



Making Good People ... Rather than Making People Good?¹

Stephen Platten²

Stephen.platten@icloud.com

ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the roots of a virtue-based ethics within Anglicanism starting with the Caroline tradition in the seventeenth century. In the twentieth century there was a rebirth of 'Anglican Moral Theology' with the work of Kenneth Kirk, Robert Mortimer and Lindsay Dewar. Issues of perfectibility are examined. The recovery of the Orthodox tradition of deification at the present time and the rebirth of virtue ethics through the work of Alasdair McIntyre are explored. Anglicanism is rooted in an approach where grace is already present in the natural order but which is enhanced by an integralist approach to theology bringing together doctrinal, ascetic and moral theology in one compass.

KEYWORDS: Anglicanism, Caroline Divines, eudaimonism, Grace, Richard Hooker, integralist ethics, Kenneth Kirk, mattering, teleology

The Caroline Moral Tradition

Remembering what we are about in this colloquium, Lincoln may be the most appropriate place to start. So let us begin there, at the time of the Restoration, and with words from the then bishop, Robert Sanderson. Sanderson was one of that group of seventeenth-century theologians popularly styled the Caroline Divines. What we might now

1. Delivered as part of the colloquium 'Church, Communities and Society' held to mark the tenth anniversary of the Lincoln Theological Institute, 25–26 October 2013, at the University of Manchester.

2. The Rt Revd Dr Stephen Platten is Assistant Bishop and Rector of St Michael Cornhill in the City of London and Chair of the Council of the Anglican Centre in Rome.

call moral theology or, alternatively in other circles, Christian ethics, the Carolines often referred to as 'practical divinity'. Sanderson's own definition of practical divinity offers us a very rich point of departure, as we look at how the Christian tradition might still help shape contemporary society. So Sanderson notes: 'But when all is done, *Positive* and *Practick Divinity* must bring us to heaven; that is it must poise our judgements, settle our consciences, direct our lives, mortifie our souls.'³

Elsewhere this is elaborated by Sanderson with regard to law in relation to moral theology. Both in the quotation above and elsewhere in his writings Sanderson brings together in the phrase 'practical divinity', an integrated understanding of Christian theology. It combines moral, ascetic and doctrinal concerns. It must bring us to heaven. The Caroline fathers, then, inspired by Richard Hooker, did not disdain *natural law* but they did redefine it. Sanderson noted, alongside Hooker, that natural law was to be conceived of as the 'pattern of characteristic behaviour' and not simply adherence to a code set forth by an external authority.⁴ So law becomes descriptive, and specifically descriptive of the Christian life. Such a life is governed by both the human individual and the human community focusing minds and hearts on the 'vision of God'.⁵ This vision is attainable only under grace and not under an external law. Perfection is not attainable simply by reason, but instead only through a longing for God focused in the life and teaching of Jesus and formed after his likeness. For Sanderson the vision of God is the goal or *τέλος* (*telos*) of history, so he talks of: 'The beatifical vision of God and Christ in the kingdom of heaven.'⁶

Seventeenth-century Anglican moral theology may seem to be an obscure and even narrow starting point. Why begin there? The answer lies in the manner in which those theologians engaged with the tradition, offered a different slant upon it, and thus established a pattern of thinking that would be rediscovered in the early part of the twentieth century by Kenneth Kirk, Robert Mortimer, Lindsay Dewar and others. This group of theologians effectively rediscovered the

3. XXXV *Sermons*, III, quoted in Henry McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology* (London: Longmans Green, 1949), p. 10.

4. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, p. 16; cf. also A.J. Joyce, *Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially pp. 155–56.

5. As Kenneth Kirk, later on, would classically argue in the first part of the twentieth century, and as set out later in this paper); see Kirk, *The Vision of God* (abridged edn; The Bampton Lectures for 1928; London: Longmans Green, 1934).

6. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, p. 25.

