work. Rather the meaning of these activities has altered. We are what we buy. We relate to others who consume the same way that we do. And the overarching system of capitalism is fuelled by, and geared to stimulating, consumption ... This is different from binding our identity to work or employment.*'⁵

The sociologists argue like fury as to whether we call this current world 'postmodern', 'late-modern' or whatever. They're all arguing about the term. Every writer I know on this identifies this key move *from* finding your identity in what you produce or the work that you do *to* finding your identity as a consumer.

This is not merely a statement about a higher profile for shopping. Consumerism is an ideology, a worldview. Lyon says we now find our meaning, our sense of belonging and our view of the good life, through what we consume. Consumerism is pervasive, and as such its power is not always noticed. One sociologist said a while ago that the power of any world view is established by the degree to which it seems natural. It's

²Charles Kraft 'Christianity In Culture' Orbis 1979 P106

³Haslev Consultation report

⁴Helmut Theilicke quoted in 'On Being' Australian magazine.

⁵David Lyon 'Memory and the Millennium' in 'Grace and Truth in the Secular Age' Ed. Timothy Bradshaw Eerdmans 1998 P284

obvious. It's the way the world is, rather than being a construction of a particular group of people in a particular place at a particular time of history. Consumerism has become *'part and parcel of the very fabric of modern life.'* says one scholar *'Areas of social life that were previously free of the demands of the market place, including religion, have had to adapt to a world where the needs and demands of the consumer are apparently paramount ... it is arguably the religion of the late twentieth century.'*⁶

Many see this as a major contribution to a self-indulgent society. Consumerism is addictive, it promotes a 'soft' hedonism as the image of the good life. I buy 'because I'm worth it.' In their book *The Unmanageable Consumer* Gabriel and Lang write *'Pleasure lies at the heart of consumerism. It finds in consumerism a unique champion which promises to liberate it both from its bondage to sin, duty and morality as well as its ties to faith, spirituality and redemption. Consumerism proclaims pleasure not merely as the right of every individual but also as every individual's obligation to him or her self. ... The pursuit of pleasure, untarnished by guilt or shame, becomes the new image of the good life.'*⁷ In other words there is a spiritual power to consumerism. No wonder one writer calls it *'the chief rival to God in our culture.'*⁸

The power of consumerism is seen in two other ways. Firstly it hides the poor. Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most insightful interpreters of our postmodern age, has written *'The postmodern era is perhaps the first not to allocate a function to its poor - not a single redeeming feature which could prompt solidarity with the poor. Postmodern society produces its members first and foremost as consumers - and the poor are singularly unfit for that role; by no stretch of the imagination can one hope that they would contribute to the 'consumer-led recovery'. For the first time in history the poor are totally un-functional and wholly useless; as such they are, for all practical intents and purposes, "outside society".'*⁹ Consumerism in effect works as a sort of apartheid. From my knowledge of Apartheid from time in South Africa, its power was that it stops you seeing the poor. You did not see the situation. You only saw a black person if they were your gardener or your housekeeper. You didn't see the conditions in which they lived. And if those who can get into the shopping centres only see those who can afford to get into the shopping centres, the same effect applies. And as the gospel is 'good news to the poor' this has to cause us concern.

Secondly, the gospel is about Christ who is the Truth, but decisions about truth are seen today as a consumer choice. To quote David Lyon again. *'When many voices can be heard, who can say that one should be heeded more than another? ... When the only criteria left for choosing between them are learned in the marketplace, then truth appears as a commodity. We hear that people 'buy into' a belief or that, rather than rejecting a dogma as false, they 'cannot buy' this or that viewpoint.'*¹⁰ The language of shopping has become the language of choosing our beliefs.

This individualistic view of truth can be reinforced by advertising. Take for example the Nike company's advertising strategy. Nike are the world dominators when it comes to trainers. They are the Coca-Cola of training-shoes globally. The company has used some religious imagery in its marketing. I quote from a sociological review of that: *'The*

⁶Steven Miles 'Consumerism As a Way of Life' Sage 1998 P1.

⁷Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang 'The Unmanageable Consumer' Sage 1995 P100.

⁸Alan Storkey 'Postmodernism Is Consumption' in 'Christ and Consumerism' Ed. Bartholomew and Moritz Paternoster 2000 P100.

⁹Zygmunt Bauman in Dennis Smith 'Zygmunt Bauman - Prophet of Postmodernity' Polity 1999 P193.

¹⁰David Lyon 'Memory and the Millennium' in 'Grace and Truth in the Secular Age' Eerdmans 1998 P285.

*idea of a single path to heaven is fundamentally inconsistent with Nike's wide range of niche markets'. In other words, you will only promote trainers with religious imageries that say 'choose the bits of religion that you would like as tailor-made for you, and it's not anybody else's. The quote carries on: 'Nike offers a plurality of spiritual ideologies to choose from. Nike appeals to what some sociologists now call "religion a la carte". ... Nike offers homilies and narratives well suited to consumers who select their religion buffet style.'*¹¹

It's not that consumerism in itself is an evil. Poverty is an evil and the freedom to have more than basic needs is good. But, when consumerism functions as an ideology, religion and everything else becomes a shopping choice. This was well summed up by Grace Davie when she wrote: *'No longer perceived as a duty, religious activity has become, for an increasing proportion of the population, a leisure pursuit; one, moreover, which competes for the public's attention alongside all other sorts of pastimes'*. In other words, some people go to the Cathedral on a Sunday morning, some people go to the golf clubs, some people go to the shopping centre and some people go to the garden centre. And they are equivalent choices in our everyday world view. Now that's a change. And Grace Davie goes on: *'It is the nature of society which is changing, rather than - or at least just as much as - the nature of religiosity.'*¹² So any engagement with British culture MUST take the pervasiveness of consumerism seriously.

