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ARTICLE

A Practical-Prophetic-Pastoral Exemplar: An Extended Homily on the Ministry and Writings of Percy Dearmer

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Abstract

An extended homily or meditation that focuses on some aspects of the life and work of Percy Dearmer. Dearmer, in his pastoral attentiveness, irenic prophetic action, and practical Christianity, sought to continue a distinctive English Anglican tradition of faithfully fulfilling his vocation through a richly incarnational ministry.

Keywords: Anglicanism; ecclesiology; English Hymnal; ministry; Parson's Handbook; Percy Dearmer

Introduction

As will become apparent, this article is essentially an extended homily or meditation that focuses on some aspects of the life and work of Percy Dearmer. However, my starting point is not with him, but rather with a simple assertion. Namely, that Jesus is the exemplar of our faith. We see 'the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ' is how this mystery is expressed with characteristic economy in 2 Cor. 4.6. That is to say, the face of Christ is both communicative and receptive. Our faces are a window into our condition. They can radiate warmth, empathy, compassion and spiritual sentience. They can also register pain, dismay and quizzical doubt. So any statement about the 'the glory of God' being revealed in one face is some claim. Jesus is the fullest expression of God that has been revealed to us. Jesus is the person God chose to be. In that sense, we can speak of Jesus being the body-language of God. And in another sense, the church as the body of Christ is called to be richly sensate within the contexts and communities it ministers.

A sensate body exemplified in Jesus provides a model for the ministry of the church. For example, in gospel healing encounters, the remarkable thing about Jesus' ministry is that it *discriminates*: he is *for* the unknown, the unnamed, the lost, the marginalized, demonized and the victimized. Likewise, as the body-language of God, Jesus ministry and in his incarnation expresses and exemplifies God's

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solidarity the unseen, unheard and untouched. His body is richly sensate and exemplary. Jesus constantly consorts with the *wrong* sorts of people in the eyes of the righteous. Moreover, Jesus gets no return for his investment in 'the lost' or 'the unclean'; he wilfully loves the loveless, and seeks out those whom society has given up on.

That said, the homiletic tone of this essay is intended to do what all sermons and homilies aspire towards. Namely, to prompt some reflection, some further self-examination and some soul-searching. At the same time, to induct us into imaginative ways of thinking critically about our Christian tradition, alongside the challenges we face in our daily lives and complex social existences. So, how does this relate to our conversation here at Berkeley at the Divinity School at Yale, and on the life and work of Percy Dearmer? Quite simply, I want to suggest that Dearmer, in his pastoral attentiveness, irenic prophetic action, and in his practical Christianity, sought to continue that distinctive English Anglican tradition of faithfully fulfilling his vocation through a richly incarnational ministry. It is this faithfulness that connects his (best-selling, let us not forget) *Parson's Handbook* to the *English Hymnal*; and his ministry in the Great War to his later years as a Canon of Westminster Abbey.

Dearmer at Christ Church

Dearmer's education as an undergraduate would not suggest a practical-prophetic-pastoral trajectory for such a clergyman. Dearmer was educated at Christ Church, Oxford – a unique 'dual foundation' comprising an Oxford College and the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of Oxford. From 1886 to 1889 he studied modern history at Christ Church, Oxford, receiving his degree in 1890. There is a kind of prevailing assumption that Christ Church is a natural home for the 'Conservative Party at Prayer'. Over the years, Christ Church – or 'the House' as it is known – has produced significant numbers of Conservative British Prime Ministers, with William Ewart Gladstone perhaps the most notable exception. Even today, the Christ Church that the media conjures up in the public imagination is often something connected with the infamous Bullingdon Club (portrayed in the 2014 film, *The Riot Club*) – an epitome of over-privileged undergraduates, engaging in rampant anti-social classism.

However, I think there is another deep and thick stream that is also to be found in 'the House', namely one of Christian Socialism. This found expression, for example, in the life and work of Bishop George Bell (1883–1958). Bell was an undergraduate at Christ Church, and also a Junior Fellow from 1910–14. At Oxford, George Bell was one of the founders of a cooperative for students and university members and sitting on the board of settlements and worker-development through the Workers' Educational Association. The same stream of social activism can be found, equally, in the founding of OXFAM, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, by a group of Quakers, social activists, and Oxford academics in 1942 – with several of the original founders drawn from 'the House'.