Caroline tradition and developed it further. Henry McAdoo, in his analysis of this tradition comments: 'Caroline moral theology was moreover popular, in that it was meant for the people and (usually) not for the professional theologian ...'.⁷

Hence this is *a moral theology for all*. It is not for an élite or special caste of the 'holy'. It is instead about seeing all life being taken up into God. It issued from the experience of a 'national church' where all who lived within the parish remained the responsibility of the clergy serving there. Hence there was a clear responsibility on the part of the clergy to care for and help shape the moral purpose not simply of the individuals within their care, but also of all who made up the wider community.⁸ The impulse for this is clear in Hooker.⁹ Moral good, then, is not a purely personal possession fashioned entirely out of each individual's relationship with God in Christ. Morality instead is a corporate possession – or better still concern – borne out of a clear sense of mutual responsibility. The earlier foundations for this had effectively been laid by Thomas Cranmer's vision in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The offices from the western tradition are reduced to Morning and Evening Prayer; they are a requirement for clergy and, Cranmer believed, a possibility for laity.¹⁰ Common prayer underpins a common moral vision; the Caroline writers rooted their integrative vision within this context.

Such an understanding is built too on the New Testament understanding of redemption being not only for individuals, but for the whole human race. Paul expresses this notion of redemption most clearly, particularly in the first eight chapters of his letter to the Romans, but also memorably in a celebrated passage in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5.16-19). This reference to Scripture indicates that the tradition uniquely developed by the Caroline Fathers as an integrative theological vision can see its roots in Scripture. Such a vision sees creation as naturally 'graced' and then renewed.

Paul himself implies a *renewal* of creation rather than something appearing *ex nihilo*. It connects with his emphasis on reconciliation

7. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, p. 9.

8. For a clear exposition of this in the period immediately after that of the Caroline fathers, see W.M. Jacob, *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century: 1680–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), especially chs. 7 and 9 on leading worship and the clerical role within education of the young.

9. Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, especially p. 90 onwards.

10. Stephen Platten and Christopher Woods (eds.), *Comfortable Words: Piety and Piety and the Book of Common Prayer* (London: SCM Press, 2012) and especially Stephen Platten, 'All Such Good Works: The Book of Common Prayer and the Fashioning of English Society', pp. 1–19.

and suggests an even better state than before, so there is a sense of contrast instead of replacement.¹¹ Both the message and the ministry of reconciliation are entrusted to humanity through the redemption of all in solidarity. Reconciliation lies at the heart of the moral life and thus of our responsibility for each other. The Caroline pattern of moral response celebrates this and so moral, ascetic, pastoral and doctrinal theology are effectively all of a piece. Alongside this, creation is graced and renewed. McAdoo makes this clear as he contrasts the Caroline model with other traditions.¹² This unity of thought is captured too by John Donne, who writes: 'Moral divinity becomes us all but natural divinity and metaphysic divinity, almost all may spare.'¹³

Donne's reflection emphasizes the significance of moral theology and indicates the danger of an over-emphasis on doctrinal and philosophical theology within the broader stream. Sanderson labels this embracing view of moral theology as *practical divinity*. Later in his analysis he refers to William Law's phrase referring to 'this holiness of common life'.¹⁴ The Caroline tradition does not ignore law, as we have seen, nor does it ignore the need for 'practical divinity' to engage with the day-to-day problems which the world may present; some form of casuistry continues. But all is set within the context of a theological ethic rooted in worship and contemplation.

Kirk's Development of the Caroline Vision

So the Carolines establish the importance of a *moral theology for all*, rooted in the *common life* and not just the individual, and a moral theology which is *integrated with ascetic and doctrinal theology*. This tradition was renewed, notably by Kenneth Kirk and others, in the early twentieth century. Kirk's Bampton Lectures, *The Vision of God*, also see theology in an integrative context: ascetic, moral and doctrinal are held together. Kirk also rekindled the notion of teleology, or purpose, in the

11. So *καινή* in Greek can mean new in the sense of contrast. Cf. here W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1973), p. 395, and also Tom Wright, *Virtue Reborn* (London: SPCK, 2010), especially p. 59 onwards.

12. See, for example, McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, p. 10, when he refers to the cleavage between moral and ascetic theology in Roman Catholic thought in the period before the Second Vatican Council.

13. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, p. 13.

14. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology*, p. 161.

moral life. He argued that the essence of Christian morality is life lived with both the individual's and the community's heart fixed or stayed on 'the vision of God'. Such a focus shapes both the individual and the community's life. Again it is a practical divinity for all, in a human nature already graced by God. Kirk explores patterns of desire for the vision of God in other traditions and then notes:

What is clear so far is that Christianity came into a world tantalized with the belief that some men [*sic*] at least had seen God, and had found in him the vision, the sum of human happiness; a world aching with the hope that the same vision was attainable by all.

He continues:

Thus the stage was set for a new and epoch-making development of religion and ethics, in which those various conceptions and experiences of pre-Christian pioneers should influence the distinctively Christian ethos and inheritance, and by them be influenced in turn, and the end of that development is not yet in sight.¹⁵

Here, with even the pre-Christian being graced, we see captured the so-called *summum bonum*, the sum of human happiness. Here is the *τέλος*, the goal and end of Christian moral theology, which we shall see focused as *blessedness* in the gospels. All this is set by Kirk in the context of the incarnation, so a little later he writes:

This means to say that Jesus, though he speaks little about 'seeing God' brought God more vividly before the spiritual eyes of his contemporaries than any other has ever done. He *gave* a vision of God where others could only *speak* of it.¹⁶

Jesus, then, *was* the image of God. So, Christian morality has a 'personalist' base in a very particular sense, in that *law* is not at the heart, nor even a *book*, but the person of Jesus. Kirk further developed the seventeenth-century pattern of Anglican thought. At the heart of this pattern is the life of holiness. Kirk was clear that this theme is embedded in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. He was clear that his argument is rooted within Holy Scripture. It is set out most clearly, of course, in the so-called 'Holiness Code' in Leviticus. The code prescribes detailed laws for the people of Israel but all is summarized early on in the description of the life of holiness: 'And the Lord said to

15. Kirk, *The Vision of God*, p. 25 and Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, p. 238, indicate that Hooker too saw grace operating more widely, even in other religions: 'certain sparkes of the light of truth intermingled with the darkness of error'.

16. Kirk, *The Vision of God*, p. 46.

Moses, "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19.2).

That same exhortation is mirrored in Matthew's Gospel, the most Jewish of all the four gospels, but there is a significant shift in the command: 'You must therefore be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt. 5.48).

The spirit of Jesus' exhortation to holiness (or *perfection*) in Matthew is perhaps best summarized in the first twelve verses of the same chapter from which the command to perfection comes. Indeed these two key passages frame the chapter which forms the first part of the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes are almost a summary of virtues out of which later contrasts might be drawn.¹⁷ As scholars have noted, the Beatitudes are focused upon a τέλος, a goal or end.¹⁸ The Greek word τέλειος refers to perfection and completeness; the Johannine passion, in a play on this, includes immediately before Jesus' death, the words 'It is finished' or in Greek τετέλεσται; glory and the cross are one (Jn 19.30). The end here, however, in Matthew is *blessedness* (this is to some degree coterminous with *glory* for John).

All this is not only resonant with Kirk's argument but also part of the sub-stratum on which he bases it. This is important for Kirk since he places his argument within the wider context of classical eudaimonism, with resonances in both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy; Kirk is keen to assert its biblical rooting. It is a teleological approach already implied within Holy Scripture. This τέλος directs our human nature, and is focused not on a set of laws but instead on the person of Jesus, his life, the manner of his death, his resurrection, all of which are resonant with his teaching.¹⁹ Incarnation offers to Christianity a palpable, recognizable understanding of the nature of God and of God's calling to us.²⁰ Here then is the foundation of Christian virtue in Jesus himself; Christianity is not a religion of a book but of a person²¹ and the foundations of Christian morality are rooted in that truth. This *moral theology for all*, set out by the Caroline Fathers and developed by Kirk, is part of an *integrated vision* which takes shape being fashioned in

17. Cf. here Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, p. 90 onwards. Although it is quite possible that the Beatitudes originally stood alone, perhaps from a rather different part of the oral tradition collected before the four gospels reached their present written form, this point is not argued for by Wright. The assumption seems to be that this is part of one continuous piece of tradition. There are good reasons for this being otherwise.

