



# Out of the Depths

**LITURGICAL RESPONSES  
TO PUBLIC GRIEF**

**Andrew Barr**

*with the Joint Liturgical Group*



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churches  
together  
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND<sup>®</sup>

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# Preface

## **OUT OF THE DEPTHS**

This resource book grows out of a debate begun at Joint Liturgical Group (JLG) conferences. A number of us, drawn from the British Churches puzzled over the changes and challenges of public worship in the market place where strangers may briefly become neighbours. This includes the current role of cathedrals. Others have described how Government is creating liturgies for public occasions and then choosing spiritual leaders to deliver their liturgies. The JLG has noted the development of national times of silence of variable lengths for a variety of commemorations. While the traditional observance of remembrance of the war dead remains prominent, even after the death of the last survivors of World War One, the new and spontaneous ritual that emerged of honouring the dead repatriated from Afghanistan as their bodies passed through Royal Wootton Bassett, demonstrated a new form of expression created without connection to organised religion.

This book focuses on the practical problems that will often arise at very little notice, and offers suggestions for a response. The members of the JLG aim to offer good practice in what follows. In each section members of the group have shared their practical experiences.

This experience is not offered as a definitive blue-print. We recognise that many leaders of public worship have much experience, and some an instinctual approach to liturgy, but we hope that this publication will stimulate further contribution to the debate, and a greater sharing of ideas.

We do, however, see this guide as an encouragement for preparation when, without warning, there is a sudden surge of national

grief. These have come with increasing frequency in recent times, and they can bring huge pressure to bear on a community, as in the Cambridgeshire village of Soham and after the tragedy in the small Scottish town of Dunblane.

We recognise that some organisations have contingency plans. Mainly these deal with 'who does what' and liaison with emergency services, as witnessed by the 2006 Home Office findings into the follow-up to the 7/7 London bombing.

This publication is a spiritual resource book for people under pressure, maybe in shock, to help guide them swiftly and thoughtfully to symbols, words, music and ideas. *Out of the Depths* does not offer new liturgical texts, but provides the background and resources for worship in these circumstances. We hope that this will be a widely available asset, discussed by ecumenical and other faith partners, as well as in the individual congregation.

## **JLG BACKGROUND**

The Joint Liturgical Group (JLG) began in 1963, drawn from the mainstream of Britain's Trinitarian Churches and is today affiliated to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). For more than forty years it has served the churches of Britain in the renewal of worship. This guide continues a programme of response to the needs of worship in Britain. This is done in the context of a common liturgical thinking shared by the worldwide Church.

The JLG is a creative group offering its work to the churches to use as they see fit. Recently the JLG has produced resources for Remembrance Day, *Beyond our Tears*, and in 2005 was the sponsoring body working with The Royal British Legion to produce a new order of *Service for Remembrance-tide*. Both were published on behalf of CTBI.

## *Introduction*

# **The Changing Face of Public Grief**

### **THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN NATIONAL LIFE**

What is the role of a church in national life, when its historic role of leading 'public worship' can be marginalised by media-led grief? In 1975, *The Times* insisted that 'clergy have an important part to play at the scene of major disasters; who is to look after the uninjured driver who has flattened a private car and its occupants and is wandering about in a state of deep shock? Who is to stand by the parents whose children have been killed, or children whose parents are dead?' The newspaper report commended a scheme in the Diocese of Bradford, where ecumenical teams of clergy had been established with an agreed system of leadership.

Some four decades later, there are some areas where this exists but the 'virtual' community apparently gives expression to a 'global community of interest' who draw on a spiritual hotch-potch of folk faith, the sacred and almost accidental echoes of the Christian gospel. The reaction appears incoherent and quite beyond the once contained authority of the parish or religious community. There are no longer natural leaders and 'wisdom' and 'understanding' at a time of grief can apparently be offered by anyone.

### **THE CHANGING FACE OF PUBLIC GRIEF**

An illustration of how the context of our work has altered since it began is to look at the changing expression of 'public grief'. In 1963, the BBC abandoned its normal schedules to show the formality of the State Funeral of President Kennedy in Washington, and then a similar service was broadcast from St Paul's Cathedral in London.

The rest of the world, whether at home or standing on the pavement and viewing were bystanders with little to do but watch and, as many were shown doing, weep.

Contrast the example of President Kennedy's death on the streets of Dallas with the 'public grief' which came into the headlines all around the world after the death of the Australian naturalist, Steve Irwin, in September 2006. Unlike the moment of the Presidents' assassination, seen around the world and re-examined endlessly since, Irwin's death as he was stung by a giant sting-ray was recorded but not subsequently broadcast. It was thought 'disrespectful' and was judged 'too distressing' an experience for his fans.

What *was* seen around the world was the public memorial meeting. Irwin's family was offered a State Funeral, an 'honour' more frequently offered in Australia than in the United Kingdom. His family declined and after the private funeral, thousands assembled in a stadium for a liturgy, including two extracts from his TV programmes, which were also hugely popular in the USA. Following a long eulogy from Australia's Prime Minister, speaking from amongst the spectators, the climax of this public service was apparently a short statement from the dead naturalist's 8-year-old daughter, Bindi. Although it was reported that her expression of affection and gratitude summed up a nation's feelings, it was delivered in front of the overarching visual focus throughout the ceremony: a huge flower display forming the single word 'Crikey'.

The use of this word as an icon for the ceremony is more than the reminder of a figure of speech used by a popular television presenter. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'crikey' as 'an assonant subject for a *sacred* name'. This is 'crimine' – a vulgar exclamation of astonishment from the seventeenth century, derived from 'jiminy' and then 'Gemini'. It is an 'oath'. So the gathering was apparently focussed on both a 'sacred name' and an oath.

While 'crikey' may not have found its way into the churches' liturgies, a 'google' search identifies 1,916 entries for Irwin's death and 3,020,000 entries for the word. In one article, posted on 13 September at the time of Irwin's Memorial gathering, Richard Farmer, American journalist and academic confesses to being



puzzled by the fascination with public mourning and quotes a website *The Encyclopedia of Death and Dying*:

*The degree of public mourning following the deaths of Diana, Princess of Wales and John F Kennedy Jr. led some social observers to wonder if grief is an ever-present latent feeling just waiting to be exploited by the political elite, if people's lives are so empty that they engage in recreational grief... people cry because they are shown other people crying for a celebrity.*

But Steve Irwin's fans seemed to be expressing more than tears. The many incoherent farewell messages posted on blogs express anger and prophecy:

*Its horrible how such good family men are taken from us like that. \*Crikey\* steve you'll live in our hearts forever!!*

*Steve's message was not just about animals, it was a message to humanity, and his death was not really an accident, it is a message from someone who wants us to pay attention.*

*Most people don't see the connection but if a snake or a crocodile cannot survive in today's world after millions of years on earth, there is certainly no hope for us humans is there?... the stingray killed him to make the final sacrifice, so we would sit up and take notice...*

We live in the third millennium and we will increasingly experience the digitisation of text, images and sound which aims to alter our perceptions of life and its meaning, either through the decaying conventional analogous media or in the exponentially developing world of social networking such as You-Tube®, Facebook®, Twitter® and other innovations yet to come. They may re-interpret traditional words of sacred scripture, and the vast heritage of prayer, psalmody and hymnody, or they may draw on fringe philosophies, cult practices and the 'commodification' of faith for the individual consumer.

This book sets out to make sense both of the conventional world and the new forms of media, and to encourage traditionalists and

innovators to understand each other. Sadly, we must recognise that in the future both will need to be ready to respond to shared tragedy and grief.

## **OUTLINE OF THE BOOK**

**Chapter 1:** *Stopped in Our Tracks*, offers an overview – the Church and Community responds. This concentrates on the external pressure of media, and the instant theological issues that can be raised by journalists and broadcasters.

**Chapter 2:** *A Faith Community Prepares Its Worship*, looks at the decisions which help participants who are not regular church-goers to share the decisions and contents for an Act of Worship which will have meaning for a wider community.

**Chapter 3:** *A Faith Community Plans With Its Neighbours*, describes how a faith Community responds with neighbours of another faith. Based on experience, it compares the two models of ‘offered hospitality’ and the harder process of creating a ‘co-operative’ liturgy.

**Chapter 4:** *Prayers and Resources for Young People*, is a reflection on young people and tragedy and how it is possible to encourage them to make their own contribution.

**Chapter 5:** *The Preachers Briefing*, offers guidelines with the pressures on shocked clergy and congregations in mind. It does not intend to describe to readers how to preach.

**Chapter 6:** *Using Non-biblical Readings*, takes a look at non-biblical readings about death. As well as giving some good examples, it also looks at the mistaken interpretation of Canon Henry Scott-Holland’s ‘Death is nothing at all’ as quoted and sets it in context as only one side of an argument expressed in a lengthy Pentecost sermon.

**Chapter 7:** *Responding to the World*, describes how over time the churches are facing the challenge of rapid and unpredictable change, and how a global response to a tragedy can involve the local community. It concludes by asking whether it is desirable to provide global resources as offered by the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and a short liturgy is offered as an exemplar.

**Chapter 8:** *Prayers and Suggested Orders of Service*, contains examples and structures for special liturgies, and includes some prayers. The Act of Intercession for the '9/11 Service of Commemoration and Remembrance in St Paul's Cathedral, 2002 – one year on' is included. This chapter also refers to the Liturgy used in Southwark Anglican Cathedral to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Marchioness disaster.

**Chapter 9:** *Suggested Themes and Bible Readings*, lists readings from the Bible and Christian readings from other sources. It continues with music suggestions, combining the familiar with the less well-known. Audio formats are changing rapidly and legitimate download of music should also be explored on the internet. When appropriate, visual material can be downloaded and powerpoint resources are possible where facilities for display are readily available.

**Appendix 1:** A Media Experience – Guns, Roses and God? An abridged version of a Robert Runcie Lecture delivered in the Church of his first curacy, looking at the issues raised for both the churches and the media by a national tragedy. The essay describes the responses to the Shooting at Dunblane Primary School in 1995.

Finally, we thank the many contributors to our work, those who have participated in our regular conferences, and also those whose thinking has helped us to make connections between the many strands of modern faith and our contemporary secular cultures. Particular thanks are due to Norman Wallwork, to Jeremy Fletcher and to Hugh Graham who inspired or wrote chapters. And to Tom Cooper, once a Roman Catholic and now a retired priest in the Church in Wales, who drew our attention to the story of 'Death is nothing at all'.