However consumerism is vulnerable to the gospel because it is a lifestyle based on broken promises. It's always 'You will only be happy when you have, but you can't be happy for long because you've got to become dissatisfied and need to have something else.' And that is why we are a pervasively consumerist society that is deeply sceptical about consumerism, but doesn't see a lived alternative. 'Consumerism', says Professor Bauman, *'promises something it can't deliver.'* *'It actually promises universality of happiness. Everybody is free to choose, and if everybody is let into the shop, then everybody is equally happy.'* 'This', he says, as a disillusioned Jewish ex-Marxist, *'is one duplicity. Another duplicity is the reduction of freedom to consumerism.'*¹³

A globalised society

But consumerism is also a key component of our second main feature, globalisation. We all live in a globalised society. In his Reith Lectures Anthony Giddens stated that *'Globalisation is not incidental to our lives today. It is a shift in our very life circumstances. It is the way we now live.'*¹⁴

Globalisation is not just about a growing worldwide mobility and interdependence, or simply a growing awareness of the world as a whole, although it is all of that. Globalisation is important because it changes our experience of the local. *'The key to its cultural impact is in the transformation of localities themselves.'*¹⁵ To quote John Tomlinson *'Even those marginalized groups for whom "locality is destiny", (in other words the ideal world may be mobile, but you are trapped here, and there is no chance of you moving) 'experience a transformed locality into which the wider world intrudes more and more.'*¹⁶ The obvious example is that the global market profoundly

¹¹Robert Goldman + Stephen Papson 'Nike Culture' Sage 1998 P147.

¹²Grace Davie 'Religion in Britain Since 1945' Blackwell 1994 P194.

¹³Zygmunt Bauman 'Intimations of Postmodernity' Routledge 1992 P225.

¹⁴Anthony Giddens 'Runaway World' Profile 1999 P19.

¹⁵John Tomlinson 'Globalization and Culture' Polity 1999 P29.

¹⁶John Tomlinson 'Globalization and Culture' P133.

influences local employment possibilities. People lose their jobs locally because of a globalised market.

Society becomes more cosmopolitan; if only through the range of local take-away food outlets or the glimpses of the world through television and the Internet. Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, sees an emerging multicultural era, saying *'For me, a symbol of that (postmodern) state is a Bedouin mounted on a camel, clad in traditional robes under which he is wearing jeans, with a transistor radio in his hands and an ad for Coca-Cola on the camel's back. I see it as a typical example of this multicultural era, a signal that an amalgamation of cultures is taking place ... something is being born.'*¹⁷ In the East London boroughs of this diocese you don't have to see a Bedouin to see that the local is becoming multicultural.

When the image of Nelson Mandela may be more familiar than the face of our next-door neighbour, something has changed in the nature of our everyday experience.

Globalisation is also changing the nature of community. It is a process which both networks and fragments simultaneously. This comes in part through our increasing electronic interconnectedness. *'Instantaneous electronic communication'*, says Anthony Giddens, *'alters the very texture of our lives, rich and poor alike. When the image of Nelson Mandela may be more familiar than the face of our next-door neighbour, something has changed in the nature of our everyday experience.'*¹⁸

Even more significantly community is being split from locality. Church of England - please take note! Ulrich Beck, the German sociologist, puts it clearly: *'To live in one place no longer means to live together, and living together no longer means living in the same place.'*¹⁹ The same point is expanded by Martin Albrow, of the Roehampton Institute. *'Effectively, in all kinds of ways, social life has been deterritorialized.'* Social life has been split from territory, from an actual place. Martin Albrow continues: *'The communities of the Global Age generally have no local centre. People living in the same street will have fleeting relationships with each other, having widely differing lifestyles and household arrangements, and have common interest only in the maintenance of certain shared facilities they take for granted.'* In other words, in this sort of street, if you want community you need a dustmen's strike! *'Rules of everyday living govern the comings and goings of its occupants. Its existence depends as much on refraining from infringing the conditions of life for others as on any positive contribution to each other's welfare. "Minding your own business" and "not getting involved" become norms.'*²⁰ because there are other people with whom you do get involved, but they're not where you live.

We will return to this in a moment. But one final, if indirect, consequence of globalisation is important. An interconnected world, bombarded with electronic messages, makes a relativistic view of truth seem self-evident. The American Psychologist Kenneth Gergen wrote: *'It once seemed easy enough to distinguish between truth and falsity, objectivity and subjectivity, good reasons and bad, and even morality and immorality. Yet, those days have largely vanished, as television, radio, books, newspapers, e-mail and passing acquaintances inundate us with differences in perspective, values, and understandings. In what particular words can we place our*

¹⁷Vaclav Havel 'The Search for Meaning in a Global Civilisation' in 'The Fontana Postmodernism Reader' Ed. Anderson 1996 P209.

¹⁸Anthony Giddens 'Runaway World' Profile P12.

¹⁹Ulrich Beck 'What is Globalization?' Sage 2000 P74.

²⁰Martin Albrow 'The Global Age' Polity 1996 P156-8.

trust when confronted with infinite variations in the real and the good?'²¹ It is not philosophically self-evident that all truth is relative. All truth may be perspectival: you can only see really from where you stand and partly what you expect to see. In 1982, when I was vicar of St Michael le Belfry, if I wanted to see how bad the floods were in York, I could stand outside the parish church, but I wouldn't see much; but if I climbed to the top of the Minster tower I'd get a view of York and the whole Vale of York. So it is entirely false to say all viewpoints are as good as any other viewpoint. But it seems obvious that there is no particular basis to choose when you are bombarded with alternative views from all over the world and all different bits of history. Very few people are relativists when it comes down to it, but some sort of relativistic version of truth seems self-evident as the only way to explain the confusion. And a church which believes that Christ's story is the key to understanding all stories, needs to take note of today's 'common sense' understandings of truth and morality.

The search for identity

But truth is not the central issue for many people today. Rather the pressing issues are those of identity and coherence. Many of the Christian writers I read struggle with this issue of 'what is truth?'. Most of the secular writers that I've read and that I've been substantially quoting so far, struggle with the question 'Who are we and how do we become who we want to be?' Identity and community, identity and coherence. Who am I, and how do we live together?