18. For example, Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, p. 90.

19. Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, p. 87.

20. Kirk, *The Vision of God*, p. 46.

21. See here the introduction to A.M. Ramsey, *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), pp. 1-7.

the person. More recently and from a very different tradition, Stanley Hauerwas notes of the Sermon on the Mount:

What cannot be forgotten is that the one who preaches the sermon is the Son of God, that is, he is the Messiah, making all things new. The sermon is the reality of the new age made possible in time and so we must be careful not to distinguish the *sermon* from the one who delivers it [my italics].²²

The Moral Vision and Perfectibility

Jesus' words in Matthew's Gospel referring to perfection have resonances in later debates about Christian morality. Talk of the 'perfectibility of humanity' has led to controversy well beyond the bounds of the Christian tradition, and it has also been an issue within the church itself. Our argument here for an integrative vision of the Christian moral life cannot avoid the issue of perfectibility. In his magisterial analysis of this subject, John Passmore writes:

To achieve perfection in any of its classical senses, as so many perfectionists have admitted, it would first be necessary to cease to be human, to become godlike, to rise above the human condition. But a god knows nothing of love, or science, or art, or craft, of family and friends, of discovery, of pride in work. And can we really count as perfection a condition which excludes all of these for the sake of eternity, of order, or of unalloyed enjoyment?²³

Edwin Muir, the poet, who came back later in life to a sacramental Christianity, captures this point implicitly in lines from his *One Foot in Eden*:

Blossoms of grief and charity
Bloom in these darkened fields alone.
What had Eden ever to say
Of hope and faith and pity and love?²⁴

Indeed, Passmore's comment here reminds us of the theological distinction between divine necessity and human contingency. That distinction both offers a definition for humanity in contradistinction to divinity, and is there as the basis for Christian soteriology, in our need for redemption. The Easter hymn, the *Exsultet*, effectively takes this as its starting point: 'O happy fault that won so great a redeemer!' Passmore offers a careful critique of both earlier forms of Christian perfectionism, issuing from the ascetic and mystical traditions, and also

22. Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 60 and see also p. 61.

23. John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1970), p. 326.

24. Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1960), p. 227.

of later post-Reformation stimuli toward perfection. Some of the most serious conflicts within Christian history have been provoked by perfectibilist movements. The Donatist controversy focused on post-baptismal sin; the debate between Augustine and Pelagius focused on grace; the Cathars and the Albigensian crusades were a brutal example of possible problems issuing from perfectibilism, and then later Jansenism was condemned within the Roman Catholic church on account of the heretical impact of that form of perfectibilism. More than once Passmore points also to the double standard ensuing from certain models of perfectibility. So, for example, he looks to John Cassian:

In support of his view that the endless contemplation of God, rather than the practice of good works, is the Christian ultimate objective, Cassian quotes from Luke that story of Mary and Martha which was to provide scriptural support for so many varieties of Christian asceticism and Christian mysticism.²⁵

Such a distinction very swiftly tends toward quietist views of Christianity which blunt any sense of engagement with the world and avoid the wider ethical problems, both social and individual, which assail humanity. Such a narrow form of virtue-based ethics rooted in worship and contemplation hardly speaks to our theme here. That is a salutary warning, as later on we seek to discover *how* ascetic and moral theology ought to be integrated as we see how worship and contemplation might instead shape a proper engagement with social and political problems. Furthermore, the double standard remains the peril. So Passmore notes: 'The distinction between the élite and the ordinary Christian – corresponding to Plato's distinction between philosophical goodness and civic goodness – appears very early in Christianity.'²⁶

It was these very questions, as Passmore indicates, that made the Reformers fear both asceticism and mysticism. Still once again with Wesley, holiness and perfection would reappear. Wesleyan Methodism was itself a 'holiness movement'.²⁷ Nonetheless, Wesley, exponent though he was of Christian perfection, corrected his approach more than once. So he writes in 1765:

In one view [perfection] is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God; it is the giving of God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling

25. John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, p. 119.

26. *The Perfectibility of Man*, p. 121.