## *Chapter 1*

# **Stopped in Our Tracks**

Almost all human activity is dominated by routine. Commuting, the lifestyle for most urban people, sets the rhythm of their lives. We find the same spot on the platform or bus-stop, choose the same seat and carriage, encounter the same tailback on the motorway, in a sort of trance. It is the same for the sleepy farm hand, who stumbles across the yard to attend to the cows, or for the monks who respond to the rising bell on a bleak winter morning. They live close to the rhythms of earthly time, dawn and dusk. Our habitual routines repeat themselves from day to day, our own personal space untroubled by others for years.

Even though no day passes without violence, conflict, famine and accident somewhere in the world, it is others who are drowned at sea, whose cattle are infected with foot-and-mouth disease, whose children die of starvation in Africa. Others win the X-Factor or are murdered, or break the rules in the Big Brother house. Most of what happens in the world happens to strangers somewhere else. We learn about it from the newspapers, on the radio and TV, and increasingly on our 'Apps' – the personal gizmos that connect us to blogs, gossip, twitters – and we are often no more than disinterested bystanders, not personally affected. Then something happens that we respond to differently: nature goes mad and destroys a city or the tsunami drowns hundreds of thousands of people in minutes, a glamorous Princess dies in a high-speed car crash, a gunman murders little children in a primary school, and neighbours in the inner-city are looting shops nearby. Suddenly, we are no longer indifferent, we become part of it. We are stopped in our tracks.

The first part of this first chapter reflects on the unexpected event that suddenly brings on universal grief. How might a faith community respond in a society full of jumbled messages and made up of

people of many different faiths and private passions? How were times of widespread public distress handled in the past? And how might a faith community better prepare to 'catch the mood of the nation' in the future?

### ***A near-miss experience***

*For a weekday afternoon, the London Square is strangely quiet, empty of people and filled with sunshine. Outside the nondescript headquarters of the British Medical Association, the parking bays are empty. It could be a Sunday, and a few people have gathered outside a church further up the street. A small notice tied to the railings here in the Square is the only sign that something shocking occurred at this same sunlit pavement a fortnight ago. Everything has been tidied away so completely that it is hard to believe that this is the backdrop to a scene that shook television viewers all around the world. The violent deaths here in Fitzroy Square of a dozen or more commuters, blown up by a suicide bomber sitting in the back of their bus, has no memorial other than the typed instruction "no floral tributes to be placed against these railings".*

*For almost a week, the railings were hidden as a shattered red bus and police screens became the icon for the fact-hungry TV reporters trying to find explanations where there were none. Those viewers who found time or had the inclination to pray will have this scene etched on their minds. Now it is all gone, the Square restored to normality, and millions of us are left with the memory of another tragedy that without warning took the lives of people that we never knew.*

*Outside the church, hundreds of flowers wilt in their cellophane wrappers, and groups of passers-by stoop to read the labels. Most messages seem to be from other strangers, sorry and angry, and perhaps grateful that this time, their journey to work was not to be their last journey on earth. Inside the church, candles are burning. An open book invites comments. "Why? Why? Why? O GOD". Another says "Please, please help me, I cannot find words..."*

*Back in the street, hundreds of us walk on just a little bit faster than usual. Four more bomb explosions are rumoured; one not far away. Some of us are praying in a bit of a hurry.*  
(JLG member's diary entry for 21st July 2005, the date of the second attempt to bomb London's transport system)

## **HOW CAN A GOD OF LOVE AND POWER ALLOW THIS?**

One of the first filmed survivors of the London tube bombs said, "Some people were screaming; others began to pray aloud to God". In so-called 'secular' Britain this sound bite was shown not as a curiosity, but because journalists recognise that prayers are said at times of crisis. And the same question is then always asked: how can a God of love and power allow this?

Even before the facts are known, the media will be beating a path to "God's Spokesman" – any community leader who claims an authority founded in religious belief – to ask them this question. Archbishops and Moderators will first be asked for a reaction to the news and then they will be pursued with follow-up questions as to the nature, presence or absence of the deity as the cause of, or impotent witness to, the event.

Each individual who makes a public claim of faith needs to be ready to respond. It would take nerve to respond the way that the poet, Emily Dickinson does:

*The Only News I know  
Is Bulletins all Day  
From Immortality.*

*The Only Shows I see –  
Tomorrow and Today –  
Perchance Eternity –*

*The Only One I meet  
Is God – The Only Street –  
Existence – This traversed*

*If Other News there be –*

*Or Admirabler Show –  
I'll tell it You –*

*Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)*

A generation ago a christian Bishop might be grilled on the part God plays in our suffering universe while sitting in his study or in a flower-bedecked TV studio. Broadcasters are now demanding instantaneous responses to tragedy. Grim images are filmed instantly by bystanders and even survivors. Just as scientists are searching back to discover the actual moment of the 'big bang', we are all now seeing disasters and tragedies almost at the instant they happen via the new generation of micro-broadcasting technologies.

Journalistic objectivity is sometimes replaced by anger. After a recent disaster involving loss of life, a producer of religious documentaries screamed in rage at colleagues preparing for a worship broadcast; "Where's your \*\*\*\*ing god now?"

The faith communities, especially with their emphasis on words, should never underestimate the almighty and uncontrollable power of the visual image. And they should sympathise with the journalist, who shares the same predicament described by a poet, the late U. A. Fanthorpe, at the conclusion of her poem, *The Witness*:

*All he can say is what he saw,  
And that's an old story. Cross-examined,  
He flounders. His vigilance is fishy,  
His ignorance shady. Truth is hard to translate  
When our only machinery is words.*

*Ursula Askham Fanthorpe (1929–2009)*

## **EXAMPLES FROM THE PAST**

In 1857, when news reached England of the mass murders of the innocent in the Indian Mutiny, a National Day of Fasting and Humiliation was declared. The famous Evangelist, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, preached to more than twenty-three thousand people in the Crystal Palace in South London, one of the largest-ever congregations to hear him. His message was unequivocal, taking his text from the Old

Testament Book of Micah: “Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it”.

*The Illustrated London News* reported that, “... he felt persuaded that there were such things as national judgments – national chastisements for national sins. Oh! What a rod was that which had just been inflicted upon our country! He saw God everywhere, and we might rely upon it that every deed that had been done against us had been appointed by the Almighty. The wheels of Providence might appear to revolve in a mysterious manner, but wisdom was the axle on which they turned, and it would be seen in the end that God had only ordained this evil that great good might ensue.”

Spurgeon’s sermon also blamed a grieving nation for some of the most shocking events that had ever been reported in the newspapers, and the equally gruesome punishments dealt out to the mutineers by the British authorities. Queen Victoria was said to have been appalled by the latter.

When the nation gathered again in 1872, this time in St. Paul’s Cathedral, to give thanks for the recovery from illness of the then Prince of Wales, the Queen sanctioned a poem, copies of which were dropped by balloon on to the cheering crowds around the Cathedral. Amidst the celebration, one verse reminded the reader of the mystery of God’s providence:

*Tis true, alas! That prayer has failed to save  
Full many a life as precious in its sphere  
Which Death has borne triumphant to the grave,  
Despite the silent prayer the pleading tear.  
The ruling cause is hid from mortal gaze,  
Whose scope’s not framed to trace all heaven’s ways.*

In the twentieth century, when King George VI called for a National Day of Prayer amidst the worst days of the Second World War, the tone of address was less strident. The King’s choice of the poem by Minnie Louise Haskins, “*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year...*” spoke words of comfort and hope. Although some Christians believed that the British troops were rescued from



Dunkirk by the direct intervention of God, more people found solace and meaning from quiet moments shared, like the “Big Ben Minute” – it was suggested to the community of radio listeners that the Lord’s Prayer could be recited quietly every night while they listened to the sound of the great clock’s chimes that heralded the main evening news.

The past is a different country, it is said, and it is a long way, but a relatively short time to have moved from Spurgeon’s forceful oratory to the present custom of standing in silence. The only distinctive feature of these contemporary national moments of silence is the variation in length. The faith community appears to play no part in deciding how long we should all keep quiet, and nothing is offered to help each individual to make use of the silence, other than the vaguely-defined “paying respects”. Is this how Christians now experience the “sighs too deep for words” that St Paul describes in his Letter to the Ephesians? Is this really all that can be expected?

### **MUST A LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITY RESPOND AS IF TO THE WHOLE EARTH IN GRIEF?**

Britain’s religious climate is changing fast, often as if driven by a frightening confusion of conflicting cultures and religions. Although this material offers guidance to a local community, the mass media will almost inevitably transmit grief and distress to a much wider community. In the case of the Tsunami on Boxing Day 2004 we all seemed to be part of one global community, at least for a short while. The response to the TV pictures from around the world was immediate and the resources of the international aid community were marshalled together. Months later individual stories of the appeal of Buddhism and Islam as a lifeline of healing were being told by survivors and bereaved relatives in the BBC programme ‘Songs of Praise’. Many Christians have been helped to recover from their Tsunami experience by learning and adopting the practice of meditation.

Can religious observances be devised that speak to a global community at such a time? Can anything be constructed able to create, transform and communicate Christian meaning out of tragedy for peoples of different cultures and belief systems, who just happen to be

united by receiving the same live news broadcasts?

There are fundamental differences that must be understood if a formal response to a tragedy or a disaster is being planned to involve different faith communities. For example, forgiveness is a central concept in Christian worship, but is not necessarily understood in the same way by other faiths. Some faiths, such as Islam, do not believe in responding to death with public displays of grief, nor such symbolism as flying flags at half-mast.

On the other hand, there are many common understandings that people of different faiths can and do bring to worship at times of distress. In the Qur'an, references to Jesus show him emphasizing the importance of silence as the beginning of worship, and the need for humility in the presence of God. In the National Service of Remembrance for the victims of the Tsunami held in St Paul's Cathedral in London in May 2005, representatives of the many nations involved came forward carrying lit candles, and the unfamiliar sound of a Thai fiddle created an almost unearthly stillness for faith leaders of many traditions.

So will the people of the earth ever practice a universal love for each other? The theologian Oliver O'Donovan thinks not, and writes: *"The attempt to depict a form of human love which is without particularity, reciprocity or preference has never yielded anything but a cold-blooded monstrosity. The most that we can do with our love is to be open with it, ready to give it to those who come across our paths and show their need for it. But even that is not, in any sense, universality."*

How we respond to the needs and answer the questions of our local communities and neighbourhoods is at least as important as searching for a universal response to a tragic disaster. But even within our own neighbourhoods, there may be a wide variety of experiences, traditions and beliefs that need to be respected and understood.

A Service for Remembrance Sunday, devised by the Joint Liturgical Group in 2005 for churches in Britain, may have allowed for a tiny beginning. The heart of the Service provides for worship in a public space such as a War Memorial:

- Silence is understood as the one response, which might unite the peoples of the global village.