It is thus by paying due attention to the oft-hidden 'soil' of conscious social activism that might allow us to locate and understand how the seeds of Dearmer's own

Christian Socialism might have been nourished during his formative years at 'the House'. Dearmer's theology, ecclesiology and social activism emerged out of something of a golden age for English Anglican clergy and laity who were 'high church' by inclination. But these were the essentially 'open ritualists' (sometimes known as 'liberal catholics') who practised generous orthodoxy – and held socialist or progressive liberal views in matters of theology or politics. His exposure to this in Oxford, and at 'the House', is not in doubt.

Following ordination, Dearmer eventually became the Vicar at St Mary's Primrose Hill, and this helped to form his liturgical work and pastoral theology. But after this, Dearmer served in no further official ecclesiastical posts until 1931, preferring instead to focus on his writing, volunteerism and affecting social change. During the First World War he served as a chaplain to the British Red Cross ambulance unit in Serbia, where his first wife died of typhus in 1915. In 1916 he worked with the Young Men's Christian Association in France and for the Mission of Help in India. Dearmer served as secretary of the Christian Social Union from 1891 to 1912. After being appointed a Canon of Westminster Abbey in 1931 he ran a canteen for the unemployed out of it. In addition to his writings, volunteer efforts and work with the church, Dearmer served as visiting professor at the Berkeley Divinity School in Middletown, Connecticut, from 1918 to 1919, and then later as the first Professor of Ecclesiastical Art at King's College London. from 1919. He remains arguably best known for his *The Parson's Handbook*, a liturgical manual for Anglican clergy.

As indicated earlier, one of the oft-neglected facets of Percy Dearmer's ministry was his early affinity with Christian Socialism. He shared this with Ralph Vaughan Williams, and others. Their agenda was social change. Katie Palmer Heathman points out that as the lead editors of *The English Hymnal* (1906), Percy Dearmer and Ralph Vaughan Williams found Victorian hymnody in need of serious revision, and not just aesthetically. This musical book was intended as an expression of the editors' commitment to the participation of the congregation.[2] Heathman examines how they achieved this by the encouragement of 'active citizenship' through communal music-making, using folk tunes alongside texts which affirmed community. She argues that the editors wedded religion and high-quality music with a focus on citizenship drawn from British Idealism; using a cultural movement to seek social change.

The presuppositions of the early Christian Socialist movement were comparatively simple, and perhaps to modern minds, obvious. Taking their cue from an emphasis on incarnational theology, they held that as all were in Christ, so was God, in Christ, bound up in the *material* of humanity as much as its spirituality. This meant that the agenda of the Kingdom of God was closely related to the concerns of the world, and most especially where suffering and injustice could be located and experienced. Correspondingly, an interest in the extension of suffrage, the relation of capitalism to the labouring poor, and addressing and alleviating the

[2]Katie Palmer Heathman, '"Lift Up a Living Nation": Community and Nation, Socialism and Religion in *The English Hymnal*, 1906', *Cultural and Social History: The Journal of the Social History Society*, 14.2 (2017), pp. 183-200.

conditions of poverty became primary arenas for debate, and for developing a Christian perspective.

Yet an ideological shift would not be enough for protagonists such as Dearmer. To be sure, Christian Socialism challenged the prevailing and complacent views about the scope of theology and the place of the church in society. In effect, the dominant other-worldly piety of Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, which had been so strong in the early nineteenth century (a mainly spiritual response to massive social and cultural upheaval, including the rise of industrialization at the expense of agrarian communities), was questioned by the more incarnational emphasis that Christian Socialists placed on social action and solidarity with the working classes.

This is the kind of 'soil' from which the irenic Christian Socialism of Dearmer took root. It explains, to some extent, why both the *Hymnal* and the *Handbook* are linked to Dearmer's theological vision for ministry, as both projects are concerned for the church as a worshipping community in common ownership, rather than as an institution run by a hierarchical clerisy. The nurturing context for the possibility of utopian-radicalism cannot be over-emphasized.[3] Just as early Christian Socialists such as Maurice, Ludlow and Kingsley had responded to and fed off the work of the Chartists, so were Christian Socialists such as Dearmer now able to situate their own writing and ministry in relation to the poverty wreaked by the Great War, and the stark economic depressions that followed in its wake.