27. Still in the covenant process between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, issues of perfectibility in the Methodist tradition have been discussed as the two churches have sought to arrive at unity in faith.

all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, mind and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which is in Christ enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of him that created it. In yet another, it is loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.²⁸

Here Wesley's Arminian sympathies are plain to see; it is about renewal of the heart. This passage suggests no ignoring of human contingency; Wesley is fully aware of our weakness and embraces the need for grace: 'it is the mind which is in Christ enabling us to walk as Christ walked'. Here, then, is the assumption that it is only by the *infusing* grace of God that we may dare to tread the path of perfection, the path of renewal, and for Wesley, as with the Caroline tradition, it is the path for all and not for an exclusive élite.

Any virtue-based ethic must heed, then, the pitfalls of different forms of perfectionism whilst at the same time appreciating the richness of a desire for true holiness or blessedness as the ultimate *τέλος* of such a morality. The Eastern church too has a noble tradition which touches on the theme of perfectibility, a tradition which is enjoying a contemporary renewal. This is the tradition of *theosis* or *deification*. The essence of this belief is that by offering our minds and hearts to God we become able to participate in the Godhead. The necessity and ultimate holiness of God are preserved, but a *eudaimonistic* tradition, attending to the vision of God, and holding together moral and ascetic theology, after the fashion of the Caroline fathers is at the heart of this approach.²⁹

In references to both deification (*theosis*) and eudaimonism, the Caroline Fathers are anticipated by Richard Hooker. He notes: 'All men desire to leade in this world an happie life. That life is led most happily, wherein all virtue is exercised without impediment or lot.'³⁰

This stands behind the impulse toward the moral life which is integrally related to sanctification and so elsewhere he writes of a form of supererogation in the moral life:

...[man] doth covet, yea often times manifestly pursue with great sedulitie and earnestness that which cannot stand him in any stead for vitall use ... somewhat it [this impulse] seeketh and what that is directly it

28. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1765), section 27.

29. Cf. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Khamlamov, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

30. Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, p. 174 quoting Hooker, *Lawes*, I.10.2; I.97.1-3 (all Hooker quotations from Folger Edition).

knoweth not, yet very intente desire thereof doth so incite it, that all other known delightes and pleasures are layde aside, they gave place to the search for this but onlye suspected desire.³¹

It is this very desire that provokes a process which ultimately promises 'union with God'; Hooker even talks of a 'divinisation or glorification'.³²

In a recent monograph, Anthony Baker puts it thus:

Becoming God is not something God can do at all; it is the ultimate creaturely act. If all human work is potentially a sharing in the divine *poesis*, primarily in the Father's eternal generating of the Son, then prayer is the thin place of human-divine poetry, the site where heavenly and earthly activity come to be most entangled with one another. That we can encounter God through human praying is not evidence that we are able to forget ourselves. Rather it shows that God has imbued our language at its fullest with the ability to make us perfect, through making the unmakeable name of the beyond-perfect God. So to lose oneself in prayer to the creator is to find oneself as a creature (Mark 8.35), because the name 'made' by our prayers is our own. That is what it means to share in the life of the Triune God, and to become perfect by resting in the divine perfection.³³

This is the meaning of *eudaimonism* – our chief end is to love God and enjoy him forever.

This engagement with perfection, then, does not indicate either a separated élite, nor indeed a new form of Pelagianism. The *necessity* of the divine and *contingency* of the human remain. Grace is an essential part of the equation. Nonetheless this explanation has deepened an engagement with a moral theology which is teleological or eudaimonistic; it is directed by our being pursued by the good; it is focused upon a blessedness to which all are called, as we encounter that concept in the Beatitudes.

Christian Moral Vision and the Fashioning of Society

The argument so far has been recaptured in different ways in the past generation following a renewal of virtue-based ethics following most notably Alasdair MacIntyre's revisiting of the Aristotelian tradition. The aim, then, is for an *integralist* vision of the Christian life – integralist

31. Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, p. 184, quoting Hooker, *Lawes*, I.11.4; I.115.2-16.

32. Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, p. 185.