- The silence is put into a context by being prefaced with sentences of scripture which can be shared between believers of the religions of the relevant book.
- A shared commitment is made to working for the restoration of a broken world, without specific faith reference.
- To echo the recent custom of laying flowers as a public gesture of respect, those who have gathered for the Service, are invited to bring them forward after the traditional wreath-laying.

Tradition and distinctive culture still play an important part in the new service. Words of prayer that sound like “ancient words” can unite generations, and seem to carry a value beyond pure poetry. The words of Psalm 90, translated by the seventeenth-century hymn-writer Isaac Watts into “O GOD, our help in ages past”, are still included in the service. As the theologian, Enda McDonough, writes: “*National identity is positively valued in scripture, and acknowledged as a health-giving dimension in our communal existence*”. Yet although the words of Watt’s hymn seem to have been taken over as an expression of national unity, the words of the psalmist cannot be contained by borders. Hence its selection as an exemplar for the liturgy rather than, say, “O Valiant Hearts” with its emotive and misleading imagery that identifies every death in combat with Christ’s suffering on the Cross.

## **MOVING ON**

After the initial shock and grief, the local faith community can be an important catalyst in helping those who have been affected by disaster to move on. In most cases this will chiefly involve immediate friends and family, and will develop out of existing as well as new links with their own local community.

Yet, increasingly, the broadcast media will wish to be present at any memorial service, particularly if funerals have been in private, because the unseen viewer or listener who has witnessed the event on the news, and been grieved by it, also needs help to move on. After the Zeebrugge Ferry disaster in 1987, a Service of Prayer for the families and friends was broadcast live in full on ITV so that those who lived faraway could share in it. The service, from Dover Parish Church, was

relayed to the USA and shown on newscasts all over the world. Local collaboration in preparing a liturgy with only a couple of days notice was made possible by all concerned putting aside ecclesiastical and ecumenical proprieties, and a willingness to work closely with the broadcaster.

After the Soham murders, the Chaplain of Ely Cathedral offered the building to the Soham Community for a broadcast service. The parents helped create “The Holly and Jessica Service”, as it was called on TV, and their wishes for the liturgy were respected. Getting the tone right at such events is vital, but can be difficult, as those affected are confident in their ability to speak and their right to contribute material. The regular inclusion of funerals on soap operas, where grieving friends and relatives are invited to deliver eulogies of a spine-chilling and mawkish form has not encouraged good practice. Holly’s father read his own specially-composed poem. This high risk strategy worked out well in the end, chiefly because the family had also asked the Vicar of Soham to deliver the address. The Vicar knew his own community and the victim’s families, but was also able to speak to the feelings of anger and guilt in the wider world and made space to speak for both. The formal address and the father’s informal poem both reflected the need to move on.

The Holly and Jessica Service in Ely, and similar memorial liturgies of an informal nature, would certainly have incurred the disapproval of Erasmus Warren, seventeenth-century Rector of the nearby Parish of Worlington. In his sermon “A Defence of Liturgies”, preached in Norwich Cathedral in June 1686, he pleaded for praying in public to be: “By made or set forms ... it is most safe. For so people being furnished, not only with proper but pregnant words; and those words disposed into clear, and easy, and coherent methods; instead of poly-logical, impertinent and superfluous requests; which not seldom fall in with unpremeditated prayers, and do mightily suffocate and stifle zeal, sinking it down into dullness and lassitude; they shall have such as are fully expressive of their wants, and apt to enliven and bear up their souls; being as wings or vehicles to carry them to God”.

This may be seen as a safe way to God, but it is not the only way. The story of those who have died can be a powerful witness to truth,

including scriptural truth. After the murder of a Manchester policeman, D. C. Oake, which had attracted national concern, it was the story of his life as a committed Christian, rather than the mission of the Baptist congregation to which he belonged, that helped us to see how we might move on.

Worship does not merely sanctify things as they are. The Australian Liturgist, Peter Atkins describes how the "... corporate memory of the church is maintained and applied to new contexts. Its story, songs, teaching and ritual pick up the memory of God's people in the past and allow it to empower and inform them for the present and the future. A liturgy to achieve this purpose needs to give worshippers a strong sense of participation and significance."

This is comparatively easy to achieve within the regular worship of a local community, where everyone is known to each other and they have grown together in faith. The occasion of public and national grief, however, brings a much wider constituency together, stemming from events that in an instant may have made both neighbours and strangers into friends or enemies. The situations are as complicated and difficult as can be; the pitfalls of sentimentality, the maudlin and the overly religious are deep, creating a false, shallow and short-lived mood of togetherness that in the end will be of service to nobody.

Parts of two further poems by Ursula Askham Fanthorpe which seem to avoid this conclude this first chapter. Taken together, they provide an example of how to recognise both the perplexities and the muddle of modern life and a truth that few would deny:

*I am Dog  
who loves mankind but must also  
Bark at the gate; I am Dragon,  
Mythical, absurd, with wings; I am also  
Watchman, who waketh, generally without a clue  
Of what he waketh for; and I am Spy,  
Watchman's other self, the double agent,  
The fifth column who has lost touch  
With the other four. And I am the fifth column  
(Which is unnecessary) who is the Fool,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances,*

*Babbling away irrelevant, incoherent,  
In the world's apocalyptic thunderstorm  
Up to a point.*

*(from "Confessio Amantis")*

And then:

*Reconciliation is for the quick, quickly. There isn't  
enough*

*Love yet in the world for any to run to waste.*

*(from "At Averham")*

## CHAPTER 2

# A Faith Community Prepares its Worship

This chapter draws on lessons learnt from a number of services and identifies both potential and peril. Examples of the former include use of symbol and silence, and of the latter, the difficulties that can arise when it is not clear who is responsible for the organisation of a one-off event, or when the Armed Services, the Police or Politicians create liturgies.

The advantages and disadvantages of media interest in the aftermath of all tragedies are outlined.

### **THE CONTEXT**

A faith community not only gathers for its own response but also to provide for the majority who may never have been into a Church before. This holds good whether the service is or is not broadcast.

#### *Churches as large public spaces*

In many towns and cities a Church or Cathedral is the largest enclosed public space. The faith community offers hospitality, without too many conditions. (York Minster is a good example, where the Nave, Transepts and Quire either together or separately can accommodate variable numbers of worshippers.)

The Church is, however, not a place for exclusive parties and the balance between public and private, and secular and sacred, needs to be considered on each occasion in a rapidly-changing world. These distinctions will often be blurred at times of public grief.

#### *Naming*

A faith community has the difficult task of naming and giving shape to public grief. This grief will draw on the life stories of people who

are not church-goers, doing what a sociologist, Peter Mellor has described to the Joint Liturgical Group as ‘huddling together in the market-place for warmth’.

## **LOCAL, REGIONAL OR NATIONAL (AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICES)**

### ***Dover Parish Church: Zeebrugge Memorial (waiting for news) – locally organised for the wider world***

Shortly after the cross-channel ferry ‘Herald of Free Enterprise’ capsized in Zeebrugge Harbour in 1987, a Service of Prayer was held in Dover Parish Church. This brought together members of several hundred families, related to the passengers who were ‘missing’, and who had come to the Port to wait for news. Organised by the Vicar of the Church with the co-operation of the ferry operators, the service was open to all and there were no formal representatives present. The unprecedented difficulty of addressing a grieving congregation who in fact lacked confirmation that their relative had been on board, fell to the Suffragan Bishop of Dover, Richard Third. Local residents stood outside the church to support the visitors in their painful vigil.

The Saturday morning service was broadcast ‘live’ around the world, both for news value and for the benefit of relatives not able to reach Dover, awaiting news from afar.

### ***Glasgow Cathedral: Funeral Service for a Nation’s politician – organised for Scotland by a political party***

When Donald Dewar, Scotland’s first ‘First Minister’, died suddenly in 2002, the members of his political party asked to hold the Funeral Service in Glasgow Cathedral. There was initial confusion because the politicians chose the Presiding Minister they wanted to take the service, whilst the Minister of the Cathedral believed he had been asked. (A situation complicated by media interest and the politicians lack of understanding of ‘ecclesiastical protocol’.)

One of the most symbolic moments came at the end of a straightforward service when the body was carried out of the Cathedral. Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham, two folk musicians, played Burns’ ‘A Man’s a Man for a’that’ at the West Door. Shortly afterwards, as the



cortege passed through the streets of Glasgow, spectators broke into applause. This is thought to be the first time that this sort of extended ‘public liturgy’ happened. It was presumably a reflection of a life that was past rather than a statement about the future.

***St James’ Piccadilly: Munich massacre response – led by Archbishop Michael Ramsey***

In September 1972, nine athletes from Israel at the Olympic Games in Munich died after a terrorist attack. A service responding to the tragedy took place on the following Sunday in the London Church of St James’, Piccadilly and was shown on BBC Television. Apart from Archbishop Michael Ramsay, who gave the address, the service of mattins relied solely on the resources of the Parish (which at the time had a paid choir). This was one of the first occasions when a TV service reflected a global tragedy.

**INVITATIONS OR OPEN-TO-ALL?**

***St Albans: Funeral Service for Archbishop Robert Runcie – open-to-all***

When Archbishop Robert Runcie died, the family delayed his funeral in St Alban’s Cathedral until a Saturday when as many people as possible were able to attend. Deliberately, no tickets nor preferential seats were arranged and archbishops, academics and admirers queued together for several hours before to get into the Abbey. This resulted in the desired ‘family-gathering’ for the funeral, which was followed by a champagne reception for the several thousand people who attended.

***Westminster Abbey, London: Celebrity Memorial Services – BBC issues invitations***

Although Funeral and Memorial Services for the ‘great and the good’ in cathedrals began in the 19th Century (e.g. David Livingstone), ‘stars’ from the entertainment world are now regularly remembered at special services. These are normally ‘all-ticket’ services. The BBC has recently ceased overall responsibility for guest-lists and invitations, except on its own premises. A service in Westminster Abbey has been described by the press as a final accolade for ‘celebrities’, but the

criteria for the choice is unclear. The late Ronnie Barker had a humanist funeral but a Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey.

***St Andrew's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Glasgow: Funeral Mass for Cardinal Winning – using technology to extend the congregation***

The Funeral Mass for Cardinal Winning was held in the small St Andrew's Cathedral on the banks of the River Clyde. Because so few seats were available, the Catholic Archdiocese and the BBC shared the costs of a Jumbotron Screen (a device used at Pop Concerts). This allowed a large crowd outside the Cathedral to take part. Communion was distributed to those outside. (A similar arrangement was made in March 2006 for a Memorial Service in Manchester Cathedral for the footballer, George Best. In this case, a large crowd in Exchange Square watched on a BBC Screen permanently installed there.)