Practical, Prophetic, Pastoral

Nicholas Healy's recent prescient work in the field of ecclesiology calls for something I think Dearmer would have approved of, namely, '[the] church-wide social practice of communal self-critical analysis [bearing] upon the issue of Christian formation'.[4] This might lead, in turn, to what Healy describes as 'practicalprophetic' ecclesiology, which arises out of conceiving of the church in the world:

> Practical-prophetic ecclesiology acknowledges that Christian existence is never stable or resolvable in terms of purely theoretical constructions, but is ever-moving, always struggling along with the theodrama. It acknowledges too that the church must engage with other traditions of enquiry not only for their sake, but for its own, in order that it may on occasion hear the Spirit of the Lord in their midst.[5]

But what of the prophetic here in relation to Dearmer? I doubt that he would have seen his theological outlook and his ecclesial practice as anything more than practical and pastoral. And yet I am mindful of the counsel of one of my colleagues, the Reverend Canon Professor Nigel Biggar, the Regius Professor of Social, Moral

[3]Dearmer understood that this could be achieved in sublime worship, which was individually and socially transformative. For a recent discussion of this phenomena, see J.D. Riding, 'Touching Mystery: The Book of Common Prayer as Liminal Space', *Faith and Worship*, 84 (Lent 2019), pp. 36-46.

[4]N. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 178.

[5]Healy, *Church*, p. 185.

and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford – one of the four Professorial Canons' posts at Christ Church. He writes that:

> True prophets are ones who don't much enjoy playing prophet. They don't enjoy alienating people, as speakers of uncomfortable truths tend to do. They don't enjoy the sound of their own solitary righteousness and they don't enjoy being in a minority of one. True prophets tend to find the whole business irksome and painful. They want to wriggle out of it, and they only take to it with reluctance. So beware of those who take to prophesy like a duck to water, and who revel in the role. They probably aren't the real thing.[6]

Prophets are innately cautious creatures. Caricatures of raging fire-storm preachers should be set aside. True prophets are more emotionally integrated. They are pastoral, contextual and political theologians. They *care* about people and places. They have virtues such as compassion, care, kindness, self-control, humility and gentleness. But they have passion and energy for change too; often reluctantly expressed, and only occasionally finding voice in anger. There is a long tradition of those who write from a pastoral grounding, and yet are also prophetic. Here I think of the likes of Una Kroll, Ched Myers or Gerald Arbuckle, each playing their part in shaping the world and the church.[7] This is manifested via a thorough practical-prophetic-pastoral theology that actively seeks social change. Moreover, such theological outlooks tend to be rooted not in frustration, but rather in hope. Indeed, in the hope of the Kingdom of God that is to come, and so therefore critically engaged with the institution of the present. To some extent, this is the same tension that all Christians labour with, and it frequently lies in the gaps between what the church is, and what it is called to be: between the values hopes and deep desire for the Kingdom of God to come; and yet with the church here on earth, in all its miscibility, muddling and machinations.

I think this gives us some partial explanation for *The Parson's Handbook*. True, it is a kind of 'manual' for clergy, and covers the ground you would expect a book of that kind to address: how to organize the vestry, through to the ordering of processions.[8] (It arguably spends too much time on liturgy, and not enough time on the rest of ministry, but let us not quibble.) Meticulously footnoted, Dearmer goes to extraordinary lengths to position his *Handbook* as a scholarly resource for all clergy, independent of their ecclesial proclivity. Dearmer's own 'Introduction' appeals to 'low', 'middle' and 'high' cultures of the church, each of which will have some bearing on the shaping and formation of clerical identity.

To some extent, one has to see Dearmer's *Handbook* as an exercise in ecclesial group reflection. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who were clergy,

[6]Nigel Biggar, 'On Judgment, Repentance and Restoration', a Sermon preached at Christ Church Cathedral, 5 March 2017, and quoted in Martyn Percy (ed.), *Untamed Gospel: Protests, Poems, Prose* (London: Canterbury Press, 2017).

[7]See Una Kroll, *Vocation to Resistance: Contemplation and Change* (London: DLT, 1995); Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970); Gerald Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993).

[8]My own copy is a 1932 vintage, and is the twelfth edition of the volume. The book was still being published well into the 1960s.

and what were they for? The questions are not as simple as some may suppose. Sociologically, clergy were trying to reinvent themselves as 'technicians of the sanctuary' or as 'preachers from the pulpit', depending on their churchmanship. But the very appearance of these more intense forms of ecclesial proclivity in the nineteenth century suggests a church slowly turning in on itself to find solace in more tribal forms of identity. Moreover, as 'occupations' – medical and legal, for example – became more professional in character, and indeed developed into 'professions' with qualifications and career-orientated trajectories, so the church found itself trying to develop something similar. Dearmer's *Handbook* is therefore suggestive, pointing as it does to the drift of clerical identity: from being holders of occupations to becoming people with professions.