Today's culture answers the question of personal identity from the resources of consumerism. Except that 'consumer' choice is relabelled as 'lifestyle' choice. In the Reith Lectures Giddens reminds us that: *'When tradition lapses and lifestyle choice prevails, the self isn't exempt. Self-identity has to be created and recreated on a more active basis than before.'*²² And if you happen to be a practical atheist - that is, you say you believe in God but you don't believe that it makes any difference - and you therefore do not believe that by being created there is a given-ness to your identity which needs to be discovered as well as a constructing of your identity through the pattern of life that you choose, then you will be, or try and make yourself to be, what you want to be, but almost as 'free-floating'. This is to deal with the question of identity on an individualistic basis. *'Reinvent yourself today - tomorrow may be too late'* went the advertisement for Douglas Coupland's latest novel. But *'Consumer society is individualistic by definition.'*²³

Recent studies have pointed out the instability of creating identity through lifestyle choice. As Madeleine Bunting wrote in the Guardian: *'Self image through consumption is self-fuelling; it can keep you busy all your life because there is always more to buy, because if your identity is about being cool then definitions of cool are constantly changing.'*²⁴ Or again: *'The overwhelming variety of possibilities for identity in an affluent image culture no doubt creates highly unstable identities, while constantly providing new openings to restructure one's identity.'*²⁵ Identity on the move is the contemporary understanding. Writers have identified the half truth which underlies this view of identity: *'Today everything is presented as a possibility.'*²⁶ That's two theologians summing up the issue in our society which causes more difficulty to teenagers than anything else. Everything is presented as a possibility. It's just down to

²¹Kenneth Gergen 'Invitation to Social Construction' Sage 2000 P2.

²²Anthony Giddens 'Runaway World' P47.

²³Petta Sulkenen 'Constructing the New Consumer Society' Macmillan 1997 P6.

²⁴Madeleine Bunting 'The Guardian'.

²⁵Douglas Kellner.

²⁶Furlong and Cartmel 'Young People and Social Change' Open University 197 P7.

your choices, and it's only partly true. Or '*One can be anything at any time.*'²⁷ Tragically, for most people, the options are not as wide as our fantasies about the future or our allegedly infinite consumer choices.

Two key points need to be made. Firstly our consumer society is marked as much by a desire to '*keep the options open*' and not to be tied down, as it is by a search for a secure identity. Perhaps the motto of our age is 'been there, done that'. As Professor Bauman has noted: '*The hub of postmodern life strategy is not identity-building but avoidance of fixation.*'²⁸ I think it's called 'sin' - I will not ultimately be answerable; I will keep moving on.

Secondly, we need to ask, who is the 'me' who chooses the person I want to be? Identity is, in part, constructed through long term choices. But who is choosing and in what way is that core maker of choices answerable to God for the choices made?

The search for coherence

If the question of identity is settled through consumer choice, then the question of social coherence becomes critical. Consumerism appears to provide an overarching creed, but in fact the result is a fragmenting individualism. In Clifford Longley's words: '*Western civilisation suffers from a strong sense of moral and spiritual exhaustion. Having constructed a society of unprecedented sophistication, convenience and prosperity, nobody can remember what it was supposed to be for.*'²⁹ Zygmunt Bauman speaks of '*a cacophony of moral voices, none of which is likely to silence the others.*'³⁰ I do not believe we live in an age which is less moral than any other. I believe we live in an age which has, for the moment at least, lost the ability to have a shared moral vocabulary. The Bishop of Liverpool has a number of times said that he has never heard anybody say it would have been wrong for *them* to have killed Jamie Bulger but it might not have been wrong for those two little boys. We are not ultimately relativists, but the moment you have to defend why something is right *contra* something that is wrong, we've lost our common language.

We now live in an age in which truth claims and moral codes seem to have no guarantees. In their absence, community often takes temporary forms. A consumer society is a throwaway society, which according to Professor David Harvey can mean '*also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships ... and received ways of doing and being.*'³¹ I sometimes in my more cynical moments wonder when being bored with somebody will become a legal basis for instant divorce.

Some sociologists now describe our society as one which has 'temporary tribes' gathered round events, clubs and brand names, but in an existence which is essentially nomadic.³² Just down the road from Ridley in Selwyn College is a man called Joseph Galgalo. He is a priest of the Church of Kenya doing a doctorate in Biblical Studies to go back and be a teacher. Joseph is a camel nomad from North Kenya. His tribe was evangelized by Catechists travelling with the clans, gossiping the Gospel one-to-one as they travelled, and then telling the Gospel story to the whole clan as it gathered. But there, to be tribal is to be nomadic together. The contemporary sociological language is that we are essentially nomadic individually, but through some

²⁷Kenneth Gergen 'The Saturated Self' Basic Books 1991.

²⁸Zygmunt Bauman 'Life in Fragments' Blackwell P

²⁹Clifford Longley in foreword to 'Faith in the Future' Jonathan Sachs DLT 1995 Px

³⁰Zygmunt Bauman 'Intimations of Postmodernity' Routledge.

³¹David Harvey 'The Condition of Postmodernity' Blackwell 1990 P286.

³²Chris Rojek 'Decentering Leisure' Sage 1995 P151-2.

shared interests rather than the shared traditional world-view, gather for shorter or longer times in temporary tribes and then move on. It's as though the postmodern world provides no permanent home. The writer Iain Chambers summarises this starkly: *'We all become nomads, migrating across a system that is too vast to be our own, but in which we are fully involved, translating and transforming bits and elements into local instances of sense.'*³³

The combined impact of consumerism and globalisation, neither of which is an evil in itself, is to create the possibility of a chameleon-like existence.