***Cluny Parish Church (Church of Scotland): Funeral of John Smith, leader of a British political party***

Following nationwide shock after the death of John Smith, Leader of the Labour Party, his widow asked that his funeral in the family's local parish church be shown 'live' on television. BBC cameras also provided pictures for ITV and SKY Television.

While large crowds gathered outside in the street, the Service was strictly ticketed. This was administered by the Labour Party both for protocol and security reasons with a lack of clear liaison with the churches' Kirk Session.

The parish minister conducted the service but politicians read the lessons and delivered tributes. There was no sermon.

**SUGGESTIONS OF GOOD PRACTICE – HOW THE LITURGY IS PLANNED AND WITH WHOM**

***Guiding Principles in a Cathedral***

A Cathedral is often seen as a place of 'high culture'. On occasions of public grief, the guardians of high culture need to enable the low culture to speak, and there must be no unease about the low-brow. A historic ancient building of great beauty will itself transform the

low-brow into ‘something else’.

A funeral service will be a religious rite.

A memorial service will reflect more the multifaceted nature of the personality. It is a ‘recollection in tranquillity’ (Wordsworth).

The music policy, especially in a Cathedral needs to be open-hearted.

### *In general*

Those attending and those watching (on a video relay or a broadcast) need to get the liturgical experience at every level – that is in their heart, in their mind and in their soul.

Time must be allowed for a liturgy to build up, and then for each person present do something with it, and then be ready to move on. Surprises can help.

A secular song may produce a spiritual meaning. The fusion of mind and body does not necessarily come from familiar and traditional hymns.

**The host church should not see itself as the arbiter of taste.**

## **COMMUNICATION AND PREPARATION**

**A clear line of communication needs to be established between one person representing each party.** The host community’s experience of worship is a good basis for an unfussy authority. Decisions need to be communicated to everyone, and especially to vergers, beadles and stewards and any difficulties discussed at once.

**Liturgy devised and controlled by the Armed Services (other than their Chaplains), the Police, politicians or the local authority are unlikely to bring out the best pastoral and liturgical possibilities which the host community can offer.** “Home-made” liturgies are increasingly devised by a society which is discovering spirituality for itself.

**Each content idea should be thought through with sensitivity in a face-to-face meeting with someone who understands the church and can act as a link and speak for those who are grieving.** Common understanding of content and purpose between all concerned may best be ensured with obvious simple questions – e.g. “Say

to me what you are trying to do”.

**If broadcasters are involved, involve the key people from the first possible moment, and expect the same sort of questions.** Do not surprise the media; they may unintentionally let you down if boundaries and details are not revealed.

Remember that many media people have a faith and some are members, even office-bearers, of a faith community.

Remember that many congregations include people with media experience who can offer advice – but they should not be left to take liturgical or pastoral decisions.

### ***Content – Memorial Services – Audio or video ‘played-in’***

This needs to be used sparingly. Such material should be viewed before the Order of Service is printed. The beginning and end words should be noted to ensure a consistent flow of ideas.

The replay must be rehearsed thoroughly and carefully and one person assigned to take responsibility.

### ***Rehearsals***

Every moment spent on rehearsals, however inconvenient and however last minute, will add value, making space for the sacred and reducing anxiety for people who are unfamiliar with liturgy.

With rare exceptions (e.g. members of the Royal Family), readings need to be rehearsed in-situ. Where vergers or beadles are involved in leading readers to their places, this must be tactfully prepared for, and the parties introduced.

The 1662 Anglican Book of Common Prayer with much beautiful prose, or the King James Bible dating from four hundred years ago, can be daunting to read aloud, and to convey the sense of a passage. Congregations are used to hearing well-known actors at public commemorations, who can spot the pitfalls. Conversely, actors who are likely to be theatrical and ‘perform’ will not convey the meaning. This is a striking illustration of the advantages and pitfalls.

### ***Applause***

A note in the Order of Service should explain when and if this is expected. Often it cannot be stopped, but applause which turns a

piece of music into a performance is not helpful. The musician can discourage this by withdrawing quickly at the end.

### ***Candles to light and condolence books***

These need a careful but immediate response. Clergy should not be left with this task alone, but some-one needs to take charge of a small team with sensitivity. At Soham and in Dunblane, the lighting of candles and the delivery of many teddy-bears as well as flowers became a distressing burden.

### ***On-line transmission (Crematorium)***

This technical provision currently being tried out whereby family and friends may join in viewing a Service of Cremation via a broad-band computer from their homes needs a pastoral debate which has yet to happen.

## **WORSHIP AS AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE?**

### ***Dunblane Cathedral: Mothering Sunday after the primary school shooting***

On Mothering Sunday 1996, the ordinary public worship of the congregation of Dunblane Cathedral was shown live on television around the World. The 'ordinariness' of the liturgy was appreciated by viewers. It must be said that a grieving congregation took on the extra burden of TV for the unseen (but also shocked) audience; symbolic of the "servant church".

### ***Dunblane: vigil and community prayers***

Within minutes of the news of the shooting in the town's Primary School on 13th March 1996, people began to go in to the Cathedral (the Cathedral being a scheduled monument is open daily).

At first no public prayers were offered, but practical needs were catered for such as packets of tissues placed on the pews by the Salvation Army. Piano and organ music was included later on. Volunteers offered a listening ear but on an informal and unstructured basis.

In the evening, the Minister led colleagues in a similarly informal vigil in the Cathedral, but now there were some prayers, as well

as music and much silence. The huge Nave was soon full and 6,000 people from around Scotland came and stood silently around the Cathedral perimeter. Cardinal Winning and fellow Bishops stood unobtrusively amongst the crowd. See Chapter 9 for a more detailed account.

### ***Soham: Parish Communion***

After the bodies of the two girls from Soham Primary School were found, ITV News cameras were allowed in to the Parish Church for the Sunday Service. The Vicar, the Revd Peter Alban Jones celebrated a Parish Eucharist with the intention of retaining normality for the Parish and its worship, although he did have ecumenical support from a Methodist colleague.

The presence of the TV cameras allowed ITV viewers to share the Service at a time when they were accustomed to seeing the religious series “My Favourite Hymns”.

The Liturgy of the Word was more inclusive than the Eucharistic part for viewers at home. The Eucharist with the sharing of bread and wine could not help being exclusive by its nature.

### ***London St Paul's Cathedral: Diana, Princess of Wales – a spontaneous response***

The evening after the death of Princess Diana in Paris in August 1997, St Paul's Cathedral filled up with grieving people from all around the world. The doors were left open late into the evening. A visiting choir (the Cathedral choir was on holiday) provided music for a simple service of prayer, which was also transmitted live by the BBC (and repeated twice on the same day). A completely spontaneous spiritual response for a silent congregation after the service was provided when a solo female voice somewhere in the congregation sang the hymn “Be Still for the Presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here”.

### ***Paddington train crash – on the spot commemoration***

On the Sunday afternoon after the Paddington train-crash in 2000, the Bishop of Kensington led a Service on open ground overlooking the wrecked train. The Service marked the end of the recovery of remains and the move to restore the train service. It was attended by

relatives and members of the emergency services and the transport industry.

### **Liverpool Hillsborough Mass – Ecumenical witness**

On the evening following the death of Liverpool football supporters in the Sheffield Stadium, a Mass was held in Liverpool Roman Catholic Cathedral. The Service began with a procession right around the Cathedral of the City's Church Leaders walking together without precedence. It was seen as a telling symbol of Church and Community united in grief.

## **THOUGHTS ABOUT PREACHERS AND SPEAKERS OF EULOGIES/TRIBUTES**

**York Minster** – Preachers (as against tribute-payers) are at the Dean's invitation. However, 'good sense' is also assumed at such events.

**Dover** – After the Ferry disaster, the Bishop of Dover spoke on behalf of Robert Runcie (who was away) in the Archbishop's capacity as Bishop of the Diocese.

**Dunblane** – The Parish Minister preached to his own community, as the rest of the world looked in on Mothering Sunday.

### ***In General***

No more than three tributes are advisable. Each speaker should discuss their contribution with their colleagues and the representative of those leading the worship. Five hundred words of script will take 5 minutes as every preacher, but few tribute players, know but only if the speaker is well prepared and disciplined.

If a tribute is offered at a funeral Mass or later Requiem, this is often offered after Mass has ended. It might be considered alternatively before Mass begins, thus declaring the 'intention of the Mass'.

## **SPECIAL SERVICES**

### ***York Minster: a celebrity remembered***

A useful example of this was the Memorial Service in 2005 for Richard Whiteley, a much-loved newscaster and reporter in Yorkshire who became a nation-wide celebrity through the daily Channel 4

programme *Countdown*. The Nave provided just the right number of seats for the televised celebration of his life, and a County focus for the gathering. The celebrity knew the Minster himself. Others who took part asked if they might come, including the Choir of Giggleswick School.

Liaison between the family and the Minster was immediate with a former producer from Yorkshire Television, himself a church-warden, acting as intermediary. The Precentor and the producer worked together to interpret the family's wishes.

The Precentor welcomed the congregation and the Dean offered the final Blessing to express the hospitality of the Minster.

The Minister has regularly become an icon in this way for all the people of Yorkshire. The Nave becomes 'common ground'.

## **MEMORIAL SERVICE LATER**

### ***Dunblane: A community remembers – liaison with the unchurched community***

After the tragedy in Dunblane, the community wished to be left to their own thoughts on the actual first anniversary, so recognising that a National Memorial Service was expected, this was organised 6 months later on a week-day afternoon. In the presence of HRH The Prince of Wales, an ecumenical Service took place. Emphasising the theme of 'moving-on', a candle was lit by either a bereaved parent or a brother or sister in memory of each child and their teacher.

A local 'video link' provided by the broadcasters allowed congregations in the other churches in the town to join in.

## **ANNIVERSARIES**

### ***York Minster: for a special constituency regardless of their faith***

#### **1: Service for the 'Foundation for the study of infant death'**

Each year in the run-up to Christmas, there is a pause in the diet of carol services for a special service. This service with musical contributions from young school children has a special emphasis on infant death.

A card in a leaf shape is given to each of the congregation, who



are encouraged to write whatever they want. They are encouraged to place leaves on a Christmas Tree naming their child. The Tree remains in a transept for ten days so that others can use it as a focus for their private thoughts. (The Service still has personal meaning for a previous Precentor whose own brother died when he was only two.)

## **2: Alzheimers Service**

This is a Service for a national charity which provides support for an overwhelming, private tragedy, which everyone is aware of. Families are invited to write or to choose their own readings.