33. Anthony D. Baker, *Diagonal Advance: Perfection in Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2011), p. 300.

both in the sense of all theology being one (ascetic, moral, doctrinal) but also as seeing grace and nature moving towards an integrity. In such a vision, grace is already present in the natural order. This is neither the separated universes of Calvinism, nor of the Neo-Scholastics. This is not grace applied to an utterly depraved creation, nor is it a naturally pure creation where grace finally comes to the rescue; nor, indeed, is it nature which is inherently good without any need for grace. Rather – and here F.D. Maurice might be cited notably in his writings on the sacrament of baptism – all things are graced by God, they are experienced as *gift*, but there will frequently be the need for a reorientation, a reordering of that vision.³⁴ The *natural law* can then become more transparent to us and a constant focus upon the vision of God is an instrument of this reordering. In a fallen world, consistent attention to the vision of God, as incarnated in Jesus Christ, may lead to that perfection, that completeness, that glory or blessedness which the gospels manifest in their narratives and which is aided by the continuing prevenience of God's grace.

With such a vision in mind we shall embrace three areas of life in contemporary society where such a vision might have some impact. These comprise the Church's occasional offices, the formative nature of worship and the political and social responsibilities of the Church.

Occasional Offices Fashioning Society

If the vision outlined thus far both assumes a grace-filled creation and is an integralist vision which embraces all humanity, then the occasional offices are almost a sacramental pointer toward that. The Church of England 'by law established' has a unique responsibility here inasmuch as all those who live within any specific geographical location within England can expect the ministrations of the Church of England where they request baptism, marriage or a funeral. Unless individuals have

34. In his very good analysis of F.D. Maurice's work, Jeremy Morris notes: 'For Maurice, taking his cue from the universality of the reconciliation effected by the Incarnation, such a view [i.e. doctrine of salvation by baptism as in Pusey] was tantamount to a denial of the goodness of creation. Maurice's alternative ecclesiology aimed to derive the Church's instrumentality in mediating salvation to human beings in history from the kingdom already initiated in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It was a fundamental axiom of Maurice that God had created human beings for communion with each other and with himself'; see *F. D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 63.

opted out of this expectation, either by being adherents of another faith, Christian church or denomination, *or* by being of no faith – then the Church of England is called upon to offer ministry at these key moments, in these rites of passage, in peoples' lives. This is not meant to exclude other Christian churches for undoubtedly they offer similar ministries to their own members and much of what we might argue here applies to them too.

Baptism is, perhaps, the most controversial of the three sets of rites alluded to, simply because of the variety of ways in which it is understood in different traditions. For Baptists, the rite can only be seriously undertaken by people as adults, when they are capable of acknowledging for themselves the claims demanded by adherence to the Christian faith. Within other traditions there are significant numbers who would adhere to a similar understanding. Within the Church of England, the Roman Catholic tradition, and some of these churches coming from the reformed tradition, however, and indeed in a rather different context within orthodoxy, baptism is administered freely to infants. Children, then, are welcomed from the earliest stages of infancy to the sacrament of baptism. Indeed in earlier centuries baptism was believed to be essential to a child's salvation and emergency baptisms would be performed if the child's life was in danger.

In contrast to this fear of a child's damnation, however, is a very different assumption of prevenient grace obtaining from the beginning.³⁵ It is almost a truism now to speak of the birth of a child as a natural miracle. What greater gift of God in creation could be offered than the advent of a new human life? This extraordinary undeserved gift is completed by a further outpouring of undeserved grace in the sacrament of baptism. How could a child of three months or younger yet have achieved anything to deserve the grace of God given in this rite? Here, then, is the example, earliest in human life, of grace multiplied in the sacramental life of the Church. In so many apparently 'secularized' European societies, families – often unchurched – still approach the Church for the ministration of this sacrament. Their reasons for doing so will be manifold and various but still the gift or grace of God is implored and then outpoured. This demands of the Church, of course, an understanding of how the sacrament should be administered, how the gospel should be communicated, and how at least some sense of the Church embracing these new and innocent young children can be encouraged.³⁶

35. Cf. again F.D. Maurice and baptism.

36. Cf. Paul Avis (ed.), *The Journey of Christian Initiation: Theological and Pastoral Perspective* (London: Church House Publishing, 2011), and especially Stephen

With marriage similar reflections may be made. Again, theological understandings vary within and between the churches. Roman Catholic theologians would still broadly see marriage as a sacrament where the *μυστήριον* is formed in heaven. It is a bond, a *vinculum*, which cannot be set aside by humanity. This means that if a couple have only been married previously in a civil ceremony then a marriage may still be solemnized by a priest. Equally it means that if someone has been married already in church and that marriage has broken down then that person cannot marry again, in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, during the lifetime of their former partner.