The combined impact of consumerism and globalisation, neither of which is an evil in itself, is to create the possibility of a chameleon-like existence. One in which the place where we 'live' may be little more than a dormitory where we sleep, but have few relationships; and where we take the colour of whatever group we are with and want to please. In such a lifestyle we would be one person where we live, another where we work, another where we play, another where we shop, another where we commit adultery (if we do) and yet another where we go to church (if we do), without any sense of hypocrisy or irony, because it becomes the way that is natural, and other people's expectations become powerful control mechanisms on how we present ourselves.

In some places, especially among young people, this is already a reality. Pete Ward, until recently Archbishop of Canterbury's Advisor for Youth Ministry, has pointed this out as a major change in youth cultures: *'Young people appear to consume the Christian scene in roughly the same way they consume other scenes. That is, they move from one to the other fairly easily and construct their identities from whatever takes their fancy. The exclusivity that characterized both youth culture and the Christian youth culture in the last few decades has largely collapsed.'*³⁴ Be true to your age. Whether you belonged or not, what was the exclusive youth movement when you were a teenager? Was it Mods and Rockers? Was it Skinheads? Was it Punks? Was it Hippies? Was it Teddy Boys, dare I ask? Do you remember there was an exclusivity? If there were two groups, you were one or the other. There was the music, the uniform. To belong was to be loyal. And if you got led to Christ through a culturally sensitive Christian youth ministry, you brought with you from your pagan days that sense that to belong is to be loyal in some exclusive sense.

There is now no such thing as *youth culture*. There are constantly changing youth cultures which people dip into and out of, sometimes quite chameleon-like; and when a young person is now led to Christ, they will bring that assumption with them just as surely as some of us brought our assumption of being exclusive. And therefore it is entirely possible that someone might be offering worship to Jesus wholeheartedly in a thoroughly contemporary Christian youth celebration on Friday, and on Tuesday being on the worst end of the dance culture, sleeping around and dropping Ecstasy, with no sense of hypocrisy until their conscience begins to be informed by the teachings of the Christian faith. That's a statement about the world, and if the Church doesn't know where the world is, its mission is not going to be particularly effective.

Despite the freedoms of consumer choice, the need for shared meaning has not gone away.

³³Iain Chambers 'Cities Without Maps' in 'Mapping the Futures' Ed. Bird Routledge 1993 P193.

³⁴Pete Ward 'Mass Culture' BRF 1999 P26.

So with that shocking statement our outline map of postmodern culture is now complete. Despite the freedoms of consumer choice, the need for shared meaning has not gone away. In his lectures on globalisation Anthony Giddens recognised that this issue still requires an answer. He asks: '*Can we live in a world where nothing is sacred? I have to say, that I don't think we can. Cosmopolitans ... have to make plain that tolerance and dialogue can themselves be guided by values of a universal kind. All of us need moral commitments that stand above the petty concerns and squabbles of everyday life. ... None of us would have anything to live for if we didn't have something worth dying for.*'³⁵

2. HOW DO WE ENGAGE THE GOSPEL WITH SUCH A WORLD?

How then do we engage such a culture with the message of a Saviour who is worth both living and dying for?

This need not be a time of losing confidence in the gospel. I haven't come here to dishearten you.

In the first century there was an overarching social system that appeared to offer coherence to society: not consumerism and the global market, but the Roman Empire. Within the Empire was a market place of gods and philosophies, some of them Eastern imports, due to the shrinking of the known world because of Roman roads. In this context the message of a crucified Messiah did not seem best placed to survive, let alone grow; unless, of course, the true God was in it! In such a missionary context St Paul discovered - and I'm mainly now referring to 1 Corinthians - that the gospel was indeed the power of God to save and to transform the characters of his own cultural group, the Jews, and those whose culture was alien, and at first repugnant to him, the Gentiles.³⁶ He quickly discovered, as we shall see, that this gospel of the cross was both the vehicle of God's salvation and an obstacle or offence to human pride, within each culture. It was divisive. It was glorious to some and deeply offensive or stupid to others, ('a stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to Gentiles'). No amount of cultural relevance or contextualisation can bypass 'the stumbling block of the cross'.³⁷ Serious engagement with the culture of those we are trying to reach is to make sure it is the cross they make their decision about and not something else, not to guarantee that because it is culturally accessible people will automatically respond.

A renewal of imagination about the church

But we need more than a confidence in the Gospel. We need a renewal of imagination about the shape of a missionary church. Robin Greenwood, recently of this diocese, wrote: '*The local church ... only has a point when it knowingly commits itself to share in God's mission.*'³⁸

What we need most of all, at the beginning of a new millennium, is a renewal of imagination about the form of the church as the Church of England understands and practises it.

The culture of the Church is a primary mission issue. Strategies for mission which assume that the point is to win people for the church, as it now is, have the wrong

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³⁶See 1 Corinthians 1:18, 6:9-11, 9:19-23.

³⁷1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5.

³⁸Robin Greenwood 'Practising Community' SPCK 1996 P35.

starting place. What we need most of all, at the beginning of a new millennium, is a renewal of imagination about the form of the church as the Church of England understands and practises it.

In a time of cultural change a critical question for any church tradition must be, 'Can you imagine a form of church different from that of your own upbringing or recent experience?' The last words of a dying church may well be 'We never did it that way before.'

Our culture forms community through consumer choice and struggles with the resulting fragmentation. A missionary church must engage with both issues.

Prioritise our outreach towards the majority; the totally unchurched

As a national church we must learn to give priority to the majority; the totally unchurched, the people who don't go. Many of these are third and fourth generation non-church attenders, who have not been to Sunday School and who have learned little of the Christian faith at school. Someone estimated that those are 40% of the current population, and the majority of young people. These rather than the 'de-churched' (those who used to come), or the fringe of existing congregations, must be given our fullest attention.