However, Dearmer's sympathies clearly lie more with clergy as primarily pastoral exponents rather than as liturgical or preaching professionals. As Anthony Judge observes in his social history of British policing,[9] some occupational roles have remained lonely, despite professionalizing, by virtue of their character. Policing is, like priestly ministry, more likely to set the person *apart* from society than draw the individual in. Similarly, and his ground-breaking and magisterial book *The Clerical Profession*,[10] Anthony Russell observed the same, combining history, sociology and theology to explore how ordained ministry moved from being an 'occupation' to understanding itself as some kind of 'profession'. But this was never a comfortable move.

So, Russell writes of three possible ways of imagining the future of the church. The first is *traditionalist*, in which the past and present is largely retained for the future. Dwindling numbers in congregations, secularization, consumerism or pluralism, or other crises or issues that require a dynamic and responsive engagement are simply met by the advocacy of an unchanging tradition.

The second is *adaptionist* in character. Promoters of this approach recognize that elements of the tradition have become redundant and cannot be rehabilitated. The church adapts and changes, as much as any living organism or institution does in response to its changing environment. Adaptionists maintain as much coherence with the past as is possible, but adopt a faithful-pragmatic outlook for the present, and as they look to the future.

The third is *reformist* in character, and this is typically the most radical of the three. That said, one often encounters many individuals and groups in the study of contemporary ecclesiology, who also claim the 'radical' crown for being traditionalists or adaptionists. In some ways, it is like small conservative groups claiming to be 'radical' solely because they constitute an unfashionable minority. Reformers typically tend to make and drive deliberate changes, and will be the most likely group to conceive of radical possibilities for the institutions and organizations they are part of. That said, many who narrate themselves as 'radical' in the church will transpire to be closet-adaptionists.

What I find refreshing about Dearmer's ministry is that he avoids being seduced by any of these three options. Rather, his practical-pastoral-prophetic approach to

[9]Anthony Judge, *A Man Apart: The British Policeman and his Job* (London: Arthur Baker Publishing, 1972).

[10]A. Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (London: SPCK, 1980).

ministry permitted him to reposition clergy as being grounded, abiding and occupied. So, the connection between the *Parson's Handbook* and the *English Hymnal* is Dearmer's desire to see the church authentically grounded in a community, so that it served all the people of God, and was socially transformative. The burden of the work is not merely to assist the church, but rather to improve society. Dearmer's own exemplary abiding found expression in his Christian Socialism, but also quite directly in phases of his ministry that were less concerned with the institutional church, and more focused on what we now might term the building of the Kingdom of God. So, Dearmer's deeply incarnational sense of his own priestly vocation led him to forms of ministry, which in turn, could now be construed as prophetic-prophetic in character. Yet underpinning this was a theology of ministry that was absorbed in sublime worship, that in turn flowed naturally into social and pastoral modes of transformation.

Correspondingly, I find Dearmer's war-time ministry to be one of the more profoundly touching phases of his vocation. The cost of this ministry, coupled with the death of his first wife as a result of the risks they both took in serving their people, remind me of a poem that seeks to call out the best in all those who strive to offer their lives for the oblation of ordained ministry:

Give us a man of God
Father, to pray for us,
Longed for, and insignificant,
But excellent in mercy,
And ordain him.
Someone who loves the mystery of the faith
Whose conversation seems
Credibly to come from heaven
A poor man, a hungry man
Whose hospitality is endless.

Give us a preaching man,
Father, who doesn't know how to fake,
A free man, on holiday
In this parish, a still man
Good as an ikon
With a heart full of treasure;
Someone to talk to
When death comes here,
A fellow countryman of birth and death
And the dynasty of our family,
Whose eye has missed nothing.

Give us a man without sanctimony
Father, to handle what is eternal,
A private citizen among miracles
Not his, modest
Capable of silence
Someone who reminds us now and then

Of your own description
And another kingdom
By the righteousness of his judgement
Or some grace in what's done
In laying down his life even
For his friends.[11]