The understanding within the Church of England (and this will be mirrored in other traditions too) is that marriage is a 'natural sacrament'. It is the couple who make the marriage and if they have already been married in a civil marriage then that marriage stands.³⁷ So, once again, grace is being added to grace. The natural sacramentality of marriage is itself a grace-filled institution; the blessing of that sacramental covenant by God in church sees grace further abounding.

Then with funeral rites, the churches are still, in a majority of cases, asked to minister to those who are dying, have died and to those who mourn. Here, there is an acceptance of the goodness of each human life and in this acceptance, the operation of God's grace is assumed. The church's ministry promises, in the funeral rite, a further outpouring of God's grace on the goodness of that life now ended. Each of these three sets of rites, then, sees the church as an accepting instrument empowered by God's grace. The church's response is thoroughly inclusive to those calling for its ministry.³⁸ The Church, then, accepts what is there already, celebrating God's grace in creation but working too with God to redeem that which appeared to be lost. Society, then, is accepted, whenever possible celebrated, but also opened up to the possibility of God's grace further abounding.³⁹

(*F note continued*)

Platten, 'The Rites of Christian Initiation - a Bishop's Theological Reflection on Liturgical Practice', pp. 106-25.

37. Within Catholic Anglicanism there has been a tradition of assuming that marriage is a primary sacrament of the Church, following the Roman Catholic understanding of a *vinculum* formed in heaven. Even so, legally all Anglican clergy are 'registrars' and must follow the natural sacramental response to marriage in church.

38. For a particular account of this argument see Wesley Carr, *Brief Encounters* (London: SPCK, 1985).

39. Cf. here W.H. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977).

Grace, Goodness and Worship

The occasional offices have taken us to the context of worship. Indeed further setting this within the background of the Caroline Fathers reminds us of the intentions behind the Book of Common Prayer. Both Cranmer himself and then also later, the divines at the Savoy Conference sought to provide a book which was to be formative of a Christian society, and a book as broadly and generously based as the divisions within the seventeenth-century English Church and society would allow. So the occasional offices provided part of this formative material. Those bringing infants for baptism would be catechised by a priest as indeed would those who later presented themselves for confirmation. Similarly, the marriage rite was set within the context of the community. Banns were called to see that the community would support the betrothed couple; the preface to the rite and the question to the gathered congregation asking if there is any impediment to this union similarly contextualized the rite while at the same time setting out the aims of marriage. The funeral rite, albeit more terse, aimed to be similarly formative.

But Cranmer and his later revisions aimed at something more. His transformation of the manifold monastic hours into the *two* offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, to which we referred in our introductory section, was designed to offer a pattern not only for the discipline and nurture of the clergy but for wider society too. The day was to be framed in prayer and the hope was that lay people would be part of that broad community of prayer. So the Caroline desire for a moral theology not simply for an élite grew partly out of Cranmer's original desire for a godly society. Recent scholarship has emphasized the formative influence of the Book of Common Prayer on English society throughout its history, building on the foundations of the earlier Tudor prayer books.⁴⁰ J.K.A. Smith writes of a 'Christian social imaginary' arguing for the primacy of worship in forming a world view. So he notes: 'Historic Christian worship is fundamentally formative because it educates our hearts through our bodies (which in turn renews our mind) ...'⁴¹

Smith's argument here echoes Paul in Romans where he admonishes his readers: 'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom. 12.2).