### ***Edinburgh – The sick-kids Hospital Service***

Every year on the last Sunday in November, this hospital organises a Service to remember all children, both those who have died in the Hospital and others from the City during the year. This Service is child-centred and takes a different form each year with an emphasis on symbols. One year, on a painted floor depicting a winding river, fringed by sandbanks, parents or brothers and sisters made small boats into which a candle and the dead child's name was placed.

### ***Dunblane – no Service***

The first anniversary of a tragedy can be difficult. On this anniversary, no services were held and others were asked not to intrude, even to the extent of being visible in the town. Dunblane Cathedral remained open until late in the evening.

On the 10th Anniversary, a similar request was made and once again the Cathedral remained open until late at night.

An Eastern faith tradition of paying special attention to first anniversaries reflects medical and psychological evidence that instinctively our body-clocks are aware of this.

## CHAPTER 3

# A Faith Community Plans with its Neighbours

Much of this chapter comes from a Minister of the United Reformed Church in an inner-city area, which is home to many cultures and faiths. The Church Hall is heavily used and for young Sikhs it doubles as their sports facility. One member of another faith describes how the churches' single bell on a Sunday alerts him to start his day. Nevertheless, the Church sanctuary, which is visible and open is a place for rest and for daily Christian prayer.

### **BACKGROUND**

British society increasingly is perceived as becoming more multi-cultural and multi-faith (with all that that means for faith, ethnicity and communication, etc.) and inter-faith services are seen as a way of bringing the community together in times of crisis and tragedy (or, indeed, celebration). In some cases services may be arranged in response to an invitation from a secular authority, such as the local council, even national government, or possibly through the local Christian community inviting other faith communities to participate in such a service.

It is the nature of inter-faith relations in Britain at the present time that the catalyst for bringing faith groups together is usually provided by the Christian churches, and the Church will often find itself relied upon to do the necessary organisation.

### **WHAT IS AN INTER-FAITH SERVICE?**

Inter-faith services can often take two extremes, either the 'lowest common denominator' approach or one where every group does its own thing as described below in a service held in London's St Pancras

Parish Church and shown on ITV to commemorate the anniversary of the 2005 London bombings.

In the first case it may be a created liturgy that seeks to either transcend or blend the unique forms of belief and worship that exist in each faith tradition, the result is a liturgical orphan which belongs to no-one and which has no recognisable spirituality for those participating. In the second case the result may be a series of unconnected religious vignettes, as in St Pancras where the participants have simply been invited to 'do their own thing' in their slot in the proceedings. The result inadvertently created a gulf between faiths, with little in common apparent to express healing or comfort.

The challenge, then, is to find a middle way that will respect the religious similarities and differences that exist, and provide a meaningful experience of how different faith communities can share their understanding and feelings about a given event. Two ways that this can be done is either by following a 'hospitality' model or a 'cooperative' model.

### **A 'Hospitality' Model**

A 'hospitality' model is in some respects the easiest to coordinate, this would envisage one particular faith group undertaking to host the service, and this role is normally undertaken by the Christian Church. The reasons for this are two-fold: firstly, it is the largest of the faith communities and has an established role within the wider community; secondly, the Church is usually in contact with and able to talk with all of the different faith communities (many of which have no direct contact between themselves for historic or ethnic reasons).

The initial invitation would be to the leaders or representatives of the local faith communities to discuss the possibility of organising such a service, to agree on its focus, and on the level of participation. It should be appreciated that many other faiths are organised on a more 'congregational' basis than many Christian churches, as well as subtle denominational divisions, and this may mean more than one representative from other faiths.

Here the basic model of a service would be essentially 'Christian' in structure and in some of its elements (for example the inclusion

of hymnody and possibly a sermon) and would be familiar to most of the people who would attend, but it would contain space within it for specific contributions from representatives of the other faith communities in attendance.

### **A 'Cooperative' Model**

This model of an inter-faith service is one that will require a great deal of trust and respect between the participants envisaging, as it does, a coordinated service with each faith community making a full input to the event. It will involve a degree of discussion between the different communities about their own contributions to the service to ensure that, with respect to the overall theme, there is a sense of coherence and complementarity.

Here there will be no compromise from any faith tradition in terms of its beliefs and way of worship, no attempt to produce a blended spirituality, yet neither will any faith explicitly question the validity of another. It is an attempt to focus on a common objective from the multiplicity of faiths involved in the service. No religious tradition is compromised, but with the hope that some larger context may be allowed to emerge through each community being able to share their faith and experience of the event with others.

### **PRAYER**

Prayer is, in a sense, a universal concept of all religions. There is, arguably, no faith which does not include some activity, be it prayer to the 'other' or meditation, which cannot be included under the concept of prayer. However, prayer is also in a sense unique to each religious tradition – for Christians, for example, we pray to the Father, through the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit. This does raise the question of the 'validity' of prayer in an inter-religious context, where it may be said that while we can all acknowledge the underlying intent in the prayer, i.e. the theme of the service, we may not be able to consciously join with any prayers outside of our own tradition.

Here are four prayers or sayings from the world's great faiths. There is both a strangeness in them and yet a familiarity with Christian themes.

'Grief is a wound that needs attention in order to heal. To work through and complete grief means to face our feelings openly and honestly; to express and release our feelings fully and to tolerate and accept our feelings for however long it takes the wound to heal. We fear that once acknowledged grief will bowl us over. The truth is that grief experienced does dissolve. Grief unexpressed is grief that lasts indefinitely.' **Buddhism**

'O God grant us wakefulness before death,  
Repentance before death,  
Guidance before death,  
Knowingness before death,  
Doing business with you before death,  
Returning to your door before death,  
And entering into the abode of your nearness before death.'  
**Amen Islam**

Bhairo Mehlaa 5

'You are my Father, and you are my Mother.  
You are my Soul, my breath of life, the giver of Peace  
You are my Lord and Master; I am Your slave.  
Without You, I have no one at all.  
Please bless me with your Mercy, God, and give me this gift,  
That I may sing Your Praises, day and night.' **Sikh Dharam**

'Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed  
Save us, and we shall be saved, for it is You that we praise.  
Advance a complete recovery for all that ails us.  
May it be Your Will, O Lord our God and God of our ancestors  
To send a complete cure, healing of the body and healing of the soul  
For You are God, King, the faithful and compassionate Healer.  
Blessed are You, O Lord, who heals the sick amongst his people.'  
**Judaism, traditional Siddur**

## **VENUE**

The choice of a venue can be important, especially as to who may be prepared to attend. Often a local authority or public hall can be available and may be provided for free, with the advantage that it provides a neutral space which is not 'owned' by any particular faith community.

Often the next best option is a Christian church or hall. In hospitality terms this is often seen as a safe venue by all faiths. It may, however, be problematic for some denominations where there may be legal constraints on any form of non-Christian worship taking place on the premises. If a church is available it is best to resist the temptation to remove such items as crosses or crucifixes etc., on the grounds that other faiths may find them 'offensive'. More often they find this puzzling, in that we appear to be ashamed of our faith.

Using another faith-community's building can also be problematic as it is often seen as less of a neutral venue than a church. While community leaders may turn up, their supporters could be less inclined to come.

In planning a service, attention will need to be paid to the form of worship or participation that will be used by other faith-communities: consider the space that will be required; will it include dance or movement and will there be a need to provide space for musical instruments? This may also affect the choice of venue.

## **LESSONS LEARNED IN PRACTICE**

One major factor to be considered in any form of Interfaith service is the order that the communities will participate or even process in at the beginning and out at the end. The solution may be to make any order of participation or procession alphabetical – which must be agreed before any service takes place.

Christians also have to be aware of the understanding or concept of a deity in the faiths which are involved. Most of the faiths which Christians interact with will have some concept of God or of gods, but Buddhism, for example, is one which does not.

## **HOW INCLUSIVE A GATHERING IS POSSIBLE?**

There has been in recent years an increasing involvement of those

who call themselves Pagans (including Druids and Wicca) in inter-faith venues such as SACRE's or local interfaith councils. This raises difficult issues of inclusion and exclusion. For example, the Muslim community may refuse to participate if Pagans are included.

In our own Christian community there are some who would question the inclusion of Unitarians as a 'Christian' body. While there are some in the Christian community who take a liberal view on this, we have to consider whether, if we include Unitarians, or even Scientologists or Unificationists (who self-identify as Christians), we will be excluding some major part of the Christian community who are entirely unsympathetic to these belief systems. The same may also hold true of other faith communities. The Muslim community, for instance, will not participate if the Amadiyya community (a particular sect which self-identifies as Muslim) is invited.

## **KNOWING THE NEIGHBOURS**

Ideally, planning an inter-faith service takes time and patience. One of the first contacts to make will be your Denominational/Diocesan/Synod/District inter-faith advisor who may be able to supply you with contact details, if needed, and advice on particular faith issues. On a first occasion a hospitality model may be the easiest and best approach, and does have a theological resonance for Christians in the sense of welcoming the stranger, but may be interpreted by some as being patronising. However, in many cases the lead from the Christian churches in this country is often welcomed by other faith communities as an assurance of the importance of faith and belief in the fabric of society in times of tension.

**Perhaps the most important tip is that it is essential that before any disaster occurs, the faith communities are already known to each other.**

In the French City of Marseilles, where many different cultures and faiths live side-by-side in harmony, the existence of the Marseilles 'Esperance' has been the key to racial harmony and mutual understanding over three decades. L'Esperance is chaired by the Mayor, and includes representatives of every faith. It is strictly non-political and simply offers a network of contacts which can be activated at times of

difficulty or disaster.



## CHAPTER 4

# The Preacher's Briefing

### **THE PREACHER AS COMFORTER**

The dominant emotion in worshippers marking a tragedy, or responding to a catastrophic loss, is grief. Some will be so close to the death or deaths being commemorated that their numbness will prevent their listening to the preacher at any significant level. Others will be listening half hoping that some word or words of the preacher will speak to their condition and, however transiently, soothe their spirits.

A skilled preacher will not mount the pulpit claiming too much for whatever they have carefully and lovingly prepared. Their message will be precise and concise, with no words left to chance and no phrase or sentence likely to fall victim to an on the spot and risky innovation.

The preacher's task is to tell of a God who is with us in the depths of our grief, and to give witness to a God who in Christ has passed through the experience of human darkness and despair.

### **THE PREACHER AS INTERPRETER**

This is the most dangerous and delicate part of the preacher's task, and on most occasions is best avoided. If it is tackled, it must be approached with extreme caution. Here the preacher is strongly advised to share preparatory thinking with others.

If the service is being held in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, there may well be an expectation that the preacher should offer a word of interpretation as to the cause of the event or how it might have been avoided. Any reference to what might lie behind a tragedy is guaranteed to either miss the mark, cause offence, increase distress, prove premature, add to conjecture and debate – or indeed, all of these.