As I reflect on this for the present, I observe that the mission of the church is a vocation to serve communities, not just convert individuals into members. Partly for this reason, the church would be wise to tread more cautiously in attempting to recast clerical and ministerial paradigms of leadership through apparently more successful secular moulds. The more the church today is treated as an 'organization', the more its mission becomes focused on techniques designed to maximize output and productivity. The church can become obsessed with quantity instead of quality; and where we may have a care for quality, it is only to serve the larger goal of increasing the goal of quantity. The church easily moves to becoming a 'managed machine of productivity', with its managers judging their performance by growth-related metrics. Yet as John Robinson observes, 'We have got to relearn that "the house of God" is primarily the world in which God lives, not the contractor's hut set up in the grounds . . . '. Put another way, the church was only ever meant to be the constructor's hut on God's building site, which is the world (or if preferred, substitute 'world' for 'Kingdom of God'). The church is not God's main project. The world is.[12]

Invariably, clergy and congregations can be made to collude with the very opposite of this, as though the church was somehow God's main concern. But it is merely an ark of salvation; a vehicle; a field hospital for healing communities; a constructor's hut for enabling the building of God's kingdom. Yet, largely through existential-evangelistic angst, or the imposition of codes of compliance, and all in the name of 'missional excellence' or 'healthy churches', the church turns in on itself. This has the potential to corrode the soul of the church – and the vocational-oblation of the clergy – who are seeking to serve their communities with compassion, care and kindness, and their congregations with appropriate passion and zeal.[13]

So what are the clergy actually for? Reading Dearmer's *Parson's Handbook*, he understandably takes much of this question for granted. However, I detect throughout Dearmer's work a committed incarnational and performative concern that is centred on the clergy being set apart as mediators of grace. In some respects, we might say that Dearmer's implicit theology of ministry (also expressed in the endeavour of the *Hymnal*) represents an appropriately measured sacramentality. And by sacramental here, I mean those mediated points of instrumentality in which the life of God meets the life of the world. Through material -– bread, water, wine, flesh (e.g., the clasping of hands), oil, unction, and ordination – abundant grace is

[11]Reginald Askew, Advisory Council for Church Ministry prayer card, Petertide, 1975.

[12]John Robinson, *The New Reformation* (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 27.

[13]For a fuller discussion see Ian Tomlinson, *Clergy, Culture and Ministry: The Dynamics of Roles and Relations in Church and Society* (ed. M. Percy; London: SCM Press, 2017).

somehow poured out. Indeed, such grace is always greater than the material it comes through, for God's abundance is always immeasurably abundant.

To be sure, some theologies of ministry still entertain romantic fantasies about distinctiveness; but it is in the tasks and life of ministry that clergy begin to find the correspondence between the Creator and the created. The 'set-apart-ness' that guarantees both centrality and marginality in any community or parish is fundamental to the vocation. Moreover, it is frequently in the marginality of life and death that the office and calling becomes most apparent. In more recent times, one writer, Tom Lynch, a funeral director who constantly witnessed the ministry of clergy in death and bereavement, reflects upon the nature of this sacramental calling:

> in each case these holy people treated the bodies of the dead neither as a bother or embarrassment, nor an idol or icon, nor just a shell. They treated the dead like one of our own, precious to the people who loved them, temples of the Holy Spirit, neighbours, family, fellow pilgrims. They stand – these clergy, these local heroes, these saints and sinners, these men and women of God – in that difficult space between the living and the dead, between faith and fear, between humanity and Christianity and say out loud, 'Behold, I show you a mystery.'[14]

Essentially, clergy are set apart. And they occupy that strange hinterland between the secular and sacred, the temporal and the eternal, acting as interpreters and mediators, embodying and signifying faith, hope and love. They are both distant and immediate; remote, yet engaged. And in occupying this most marginal and transitory ground, and sometimes helping to close the gaps between these worlds, they become humanly and spiritually necessary even as they live out their (party self-willed, partly communally imposed) social marginality. It is nothing less than to follow the call of Jesus: to belong both to the wilderness, but also to the city. To be a citizen of some place; but also of nowhere; of earth and of heaven. To be of the people; but also for their sake, to be wholly, holy other. I realize that this may be deeply unfashionable to say, but perhaps the most important thing about ministry is, after all, to be vested in the notion of *occupation*.

The calling of clergy is to be occupied with God – and then to be preoccupied with all the people, places and parishes that are given by God into our care: to dwell amongst, care for and love those people and places as Christ would himself. This ministry requires an eye for detail: noticing things that others might gloss over, or otherwise overlook. But as I have remarked on a number of occasions, clergy are invariably 'naturally' emotionally intelligent individuals. They can see the look in the parishioner's eye that harbours fear or pain, even though they may be smiling and speaking to you, and asserting that they are 'fine, actually', and that 'everything is OK'. Clergy can often read the emotional temperature of a room, home, meeting or gathering: they 'sense' the underlying emotional and social 'weather-patterns' that swirl around, beneath the prevailing and presenting sense of 'atmosphere'.