Go where they are and plant the gospel (or churches which are) shaped in relation to their culture, but which reflect Christ

In all probability the only way to reach these people is to go where they are and share the Gospel and, if need be, plant churches which are shaped in relation to their culture, but which bear the image of Christ. When St Paul describes his missionary strategy in 1 Corinthians 9, he uses the same language that he uses elsewhere to describe Christ's incarnation. Of Christ he says, 'He became poor that we might become rich; he became sin that we might become the righteousness of God', and so on. There are many other texts. It is the language of exchange. He becomes what we were so that we can share in who he is. I think that's the simplest way I know of expressing the Gospel. Christ became what I was that I might share in who he is with the Father. I think that's wonderful. Listen to Professor Morna Hooker: *'What Paul describes is the self-identification of Christ with men and women which, in turn, results in their sharing what he is. ... Paul then in turn, became what the men and women to whom he proclaimed the Gospel were, in order that he might gain them for the Gospel. "To the Jew I become as a Jew. To one outside the law I become as one outside the law." This I commend as the most important missionary strategy that we can address if we are serious about the majority group in our population. And just as in some statements about what Christ became needed modification - he became sin, though he knew no sin, ... so too, in the case of Paul. He came under the law, even though he was not under the law; he became as one without law, even though he was not without God's law. Only the last part of the statement is different: in those statements about Christ, Paul spells out the interchange: we become rich, we become children of God, and so on. But in the statements in 1 Corinthians about his own ministry, he says his aim is to be that he may gain - or save - the men and women to whom he preaches.'*³⁹

We will probably never reach the majority of the unchurched by getting them to come to church as it now is. We must learn to plant the church in their world.

No one expression or shape of church life will fit our diverse consumer culture

³⁹Morna Hooker 'A Partner In The Gospel' in Lovering + Sumney Ed. 'Theology and Ethics in Paul and his Interpreters' Abingdon 1996 P89-92.

There can be no stereotyped model of what such a church would look like. No one expression or shape of church life will fit our diverse consumer culture.

Robin Greenwood asked, *'What is mission if not the engagement with God in the entire enterprise of bringing the whole of creation to its intended destiny? A local church cannot claim to be part of this if it fails to work with all ages, if it only serves itself, or if it operates entirely on a Radio 4 model to the exclusion of all else.'*⁴⁰

'Difference' is the great postmodern value, 'coherence' the great problem. But, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Gordon Fee affirms that *'The one God who is himself characterised by diversity within unity has decreed the same for his church.'*⁴¹ A pluralist culture requires diverse forms of the church. Bishop John Finney wrote that *'There may come a time when it is impossible to keep the different midi-cultures together in one act of worship ... It is clear in some places that a form of worship which really satisfies nobody is no longer acceptable, as people leave in search of something where they can feel completely at home.'*⁴² I know there is a consumerist mentality in that, but if we don't take it seriously that that is where people are, or outside the church, we will not start to reach them.

Churches and congregations will need to be based on networks as well as neighbourhoods.

Churches and congregations will need to be based on networks as well as neighbourhoods. The House of Bishops' report 'Breaking New Ground' recognised that *'Human life is lived in a complex array of networks and ... neighbourhoods. Where people live may hold only a very minor loyalty.'*

One further point must be made about this strategy. Up until now, at the outset of a mission or a church plant, we have begun with a fairly clear understanding of the hoped-for outcome. We had in mind, for example, what the newly planted church might look like. But in this emerging culture we may not even know whether we are planting a church until some time after we have made relationships and planted the Gospel. We may, to put it bluntly, achieve nothing. We may win some people for our existing acts of worship and congregation. We may plant the cell or we may plant the congregation. We need not be fearful about this apparent loss of control. (I speak as a Bishop-designate!) What underlies it is the positive conviction that when a seed called 'gospel' is planted in a human community it genetically grows into something called 'church'. The shape emerges with growth from God that you see him establish under your hand. 'God gives the growth.' (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Plant the gospel in networks of relationships

We have to learn to plant the gospel in networks of relationships, even though they are largely based around consumerist lifestyle choices. To those outside the law we become as those outside the law. The only way to win thoroughly unchurched people is to go where they are to meet them on the basis which they have formed their relationships, rather than to say: 'This is where they ought to be and when they come here and relate differently we will win.' I'm talking about an unavoidable starting point. Only thus will we meet people where they are. This is not to abandon community - it is to refuse to be dragged into dying forms of community rather than planting into networks where people do have some ongoing relationships.

⁴⁰Robin Greenwood 'Practising Community' P28.

⁴¹Gordon Fee.

⁴²John Finney.

Identify the more stable places that sustain ongoing relationships

Because of the temporary nature of many forms of community we need to identify the more stable places that sustain ongoing relationships and plant the Gospel (at least) there. The most important of these to my mind are schools, the work place, pubs, some dance clubs, old people's centres and shopping centres.

Get church into the shopping centres

Shopping centres have been described by one sociologist as '*cathedrals of consumption*'.⁴³ The writer says they function in the way the medieval cathedrals used to. They are the markets, where you meet your regulars on a certain day. They are important meeting places. Perhaps we need storefront churches which offer an Alpha or Emmaus course to each day's regular visitors, and build some community on the basis of initially casual but regular acquaintance.

Consider establishing a youth congregation

Work with teenagers is critical for the church's future. Evidence shows that a specific worship event for young people is a key factor in winning and keeping them.⁴⁴ Look at Peter Brierley's recent English church survey. It will tell you that 50% of the churches in the country have no young people aged between fifteen and nineteen. Those that do and are doing well (something like one church in five now has a full-time youth worker and one church in seven has a special event just for young people for their worship) - they are the churches that are winning the next generation of the church. So you might need a youth congregation, and this could be done on an area or deanery basis, with cells of young people within local parishes.

Identify initiatives with the elderly

We are an ageing population. There are large and demographically increasing numbers of retired people who once went to church or Sunday school and, unlike the young people, they know the stories and hymns. Specific programmes are needed to win them back. But don't try doing it in the same event that's for the teenagers who know nothing! All such attempts to plant the Gospel where people are, meeting them on the basis initially of their consumerist choices, require firstly an accessibility.