## **THE PREACHER AS TEAM PLAYER**

The preacher – despite the fact that they may be the only person physically above the congregation in the pulpit – should not perceive themselves as the most significant or authentic voice in the act of commemoration.

Those who have planned the service or will perform or speak in it, as well as the one who is presiding, are each part of a seamless whole. No part of the movement or content of the service is meant to outshine the rest. No part of the service is meant to set the seal on the proceedings.

Indeed, members of the planning team and other key participants may assist the preacher by indicating the gaps they cannot close – the balance they cannot maintain – and the note of objectivity they are looking to the preacher to offer – but at their request.

## **THE PREACHER AS FOCUS**

Although the preacher is not present to interpret what has brought about the tragedy, there are likely to be needs, emotions and irrationalities in the gathered community whose resolution – rightly or wrongly – will be focussed on the preacher. Somehow the preacher has to draw out, recognize and voice the dominant feelings of the congregation.

It is part of a preacher's office to receive into themselves the powerful and mixed emotions of the occasion.

## **THE PREACHER AS RECONCILER**

As indicated throughout this book, worship events commemorating a tragedy or marking a public grief are constructed from many building blocks. These include other faiths, other organizations, public bodies, possibly the government, the services – and not least those most intimately associated with the event itself. During the planning of the worship, emotions will have run high and not all conflicts of interest will have been resolved! Preachers who have familiarized themselves with these issues will be better equipped to bridge gaps and offer balm for throbbing wounds.

## **THE PREACHER AS MOURNER**

At the marking of a tragedy, as a community gathers to express its grief, the correct choice of preacher is crucial. Though there may be the opportunity to secure a national religious leader, a local or regional religious leader, or person of known faith, more closely involved in the events may be the best choice.

The preacher must not be perceived as standing apart from the grief nor appearing to be rising above the tragedy. The best preacher is the one whose message has been wrought in the furnace of the events.

## **THE PREACHER AS REPRESENTATIVE**

The chosen preacher may have a long time to prepare their message or only a few hours or days. But in our multi-cultural, multi-faith and increasingly secular society, the selected preacher is not there simply to represent their own brand of Christianity – however orthodox they may perceive themselves to be.

A twenty-first century preacher in the Western tradition is there to represent not just the full spectrum of Christianity, but also the central values of all the great faiths and the common aspirations of all sensitive thinkers – and in some way to speak also to those without any recognizable faith.

Having said this, the Christian preacher is present to represent the God and Father of Jesus Christ and the gospel of the universal Church. The preacher's message is shaped by knowledge of a God who has revealed himself in human suffering and is present in the depths of all human tragedy.

## **THE PREACHER AS ARTIST**

Every sermon is unique, but a good sermon is created, crafted and honed for the occasion. Never is this truer than when the preacher's message is to be offered in the aftermath of a community tragedy or an occasion of national grief.

The majority of those listening are not hardened sermon tasters. Every word needs to count. Each sentence must be short. All the phrases need to be relevant. Adjectives and adverbs need to be used sparingly. Most illustrations will seem trite. Few incidents, if any, from

outside the event will have a comparable value. Any preacher who says – what I have written, I have written – would be wise to have the wisdom and humility to share their draft sermon with trusted friends or colleagues.

## **THE PREACHER AS EXPOSITOR**

The true blessing of a sermon often lies at a level of reception that is not perceived by the listener at the time it is preached. The effect of the authentic word within the preaching may be lodged deep within the psyche and not emerge to stir the heart or comfort the spirit until long afterwards. No preacher can control the future time or depth at which the sermon may heal, or guide or bless the listener. Listening is the hearer's task. Hearing is God's work.

The best way to ensure a sermon contains medicine that can be slowly released into the spiritual bloodstream is for the sermon to be deeply grounded and rooted in a passage of scripture. The accrued wisdom of the church is that the God who spoke within the heart of a passage of scripture as it was formed, can and will bless its message if the passage is faithfully revisited by the preacher delivering a sermon. This process – faithfully undertaken – allows God to be the primary agent of the deep comfort that can be released into the life of a grieving community and the hearts of individuals overwhelmed by tragedy.

Shortly after the night in December 1989 when PAN-AM Flight 103 exploded in the skies over the Scottish border town of Lockerbie, with the loss of all 259 passengers and 11 lives in the town itself, a special Service was held in Dryfesdale Parish Church.

The Preacher at this Service was the Very Revd. James Whyte, a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Not only did Jim Whyte associate closely with the grief and outrage felt across the world by the bombing (the fatalities affected citizens of 21 nations), he had experienced the profound shock of the death of his own wife shortly before the event.

As he reflected on the desire for revenge, his words provide a good example of the preacher as reconciler:

*The desire, the determination that those who did this should be detected, and if possible brought to justice, is natural*

*and is right ... Justice is one thing. But already one hears in the media the word 'retaliation'. As far as I know no responsible politician has used that word, and I hope none ever will, except to disown it. For that way lies the endless cycle of violence upon violence, horror upon horror. And we may be tempted, indeed urged by some, to flex our muscles in response, to show that we are men. To show that we are what? To show that we are prepared to let more young and more innocent die, to let more rescue workers labour in more wreckage to find the grisly proof, not of our virility but of our inhumanity. That is what retaliation means. I, for one, will have none of it, and I hope you will not either.*

*Justice, yes, retaliation, no. For if we move in the way of retaliation, we move right outside of the fellowship of Christ's suffering, outside of the divine consolation. There is nothing that way but bitterness and the destruction of our own humanity.*

## CHAPTER 5

# The Use of Non-biblical Readings

### A CAUTIONARY TALE

Aside of Royal Funerals, it seems almost inevitable that non-biblical readings will be requested for funerals or memorial services. Some of these readings are so ingrained in our consciousness that they are either mistakenly assumed to be biblical, or are read as eternal truths. Julian of Norwich, John Donne, and John Henry Newman provide good examples.

#### *All shall be well*

At one time our good Lord said: “All things shall be well”; and at another he said: “Thou shalt see thyself that all manner thing shall be well.” In these two saying the soul received various manners of understanding. One was this: he wills we know that he taketh heed not only of noble things and great, but also of little and small, low and simple – of both the one and the other. This is his meaning when he saith “all manner thing shall be well”; for he wills we know that the least thing shall not be forgotten. Another understanding was this: there are many evil deeds done in our sight, and such great harm taken that it seemeth to us impossible that things should ever come to a good end. As we look upon these, we sorrow and mourn for them, so that we cannot rest in the blissful beholding of God – as we ought to do. The cause is that in the use of our reason we are now so blind, so lowly and so simple that we cannot know the high marvellous wisdom, the power and the goodness of the blissful Trinity. This is his meaning when he saith, “Thou shalt see thyself that all manner thing shall be well”; as if he said: “Accept it now faithfully and trustingly, and at the

last end thou shalt see in truth and in fullness of joy”.

So in the same five words before said, ‘I may make all things well,” I understand a mighty comfort in all the works of our Lord God that are to come. There is a deed which the blissful Trinity shall do in the last day (if I see it aright); but what that deed shall be, and how it shall be done, is unknown to all creatures which are beneath Christ, and shall be so until the time when it shall be done. The goodness and the love of our Lord God will us to know that it shall be done. But his might and wisdom by the same love will to hide and conceal from us what it shall be, and how it shall be done. The reason why he willeth us to know it just so, is because he willeth us to be easier in our souls and peaceable in loving, leaving aside the beholding of all troubles that could hinder our having true joy in him.

*Julian of Norwich: The Revelations of Divine Love, chapter 32 – this translation © 1961 by James Walsh S. J.*

### ***The Death Knell***

All mankind is of one author and is one volume. When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book but translated into a better language, and every chapter must be so translated. God employs several translators. Some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice. But God’s hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another....

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thy own were. Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for thee.

*John Donne, Devotion 17*

### ***The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life***

When life is past, it is all one whether it has lasted two hundred years or fifty. And it is this characteristic, stamped on human life in the days of its birth, viz. that it is mortal, which makes it under all

circumstances and in every form equally feeble and despicable. All the points in which men differ, health and strength, high or low estate, happiness or misery, vanish before this common lot, mortality. Pass a few years, and the longest-lived will be gone; nor will what is past profit him then, except in its consequences.

And this sense of the nothingness of life, impressed on us by the very fact that it comes to an end, is much deepened, when we contrast it with the capabilities of us who live it. Had Jacob lived Methuselah's age, he would have called it short. This is what we all feel, though at first sight it seems a contradiction, that even though the days as they go be slow, and be laden with many events, or with sorrows or dreariness, lengthening them out and making them tedious, yet the year passes quick though the hours tarry, and time bygone is as a dream, though we thought it would never go while it was going... And life is ever promising and never fulfilling; and hence, however long it be, our days are few and evil. This is the particular view of the subject on which I shall now dwell.

Our earthly life then gives promise of what it does not accomplish. It promises immortality, yet it is mortal; it contains life in death and eternity in time; and it attracts us by beginnings which faith alone brings to an end. I mean, when we take into account the powers with which our souls are gifted as Christians, the very consciousness of these fills us with a certainty that they must last beyond this life; that is in the case of good and holy men, whose present state I say, is to them who know them well, an earnest of immortality. The greatness of their gifts, contrasted with their scanty time for exercising them, forces the mind forward to the thought of another life, as almost the necessary counterpart and consequence of this life, and certainly implied in this life, provided there be a righteous Governor of the world who does not make man for naught... The word 'disappointing' is the only word to express our feelings on the death of God's saints. Unless our faith be very active, so as to pierce beyond the grave, and realize the future, we feel depressed at what seems like a failure of great things. And from this very feeling surely, by a sort of contradiction, we may fairly take hope; for if this life be so disappointing, so unfinished, surely it is not the whole.



### **‘DEATH IS NOTHING AT ALL’ – A HEALTH WARNING**

More popular than almost any other non-biblical reading is a short passage of prose, often set as a poem, and reproduced on web-sites and in ‘comfort’ keep-sakes everywhere. There are almost 16000 references to it on Google. ‘Death is nothing at all’ forms a short section of an extremely long sermon preached one May afternoon in 1910 by Canon Henry Scott Holland, Precentor of St Paul’s Cathedral.

However, requests for this reading in a Christian Service should be discouraged. In its familiar extract it is misleading, being taken out of context and addresses only one of two contradictory experiences felt after the death of a loved one. The title of the full sermon ‘The King of Terrors’ describes the awfulness, futility and misery that strikes the mourner. ‘Death is *not* nothing at all, *it’s awful!*’ says one of the characters in Victoria Wood’s TV comedy series ‘Dinner Ladies’.