40. Platten and Woods, *Comfortable Words*.

41. J.K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 137.

Morality and Politics

How, then, does the church more widely relate to the political and social aspects of our society?⁴² There are two phrases which pick up something of the essence of our argument thus far. The first is rooted in the Aristotelian origins of much Christian teaching on natural law in relation to wider society and to social ethics. It is the reference to the *common good*. The term has been used widely within the Roman Catholic social ethical tradition, but equally it has been embraced throughout the churches and notably within Anglicanism where Richard Hooker and others have continued within a tradition of critical Aristotelianism.⁴³ Common good refers to the good which is already there within society, but which also recognizes the need of God's grace (referred to in some traditions as *common grace*) to redeem those elements within society where that good is in need of renewal.

A second term of more recent coinage and used most particularly within the Church of England is that of *critical solidarity*. This argues for the possibility of an established church standing alongside government and establishment, but critically, pointing again to the need for grace to redeem where our humanity falls short. An integralist view of moral theology or practical divinity assumes goodness in society given through God's grace as we saw in the occasional offices. Nonetheless, it requires of us still a critical stance to see where society needs to be open to the further operation of God's grace. This sharpens the need within a democratic society for a proper seriousness to be assumed about the nature of human society. It points beyond the easily assumed trivialization that issues from a 'celebrity culture'. It is profoundly aware of the way in which human individuals and societal relationships *matter*.

A variety of different philosophical approaches to humanity all point in this direction. We have already touched upon the Aristotelian tradition. Kantian ethics, issuing from a very different starting point talks of a categorical imperative; one form of that imperative assumes that persons must always be seen as ends in themselves and never

42. Cf. Richard Harries and Stephen Platten (eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); see especially Platten, 'Niebuhr, Liturgy and Public Theology', pp. 102-15; and see also Edward Foley, 'Engaging the Liturgy and the World: Worship and Public Theology', *Studia Liturgica*, 38.1 (2008), p. 35.

43. Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, p. 91. Quoting Hooker, she notes his reflection on 'laws politique': '...that they be no hindrance unto the common good for which societies are instituted: unless they do this they are not perfect'; Lawes, I.10.1; I:96.24-32.

simply as means to an end. Elizabeth Telfer and R.S. Downie focused on the concept of 'respect for persons'.⁴⁴ Helen Oppenheimer, the philosophical theologian, puts it differently again. She reflects: 'Suppose we define a person as an irreplaceable centre of minding.'⁴⁵

She continues:

[Christian morality] ... starts with human beings as they find themselves from infancy: wholly separate and wholly dependent. Every baby that yells is saying 'I matter' and 'I need you'. Each human creature is its own world and morality is about the interlocking of our worlds. We find in experience that our words can and must interlock, that each individual mattering is not all the mattering there is. People who are lucky enough to grow up surrounded by human love are taught from the outset, not merely to adjust themselves to other people's matterings, but to enter into it. What the gospel adds is the assurance that we are made for this, that the mattering we have experienced is real and is the purpose of creation.⁴⁶

This lies at the heart of the eudaimonistic tradition which we have been exploring. It points to a renewed Christian humanism which manifests itself in that inherited tradition within European thought, bridging across the Reformation divides and even linking to the undivided church of east and west. Oppenheimer notes: 'there is no need to try to exclude the unbeliever from this kind of humanism, any more than the unbeliever has the right to exclude the Christian. We can all be personalists together.'⁴⁷

So, this integralist vision, rooted in the 'mattering' of all 'matter' brings a new and appropriate seriousness to our society. It celebrates the irreplaceability, the necessary mattering of all that is created. It is this gift of all creation which is the essence of the grace given by God, and renewed by God in all humanity to redeem that which might be lost. As W.H. Vanstone argued, all creation is poised on a knife-edge between triumph and tragedy; God's gracious gift for redemption is open for all humanity to embrace.⁴⁸ Here is the context for our celebrating as one integralist vision, 'Church, Communities and Society'.⁴⁹

44. Cf. for example in Helen Oppenheimer, *Making Good* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p. 27.

45. Helen Oppenheimer, *The Hope of Happiness* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 92.

46. Oppenheimer, *The Hope of Happiness*, p. 93.

47. Oppenheimer, *The Hope of Happiness*, pp. 93–94.

48. Vanstone, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense*.

49. This was the title of the Lincoln Institute Colloquium in Manchester.