[14]Tom Lynch, 'Good Grief', *Christian Century*, 26 July 2003, and cited in Martyn Percy, *Clergy: The Origin of Species* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 188.

Clergy cannot stop themselves reflecting, processing, interpreting and reframing. True, some may find solace in the tribal cultures of ultra-Protestantism or Anglo-Catholicism. Yet the vast majority do not. They are occupied with what is before them; office bearers, trying to hold people in that liminal space of grace we know to be the presence of God. That is one of the reasons I admire the poem 'Knotty Nineties' by Hilary Greenwood SSM (1969) – a celebration of clergy noticing the details, enjoying the love and life of others shared in moments most will overlook:

> What I like about being a priest
> is nothing to do with the cultic beast
> or having a message to write on the leaves
> or offering charms to the heart that grieves
> or counting the sheep in a pitch-pine fold
> or wearing a shirt of cloth-of-gold,
> no, none of these – but marrying
> the glory to the little thing:
> to eavesdrop on a monologue
> delivered to a woolly dog;
> to hear the tones of righteous rage
> excite the prophet of schoolboy age;
> to sit down in a bus behind
> four lots of fingers intertwined;
> to see the boy's face in the man's
> blush when he comes to put up the banns:
> to watch rheumatic ladies pat
> a blessing on the pampered cat –
> what I like about being a priest
> is turning everything to the east.[15]

Conclusion

In a highly influential essay, 'Created and Redeemed Sociality', Dan Hardy writes that:

> The task of theology, then, is to begin from common practice and examine its quality in open trial by the use of natural reason in order to discover the truth of this practice, by a truth-directed reason … (including) practical reason. And the outcome … should be an agreement on the proper organisation of common life which would actually promote the practice of society …. The concern is public … the use of public reason, open trial of the truth and the achievement of truly social existence.[16]

[15]Cited in Tomlinson, *Clergy*, p. 174.

[16]Dan Hardy, 'Created and Redeemed Sociality', in D. Hardy and C. Gunton (eds.), *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), pp. 21-47 (33).

Hardy's theological vision articulates Dearmer's ecclesial praxis. For in the *English Hymnal* and *The Parson's Handbook*, we see a very real endeavour for truth-directed social ordering; one that has a vision for the betterment of society, and does not merely seek to address deficiencies within the church. The burden of Dearmer's ministry was not simply to turn worship, or for that matter the clergy, into something more 'fit for purpose', such that the *Handbook* and the *Hymnal* might simply serve the church. Dearmer's labour was that as holy and (appropriately) occupied people, those at worship, or who are called into ordained ministry, can actually contribute towards making a better society. The Anglican vision of the church – carried forward and exemplified in Dearmer's writings and ministries – is first and foremost a blueprint for the ordering of society. Anglican polity is primarily a social vision that has ecclesial consequences; it is not (merely) an expression of ecclesial polity with some accidental social consequences.[17]

As Hardy says, the outcome of all such ecclesial reflection 'should be an agreement on the proper organisation of common life which would actually promote the practice of society'. Yet such a vision for the world, under God, requires a real sensitivity to the character and nature of the worship and ministries we inhabit, and the people we serve. It is only when we are occupied with God that we can then glimpse and glean some of the possibilities for the church and world that God's Kingdom may inaugurate; indeed, to imagine how Christ's own nature, power and love might reshape the world.

I began this extended homily by reminding us of the implied ministry for the church contained in Paul's phrasing, that the 'the glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ', and that Jesus is the 'body language of God'. God occupies the world though Christ, and in so doing, becomes 'sensate' to its pains, sorrows and grief, as well as its joys. I therefore think that if we are to understand Percy Dearmer's socially transformative vision for ministry and worship, it must be read through his own understanding of the pastoral and prophetic example that Jesus set before us. Our churches are sacramental vocations: there to occupy and abide, and bridge the gap between created and redeemed sociality. The church holds the world before God. As the body of Christ, it is called to be nothing less than the social-sacramental skin for the world – and for all the communities we serve.[18]

[17]On this, see Paul Avis, 'Polity and Polemics: The Function of Ecclesiastical Polity in Theology and Practice', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 18 (2016), pp. 2-13.

[18]On this, see Martyn Percy, 'The Household of Faith', in P. Avis and Benjamin Guyer (eds.), *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 316-40.

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