1. Accessibility - belonging before believing

Whatever the form of the church or the culture which it is engaging, all forms of church must be hospitable. Hospitality is the ethical counterpart to witness. I know some people might come, for instance, to a cathedral and the hospitality is not to be noticed for a while because they want to be anonymous. I'm not saying there is a standard version of hospitality. But if you are not actually welcomed, in a way that is appropriate to you, you won't stay. '*The discipleship for which Jesus called*', says Professor James Dunn, '*was both open and committed*.'⁴⁵ There was a burning centre, if you like, of commitment to Jesus the people were encouraged towards. The same must be true of his churches. These days most people need to belong before they believe and therefore the hospitality of even newly-planted Christian initiatives is crucial while they make their mind up about belief. Change in behaviour is a mark of true Christian conversion, but it follows belief. Belonging, then believing, then behaving - not the other way round. So if we don't have churches in which people who don't behave feel that they are welcome, what will we do? All such initiatives must be accessible, and secondly need to demonstrate a practical local commitment to justice and to hope.

⁴³George Ritzer 'Enchanting a Disenchanted World' Pine Forge 1999.

⁴⁴Peter Brierley 'The Tide is Running Out'

⁴⁵James Dunn 'The Discipleship of Jesus' CUP 1992.

2. A practical local commitment to justice and hope

But who will want to belong if the local church is not seen to care for its community, whether that community is a network or a neighbourhood? There needs to be a tangible, visible local commitment to people's well-being, to justice and to bringing hope. The Soul Survivor Trust took nearly ten thousand young people to Greater Manchester over the summer, for two five-day missions. We took them into some of the most run-down estates in Greater Manchester, and they just did what the community wanted done to the community. They learned to treat people with dignity and help transform their circumstances. And we did it so ten thousand Christian teenagers would come home and want to do it locally. Consumerism hides the poor. The care of the poor and questions of justice are issues for every church. There is no longer any room for a divide between evangelism and the care of the poor.

Offer an alternative to consumerism from within it

All of this planting of the Gospel into different lifestyle or generational groups may have seemed, until the last couple of points, to have been a total surrender to the consumerism I have been warning you about.

But to plant the Gospel where people are, as a result of their consumer choices, is only half of the strategy. Paul wrote, *'To the Jew I become as a Jew, to those outside the Law as one outside the Law.'* The equivalent is, *'To the consumer I become as a consumer.'* But a great deal is contained in that little word 'as'. Always, he says, I am under Christ's law. There lies the Christian difference. We are called to offer an alternative to, or a transformation of, consumerism from within it. Consumerism isn't 'them', it's 'us'. It's our society. It's the way we live. We can no more get out of it than fishes can live out of the water. How to live in it healthily and to change the quality of it is the issue. We cannot avoid it; it is the dominant ideology and lifestyle of our day. There we must plant the church, and there we must live according to Christ.

To avoid a surrender to consumerism we must address two final issues; discipleship and unity.

Aim to establish discipleship groups as a matter of priority

Wherever you plant the Gospel, aim to establish discipleship groups as a matter of priority. A consumer culture weakens the connection between belief and behaviour, so never split doctrine from ethics. Never speak of the content of the faith without talking of the lifestyle consequences. Never speak of Christian behaviour without talking of its doctrinal foundations. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon have written *'You do not need a strong community, the church, to support an ethic everyone else already affirms.'* And *'Christian community is not primarily about togetherness ... togetherness happens but only as a by-product of the main project of trying to be faithful to Jesus.'*⁴⁶

One part of faithfulness to Jesus will be a new vision of relationships and a Christian rather than consumerist answer to the question, 'who is my neighbour?' An expansion of the boundaries of each group planted in this way would be an important dimension of discipleship.

Effective mission must be allowed to create problems of unity

We should not be too quick in trying to integrate such new groups into the church which has planted them. To quote Robin Greenwood: *'Unconsciously churches reject large tracts of humanity by failing to make provision for them to find a "space" which they can occupy without automatically denying their culture, music, ways of speech, or*

⁴⁶Hauerwas + Willimon 'Resident Aliens' Abingdon 1989 P73+79.

*capacity to handle texts or concepts.'*⁴⁷ What some churches call integration can simply be absorption; 'You do this until you learn to do it properly like us'. This swallowing of the culture of the new Christians by the established culture of the church, renders them totally ineffective to win their own. Better to allow the new group to establish its own Christian culture and character in relation to its own part of the mission field and then ask how the new group and the old should express the reconciliation and unity which is Christ's gift. Let it grow up a bit, and then ask how the two adults relate. Don't let an adult swallow a child. Effective mission must be allowed to create the problems of unity. That is what it is meant to do! It did so in the New Testament as Jewish churches faced up to the consequence of the Gentile mission, and it will do so today. All those great passages about unity in the New Testament are there because people went out and won people who weren't like the original church. Mission led to a problem of unity. There has been a tendency to let concerns about unity prevent innovative mission, rather than seeing that innovative mission creates the situations in which unity is worked out. The issue of unity is not a sort of missionary condom: 'we can't do this because of that.'