Yet, Henry Scott-Holland’s sermon in its *complete* form, is a strong statement of Christian faith, first delivered in the season of Pentecost. It concludes with the tough, but personal, challenge of Christ in the gift of the Holy Spirit – which taken up, Scott Holland asserts, means that ‘death is past and has become nothing at all’. The hearer must respond with active faith and not just feel comforted as if by the kindly God who says, ‘there, there, now let’s have a nice cup of tea.’

Henry Scott Holland was a radical thinker. In June 1889, as a Canon of St Pauls’, he chaired the meeting which founded the Christian Social Union. The aims were to make the Christian Law rule social practice; to ‘talk with a view to action’. At St Pauls’, Scott Holland was a source of energy and ideas. He thought quickly and laterally, often using story-telling to express his ideas. In that sense, he was more a journalist than a theologian.

The Sermon was prepared for a nation in grief. The colourful, party-loving King Edward VII had just died and it felt as if an era had come to an end. A week had passed before Queen Alexandra had even been persuaded to relinquish his body ready for his funeral, beginning with the first royal ‘lying in state’ since mediaeval days.

When Scott-Holland died in 1919, his obituary in *The Times*,

described his preaching style as ‘redundant yet vigorous’. Read not in slow tones of reassurance, but with energy and haste as the preacher gathers hearers up and hastens them to the experience of Pentecost, the rhetoric of the sermon almost takes over. Here it is in a heavily abridged form beginning with the biblical text.

*Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. [1 John 3.2-3].*

*Scott-Holland begins by trying to catch the mood of the huge congregation.* I suppose all of us hover between two ways of regarding death, which appear to be in hopeless contradiction with each other. First, there is the familiar and instinctive recoil from it as embodying the supreme and irrevocable disaster. It is the impossible, the incredible thing. Nothing leads up to it, nothing prepares for it. It simply traverses every line on which life runs, cutting across every hope on which life feeds, and every intention which gives life significance. It makes all we do here meaningless and empty. “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.” Everything goes to one place, good and bad, just and unjust, happy and unhappy, rich and poor, all lie down together in one common ruin. All are cut off by the same blind inexorable fate. So stated it is so inexplicable, so ruthless, so blundering – this death that we must die.

*Two days after this sermon was delivered, a quarter of a million people would queue around Westminster Hall to walk slowly past the late King’s body, sealed in his coffin and surrounded by 4 tall candles. The new King, George V, and his relative the German Kaiser, famously shook hands over the coffin in a gesture which later proved a false hope. Four years later, they had become enemies. The preacher moves to the thoughts which have made this sermon so famous.*

But then there is another aspect altogether which death can wear for us. It is that which first comes to us, perhaps, as we look down upon the quiet face, so cold and white, of one who has been very near and

dear to us. There it lies in possession of its own secret. It knows it all. So we seem to feel. And what the face says in its sweet silence to us as a last message from the one whom we loved is: **“Death is nothing at all. It does not count. I have only slipped away into the next room. Nothing has happened. Everything remains exactly as it was. I am I, and you are you, and the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched, unchanged. Whatever we were to each other, that we are still. Call me by the old familiar name. Speak of me in the easy way which you always used. Put no difference into your tone. Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes that we enjoyed together. Play, smile, think of me, pray for me. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without effort, without the ghost of a shadow upon it. Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was. There is absolute and unbroken continuity. What is this death but a negligible accident? Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am but waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just round the corner. All is well. Nothing is hurt; nothing is lost. One brief moment and all will be as it was before. How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!”**

*Next the preacher tries to prepare his hearers for darker, contradictory thoughts. Death is also terrible, hence the title of this sermon; ‘The Prince of Terrors’.*

Not a glimpse to be had of the world inside and beyond! How black, how relentless, this total lack of tangible evidence for the certainty of what we believe in! Once again the old terror will come down upon us. What is it that happens over there? What are the dead about? Where are they?

*Yet the two experiences are true.*

Yes, but for all that our high mood was real, though it passes. It was a true experience; it gave us authentic intelligence.

Our task is to deny neither judgment, but to combine both. The

contrasted experiences are equally real, equally valid. How can they be reconciled? That is the question.

And yet, and yet “it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” “It doeth not yet appear.” Ah! How dreadfully true that is!

*This situation, the preacher admits, is one all of us, him included, are sharing as he speaks. And all that we will see in Westminster Hall is a closed coffin. So what is to be done, and how might Christian Faith help us?*

But over it and round it and about it the light Whitsuntide sweeps in to scatter all our fears. Why are we afraid? Have we not the gift of the Spirit? Has it not swept in upon us with a mighty wind? Is it not in our heart as a fire? Surely it has become our very own possession, one with our very life. And the Spirit which we now possess is itself the Life of all Life, the Life of the Life beyond death.

Now, even now, brethren, we are the sons of God; we have the Spirit of Him Who says: “I am the Resurrection and the Life; He that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live. And whoso liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.”

Stand on the strong Word.

*The final paragraph becomes almost an Altar Call*

Purify yourself as He bids you Who is pure. Then the old will drop away from you, and the new wonder will begin. You will find yourself already passed from death to life, and far ahead strange possibilities will open out beyond the power of your heart to conceive. For, “it doth not yet appear what you shall be.” Only, you will somehow become aware of what it might mean to become more and more like to the Lord Jesus Whom you adore, as more and more in the infinite amazement of an ever-growing surprise you learn to see Him as He really is.

Even in this abbreviated form, the fuller address is a sermon for grieving people who will need to move on. But can this be asked, as Scott Holland suggested, at a time of national grief? A recent post-Easter editorial in the weekly *Church Times* asks why ‘All too often, the

church appears to be stuck at a point just after the Easter Vigil: the resurrection has happened, the tomb is empty, but the truth has not sunk in. The tension, the emotional sensitivity, the touchiness that are more associated with a funeral have not been quite shaken off.

The late Revd Ian Mackenzie, former head of BBC Religious Programmes in Scotland, used to say after reading letters from the audience responding to broadcast services, that 'we were Good Friday people'. Perhaps in secular Britain we can readily identify with suffering and hopelessness, but not easily with Easter and Pentecost.

So why did Scott Holland's stirring sermon become reduced to an emotional but misleading remnant? Was it intended as a 'Good Friday' sermon for a nation that felt abandoned and inconsolable, or was it revived following a War in which so many of the dead were simply unaccounted for? In the early 1920's, there was an enormous interest in Spiritualism as grieving war widows attempted to contact their loved ones. Perhaps, before condemning the balm-laden prose of the popular poem, we should realize that the reading offers comfort, even in such a misleading form, for those who have no church connection.

## **ANOTHER OPTION FROM THE WRITINGS OF CARDINAL HUME**

The late Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster wrote about death with words which have a resonance with Scott Holland, but are more succinct as well as re-assuring in an orthodox Christian context.

*We each have a story,  
or part of one at any rate,  
about which we have never been able to speak to anyone.  
Fear of being of being misunderstood.  
Inability to understand  
Ignorance of the darker side of our hidden lives,  
or even shame,  
make it very difficult for many people.  
Our true story is not told,  
or, only half of it is.  
What a relief it will be to whisper freely and fully into the*

*compassionate ear of God.  
That is what God has always wanted.  
He waits for us to come home.  
He receives us, his prodigal children,  
with a loving embrace.  
In that embrace we start to tell him our story.*

*I now have no fear of death.  
I look forward to this friend  
leading me to a world where I shall know God  
and be known by Him as His beloved Son*

## CHAPTER 6

# Responding to the World

Electronic media emphasise an ever-smaller and ever more-crowded planet in which events pile one on another disseminated by twenty-four hour news and individual rapidly-expanding electronic communication. How can faith communities understand and prepare for the unexpected?

*Abiding God, your light is ever present with us,  
Piercing through the darkness of tragedy.  
We give you thanks for the bright beacon of hope  
Found when your people join together for the welfare of all.  
And now, when all seems dark, illuminate for the world  
Your vision of hope, dignity, and life abundant  
Set forth for Haiti from the beginning of creation.  
In your light all shall be revealed and all shall be made whole.  
Amen*

*Prayer moment around the world after the Haiti Earthquake 2010*

## CHANGING POPULATIONS

When the Joint Liturgical Group began to research this book, initial thoughts naturally concentrated on ‘best practice’ from the past experience of the contributors. Drawn from all Christian denominations, most members of JLG step out of running parishes to reflect on how to provide for the opportunities and difficulties that have developed in an increasingly secular society. In many urban communities traditional Christian culture, where it survives must live side by side with the customs and beliefs of other faiths. A Roman Catholic priest moving to a town in the south Midlands today may find that he is now the only Christian living in a road which once was at the heart of a

Christian parish.

So the shape of a community that is involved in a major tragedy, or influenced by a national or international disaster, is unlikely to be the same each time. Old relationships with local churches may have dissolved but new institutional links can be established with incoming neighbours of different faiths.

Traditional Christian church membership has been particularly eroded by the work patterns of those whose career success now depends on mobility. Links with churches become, at best, a part of a pilgrimage. This can be educative; in some parts of Europe, a cosmopolitan congregation flourishes. Although only thirty-six in number, twenty-five different nations are represented in one English-speaking congregation in Northern Italy. The Minister reports that they are quite unperturbed by the differences that might be resented by a more traditional membership.

Yet there is also a danger of isolation, when relatives are left far away and roots become less important. A recent survey reported that many people see their own parents as infrequently as once in two years. After the Dunblane Primary School shooting, the town realised how transient the population had become, and that although the children knew each other, wider families were comparative strangers. Moving in and out of newly-developed estates of executive homes on the edge of a town, the community spirit can go no further than ensuring that house values are not eroded. Home is where the health clubs, golf courses, multiplex cinemas and 24-hour superstores are.

In spite of this, a moment of national grief or an event that overwhelms a community, re-awakens a yearning for older patterns of life yet challenges us all to find the place of the Church in contemporary society. Just as people turn to the original TV channel, BBC 1, when rumours spread, many will still gather in or around the local church, even if they have never been near it. Broadcast news will report 'prayers being given' by a church, revealing how secular the language of news reporting has become.

One unintended outcome of consumer-driven media is that 'church' and 'worship' are rarely seen, usually only when people have died or members of the Royal Family are present. This changes



believing in God into the spiritual equivalent of the Accident and Emergency service. When tragedy strikes, people queue up pleading for help, as they did in Dunblane when after only a word of mouth message, 7,000 people stood in silence around the Church of Scotland's Dunblane Cathedral. After the Soham murders, so many people went to light a candle at Ely Cathedral that the mass of light became a hazard. Hospitality to the incoherent, even wordless spiritual gesture of the stranger is perhaps the most important and least acknowledged task of the church.