Aim towards sharing the Eucharist together

It should be the aim to find a way, eventually, for all such groups to share the Eucharist together at compromise to everybody's preferred way of doing it. Not only is the Eucharist the great sacrament of unity and the celebration of the things all Christians hold in common, but as Pete Ward has shown in his contribution to the book 'Mass Culture' the Eucharist is culturally 'strange'⁴⁸ outside of church culture, and it has the power to challenge any group that is in danger of being absorbed by the culture of its own particular context. The uniqueness of the challenge of the Gospel is embodied in that.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to map the main contours of our mission field and to propose a core component of an appropriate mission strategy. I conclude with a quotation from Tex Sample, Professor of Church and Society in Kansas City: *'The call here is for a church that will 'imitate' Christ, to pitch tent, to embody itself, to take form in the indigenous practices of our time, not for the purpose of accommodation to the world but rather to be God's people. It is a twofold effort: To join the practices of an electronic culture, on the one hand, and to keep faith with the story of Christ, on the other.'*⁴⁹

Questions

Stan Atkins: *While doing the CCS course at Chelmsford we studied the Eucharist, and one of the things the tutor asked was 'Is there anyone you would exclude from coming to the table to receive the Eucharist?' For my part, frankly, I couldn't think of anyone, whoever he was, whether of another religion, Christian or non-Christian, anybody. Christ wanted everyone to come and share.*

Graham Cray: I think there are two things behind that question. I do believe that to take the Eucharist implies a journey at least towards a commitment to Christ, so the question of whether others who do not have that would do so with integrity as they saw it themselves, is important, and the quite serious passages about those who eat and drink condemnation on themselves because of their failure to recognise the nature of the body of Christ in their brothers and sisters and so on in 1 Corinthians is an

⁴⁷Robin Greenwood 'Practising Community' P27f.

⁴⁸Pete Ward 'Essentially Strange: Communion and Culture' in 'Mass Culture' BRF.

⁴⁹Tex Sample 'The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World' Abingdon 1998 P122.

issue. But if you have to belong before you are going to believe, the question of when you decide to express that journey or commitment through taking the Eucharist is probably going to have to become more self-regulating than regulated by the Church.

There was a group we set free in York to begin a serious long-term mission amongst the young adult dance culture. Some people would call what they did 'alternative worship'. As a result they gathered a whole collection of New Age travellers, road protesters and dance culture kids, who started to come to their services, and their service once a month was a Eucharist. Culturally, in terms of the electronic visuals and the music and so on, it was entirely appropriate to the world that these people came from. But they served the Eucharist by the passing of the elements from hand to hand rather than coming to the priest, and they decided in the end that the young people and young adults there actually knew quite well what they were doing by taking or not taking, and it could be left to them. That proved to be true and appropriate, so I think we can't guard the fence too much. That's my personal view of that one in a missionary context. But please note that the big thing I am saying to you today is, we have a huge mission field we're not touching. The moment we start to invest considerable energies in going to them rather than trying, often unsuccessfully, to get them to us, all these sort of questions come in, and that's a very helpful one because it illustrates a very practical as well as very central thing.

Stan Atkins: *Trying to embrace other forms of religion as well?*

Graham Cray: I hear that you're trying to embrace other faiths. I am one who believes in the finality of what is revealed in Jesus without meaning that that is a damnation or a rejection of every insight of other faiths. I think many faithful practitioners of other faiths would regard the Eucharist as an expression of an exclusive Christian commitment, and therefore we need to be careful that the way we think and the way they think is not actually missing one another.

Jane Orton: *Can I just ask you, as the Principal of a Theological College, what proportion of the timetable would be devoted to preparing students specifically for mission in our fragmented and consumerist society?*

Graham Cray: 'Quite a lot, but not as much as I'd like', is the short answer. The slightly longer one is that all students at theological college have got to do the musician's equivalent of learning their scales if they've not done theology before. So a proportion of the curriculum is the lifelong foundation of learning Scripture, doctrine, church history, traditions of Christian ethics, and things like that. That rightly takes a considerable amount of our time, but it is a foundational investment for a lifelong ministry. The key issue comes when we are doing the preparation, if you like, for the practice and theory of ministry, and at Ridley Hall that is primarily mission-focused. I make it clear when students come for interview that we will teach them many practical things for pastoral ministry but always as understood in the context of a missionary church. So we teach about church planting. We teach about cell church. If they are at Ridley they can't escape culture talks of the sort that we have just had from me. We try and place them in local churches where they will be involved on a weekly basis in the church's mission and not just, if you like, its maintenance, although I don't like setting those two against one another. They all go on a mission. They all have an engagement. They all have a ten-day residence in an urban multi-cultural setting, if they've not been there before, and learn about dialogue and mission and so on. So we invest as much time as we possibly can. If I'm honest it's not so much that I'd like more time for that; I'd like more time for everything!

Joan Good: *I'm a Reader in the Anglican Church, and I'm also an industrial chaplain. I was so pleased when you said about the larger opportunity of the church, because I find where I've worked for the last three years at least 80% of the people doing manual work are totally unchurched, and yet they have got a wonderful spirituality of their own. They've got as far now that they trust me implicitly, but I could never, I think, find any church I could take them back into, and at the moment as I'm more or less on my own, what do I do with them?*

Graham Cray: First of all you are confirming the reality that I've been describing. It is equally true of young people. One of my great heroes is Tracy, who works for Norwich Youth for Christ and is the chaplain of the Rank nightclub, The Icon Club, in the middle of Norwich. She's done what you've done. She's been there long-term. She's now deeply trusted. She's been with half the staff to casualty when something's gone wrong and everything else. She's got a growing group of people who, through her, are beginning to relate to God; some of them not knowing it, but that's really what's happening. There isn't a church in Norwich they could go to. They've moved their chaplaincy team meeting to the function room of a pub, and they're drawing in with them the people who are attracted to what they do - half as helpers, half as people being disciplined. What they are really doing is planting a church.

Now I know in Anglican terms we think of the parish church, the building, but effectively what you're talking about is some sort of little cell beginning to come together in which you help those people focus and begin to express their faith, relate it to the Christian tradition that you've been trained in and have an understanding of, let it take a cultural shape that's appropriate, and that might take a long time. But I would look to that sort of little cell to emerge. Now, it might become what the Church of England one day technically calls a network church plant, and I can tell you how you can regularise that under the Pastoral Measure. I need to know that because I'm going to be a bishop! But actually the thing that matters is that a group of people are gathering round someone who has some training and recognition in some Christian ministry and beginning to find their faith. I would go for that, and then ask the question, 'How can this in some way relate to the wider church so it knows it's not the only form of church there is or that's good or that matters?' I would say my whole aim tonight has been to say, 'Start there, recognise the issues that you must address because you start there, but please allow it to take time.' Don't start with what it must look like if it's going to be the Church of England.

Joan Good: *I quite agreed with you when you said the Church of England usually thinks of its mission as a periphery, or the people who have fallen away, and entirely ignore the large, wider population.*

Graham Cray: We are in particularly enormous difficulties if we don't address the issue of teenagers. This serious message came out with English churches' census ten years ago. There's been some really imaginative youth ministries and they have meant that the decline in the numbers of young people of that age in the church is parallel to the fall of their proportion of the population in terms of the demograph. Great. But it also says 50% of the churches don't have any youth ministry at all, and we are an ageing church. Even if you're the sort of Anglican for whom evangelism isn't the sort of thing you do, even if the language of winning others to faith is uncomfortable to you, it is still vital to be one who believes, and to do the acts of neighbourly love that I'm sure at your heart you believe are what Christians do in their community. It is an urgent and essential matter.

Simon Garwood: *I was interested in your comments about the Eucharist being outside the church. You were quoting Pete Ward. I'd like you to expand on that,*

particularly in the light of the Catholic tradition, which I'm in, which at its worst tends to fetishize the Eucharist to such an extent that it thinks it owns it.

Graham Cray: The first thing I'd do is recommend the book 'Mass Culture', published by the Bible Reading Fellowship, which includes a contribution from Stephen Cotterell, who is in the Catholic tradition. The issue is: 'How does the Eucharist relate to mission in a postmodern world?' And Pete in his opening, and I in my chapter, point out that the postmodern world talks about icons; but what it means is symbols that have no depth, and that the Eucharist is actually iconic. Its symbolism actually is the acting-out of something utterly profound which has depth. It is the acting-out of the Christian story, the focusing of the Christian message. I, as an evangelical, believe that an encounter with the living Christ is in it, and argue the toss with my Catholic friends about simply the way that that is expressed. If you eat and drink without discerning the body to your judgement then there is encounter in this. There is not just a visual aid or the equivalent. You might as well have a picture of bread and wine on an overhead projector! So here is something profound, which is three-dimensional, in a culture that's one-dimensional. You put it against postmodern theory and that becomes clear, and that's what I do in my chapter.

Pete uses this word 'strange'. He says actually outside of the culture of the church, (and I have the whole time tonight been trying to get us into the heads of people outside of the culture of the church, the ones who don't go, or just pop up for a wedding or Auntie May's funeral or something like that), this sort of ritual action whether formal or informal with bread and wine, and a gathering around is a strange thing, and what Pete says is, if we are going to take very seriously the contextualising of mission, the danger of contextualising is syncretism. You end up getting swallowed by the culture you're trying to engage with, and that which is distinctive in the Christian faith is lost, especially if I'm saying you start where people are on the basis of their consumer choices. Therefore I say 'stop there', and Pete says the Eucharist because of both its transcendence and its strangeness has what he calls a de-contextualising effect: a sudden reminder that this does not just happen to be a way a whole group of people live at the moment, but is the living reality of the Gospel of Christ acted out as it is done in many different culture forms and different ways. It draws you back to the story which is to inform your critique and engagement with the society which you are in. Initially when I read that I thought, 'that's a bit strange', but the more I've thought about it, the more I've become convinced about it.

Ken Dunstan: *I'm a local curate and long-time Greenbelter. In a couple of days' time we change the worship of much of the Church of England and I felt the frisson of relief at a training day when Mark Earey of Praxis said there won't be another shift like ASB. In the light of all that you've been saying, is something as culture-bound as Common Worship going to be what we need? Is there a way forward, because we are being told that this is far too advanced and all sorts of criticism has been levelled against it despite what I see as some great treasures in there. So whither Common Worship and whither that commonality that it actually tries to bring to the church and to its worship?*

Graham Cray: At Ridley we've been authorised to use the liturgies for about two terms, so I've now used every Eucharistic prayer at least twice. I think we've been given a lot of consumer choice, in the context of what I've been saying tonight, a considerable range of resources to make appropriate choices. For instance, there are now two Eucharistic prayers that you can use with children there, with lots of responses which I'd actually want to use. That was a huge problem before. The concepts in those prayers are not quite as dense. So I think there's a lot of gain. I don't think we're going to go through a great seismic shift. But once again we've printed a great big fat book and I do worry about that, but you can buy the CD-Rom

and Mark Earey's very important little booklet about how you put together your own service, so that's OK. Powerpoint may one day overtake overhead projector in the parish church. I think we need to move forward to a liturgy where people aren't standing shuffling loads of books in their hands, and some accessible way that what you're going to do now bears some similarity and pattern to what you did last week.

Electronic culture, which is forming the young and the young adult, and the future generations, is a literate version of oral culture. It is not a book culture. It requires literacy, but it expects to see things on screens. It is image-based and so on, and I think our churches must engage with that. If we are moving into a culture where there are resources for appropriate local sensitivity, I think that's thoroughly good and I think that fits. I suspect Common Worship is still much too literate and although it looks as though there's a wide range of resources, there's only a wide range of resources for a particular band of the population. I suspect we've got more to do, but I think it's a really hopeful shift which has given us a combination of retaining our tradition and yet having some mission focus freedom. I don't think by any means we've got all that we need yet.

Andrew Knowles: *Graham, it seems to me that you're a man who takes on impossible jobs, and not only gets by but does them superbly well. This evening you've covered your subject in great breadth but also depth. You've scattered us to the wind - I felt entirely blown away at some stages - and then you've gathered us, focused us and in such a way as to give us, I think, great inspiration and hope for the future. So we are indebted to you. Through it all there runs your own very positive and informed evangelical conviction, and we do thank you for adding to your pressures by accepting our invitation to come this evening. We wish you well in Maidstone and I hope we can stay in touch. Thank you so much.*