## **CHANGE AND THE CHANGELESS**

Traditionally, bad news was disseminated from the Church. News of the Jacobite rebel advance of 1745 into England was reported in letters from Diocesan Bishops read from pulpits. All deployed alarmist language and biblical precedents to warn of imminent perils, requiring every parishioner to report any sightings of strangers in their parishes as their duty to God.

Heralded by the First World War, the traditional pattern of parish life was rudely and almost fatally damaged. There were some amazing exceptions. Canon Albert Lawrie of Old St Paul's Church in Edinburgh did not wait for the news from the Western Front. Although not a military padre, Lawrie felt drawn to the Front and by the spring of 1915 was writing his parish newsletter from the trenches. As letters posted to and from the Front were delivered overnight, the Rector did not feel out-of-touch, and never failed to first remind parishioners of their Lenten obligations and the necessity of fasting. In June, he intimated that Evening Services in Edinburgh must revert from 7pm to 6.30pm, yet only a paragraph later, he broke the news that three from their Sunday School had been killed at Quintinshill in the Scottish Borders on a troop train, one of Britain's worst ever railway disasters, news of which spread very slowly in Scotland.

His despatches imply that his parish was no more than just a little stretched as, in the mud of Flanders, he prepared young soldiers for Confirmation. *"Shells you have a chance of dodging, but the raking, persistent fire of a machine gun is incredibly, cruelly, pitilessly nerve-racking"*. Once, Divine Service was 'rudely' interrupted by a breathless Major

who ordered the congregation to disperse, just before an enemy shell burst on the spot. Laurie applauded the '*simplicity of life*'; '*just simple children, cheerfully doing their duty*'. He received the Military Cross for his bravery in caring for the wounded at the battle of the Somme.

The response of his Episcopal parish was to fund The Memorial Chapel in the Canongate, in remembrance of the hundreds of men from the parish who died doing their duty, and whose names are carved on the walls. Although no First World War veteran survives, the Chapel remains a spiritual centre in daily use for the Eucharist and for private prayer. It was a tangible response to their outpouring of grief; a place of eternal memory. In 2008, the blank wall of the chapel was used for 'Still', a huge abstract work in which shades of grey and white suggest half opened curtains and areas of purer light. The artist seems content for the viewer to find their own meaning in the work.

Comparing such an uncomplicated missional response, it seems a sad reflection of modernity that after the Lockerbie disaster and the Dunblane tragedy, there was heated and public division and disagreement about the site and even the nature of an appropriate memorial in each case.

## **CELEBRITY CULTURE**

In 2009, two deaths brought grief not as result of national disaster, but as a result of the culture of celebrity that shapes the landscape of the media today. In each case, a wave of grief appeared to sweep around the world led by media attention. Jade Goody, a British reality television 'star', lived by media and died with their cameras just outside her front gate. Her funeral, by contrast, fell on a local Essex Parish Church, St John's Church, Buckhurst Hill whose prompt and discreet preparations led to a family funeral of the simplest form at St John the Baptist Church in Buckhurst Hill, Essex. Cameras were excluded but thousands of fans/mourners gathered in a nearby field to watch the service on two huge television screens. Glossy magazine specials appeared thereafter, and 'normality' ensued and 'closure' followed. Within a year Jade Goody was almost forgotten.

Goody died on March 22, Mother's Day, after losing a brief but very public battle with cervical cancer. By comparison, even though

there had been endless media speculation about his physical and emotional health, Michael Jackson's death as he was rehearsing for a series of comeback concerts in London in June 2009 came out of the blue. This exploded across the world to generate a tsunami of lurid copy. His funeral shown 'live' around the world seemingly revelled in the utter vulgarity of 'celebrity' performance against the backdrop of Black-Christian Church ritual. The gold coffin wheeled in and out of the Hollywood centre by an honour guard in front of weeping mourners may not have even contained Jackson's body. His burial was steeped in secrecy at sometime before or after the funeral. Unlike Jade Goody, the 'entertainment' industry is intent on keeping Jackson's name, and his back catalogue of work, in front of us. Although the exact circumstances of his sudden death remain a matter of speculation, addiction was a major fact, and at the time of writing Jackson's personal doctor was being tried for involuntary manslaughter.

Tabloid headlines of the time raise important questions about the effect on Christian Theology. Can these sort of headlines be measured with no more concern than was raised in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when Famous Last Words were published as a spur to reader's faith?

### ***JADE GOODY***

**HOLD ON** – going home to die

**I AM SCARED TO FALL ASLEEP** – Her last interview

**JADE'S VERY LAST WORDS** – I'm not an effing idiot

**AT PEACE ON MOTHER'S DAY**

**MUMMY'S IN HEAVEN**

**JADE GOODY'S FUNERAL:** Big, bright and lacking subtlety – just as she would have liked it

### ***MICHAEL JACKSON***

**JACKO DEAD**

**JACKO'S COMING BACK**

Michael Jackson's doctor to be tried for manslaughter

Michael Jackson's Family Shoots Down Tribute Concert

## **WHY INCLUDE THESE EVENTS IN THIS BOOK?**

The new world of personal twittering/blogs and social networking recorded literally thousands of virtual-conversations combining both grief, faith, confusion and hatred. This sort of event requires attention by those concerned with the young generation and school communities. The grief affecting the young generation may be private and unknown to parents or guardians. An electronic world of anonymous correspondents generates an un-moderated conversation that can easily spin out of control into vitriol.

### **JADE**

‘She’s going to live in all of us.’

‘A life without extremes is a life not lived.’

‘Are they going to cremate and flush this filthy racist slug along with her vile drug-dealing lesbian mother?’

‘I am glad she is dead – sick and tired of hearing about her...’

‘Jane Cerisa Lorraine Goody – you grew your wings far too soon!’

‘Ding dong, the bitch is gone!’

‘Heaven is a place where people go in to be made well.’

### **MICHAEL**

‘Michael was in the voice of our angelic trumpets.’

‘I Hurtin. I stand here tryin to find words of comfort.’

‘Ever since I was born, Daddy has been the best father you can ever imagine.’

## **RESPONDING TO AND FOR THE WORLD?**

Each year, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches invite a different nation to prepare a service and study material. Founded more than a century ago, and possibly as a reaction to the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1903, it laid the foundation for the week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Recently, it has become narrow in impact, both on ecumenism as an ideal and the value of shared prayer. Ecumenism has, it is said become ‘becalmed.’

Recent disasters reveal little appetite for, or evidence of a sharing of resources of prayers. Can material be prepared to help the world to share its grief? This is perhaps a question requiring urgent action, especially when the churches of the developing South seem increasingly alienated from the countries of the North, whose missionary history is described as ‘colonialism’. Yet, is there not still in the common memory of many post-colonial nations, a heritage cherished like the unkempt statue of a victorian monarch from the era of Empire.

### *An example of prayer from a familiar Lent hymn*

*Lord Jesus, think on me,  
Nor let me go astray;  
Though darkness and perplexity  
Point thou the heavenly way.*

*Lord Jesus, think on me,  
That, when the flood is past,  
I may the eternal brightness see,  
And share thy joy at last*

## **THE FUTURE**

Only quite recently have astrologers ceased to have much credibility, although they still remain popular, appearing in almost every daily and weekend newspaper published in the United Kingdom. While *Old Moore’s Almanack* is still published annually, we do not have the same desire to read pamphlets or listen to prophets. After the English Civil War in the late seventeenth century, Britain was flooded with as many propagandising and prophetic handbills as there were wars and rumours of wars. The social and political climate was so jittery that, after the Restoration, the revision of the Common Prayer Book was an establishment priority. Charles II needed to ensure that the spiritual temperature was temperate and that belief was known through reticence – a quality which persists to this day in the Anglican culture. In 1662, when the revised prayer book emerged, the work of a group bringing together all shades of opinion, some prayers like the still-popular ‘General Thanksgiving’ petitioned for calm and concord. The

compilers knew that the political and religious anarchy of previous decades had proved catastrophic to the economy.

But what of natural disasters? These terrible events, once transmitted to congregations in churches, coffeehouses and taverns by pamphlet and word of mouth months later, are now seen around the world in minutes. The media record the instant of the big tremor, and we all feel involved. Friends on business or holidaying across the globe may be involved. Inwardly, we all wonder how safe we are at home. When the news is thin, the insatiable demands of the 24-hour news cycle regularly unearths 'the asteroid that is set to crash on Earth (just as it has in disaster movies)'. The report is even known to set a date. Later, a more considered report which should set our fears aside is not published or broadcast.

There is still very little that science can do to exactly predict the natural disaster of an earthquake or a tsunami, and nothing that warns of air and train crashes. Industrial accidents and environmental catastrophes vie with personal tragedies and terrorist atrocities to fill the maw of the media beast. Even when things can be predicted, the hand of man seems complicit in witness to the plagues of war, famine and disease. The place of disaster news from around the world in everyday life has created a state of constant anxiety and disaster-appeals run the risk of creating a world-weariness.

In the autumn of 2010, two terrible events really set the world wondering. Could it be anything but 'a miracle' when more than 30 miners trapped a mile below ground in the Atacama desert of Uruguay were all rescued weeks later, largely unhurt? The rescue was transmitted live around the world and watchers could experience pictures of the cavern that nearly became a tomb. Hardened journalists mused about the place of faith in the safe rescue. It all seemed so unreal, judged in the light of the familiar course of disaster, mourning and remembrance.

Two months later, 29 miners were trapped in Greymouth, South Island, New Zealand by an explosion. The same journalists were unusually open-minded and optimistic at first. Almost an echo event; could they be rescued too? But the same TV technology was to capture two moments of appalling sadness in the days following. With

no evidence of survivors, a video caught the moment underground when a huge explosion of gas flared. In that moment all hope seemed lost. New Zealand mourned and as the country came to a standstill for a nationally observed moment of silence, another even more violent explosion rocked the 'live' pictures from the mine.

We have little choice but to live with such unpredictability. But we must bring our faith into play so that the cacophony of what is almost disaster-porn does not overwhelm us. We must keep our faith well-exercised.

## **A LOCAL GESTURE BECOMES AN UNOFFICIAL ACT OF REMEMBRANCE**

Wooton Bassett, a large village near Swindon came into prominence in 2009. Close to a large RAF base which regularly featured on the news as the casualties of the Afganistan war were 'repatriated', the inhabitants of the village realised that their homes lay on the route taken by hearses passing from RAF Benson to Oxford.

At first, just a few gathered on the village street, standing in silent tribute. Soon, and as the number of the dead grew, and as the bands and representatives paying tribute as the coffin emerged from transport planes, diminished, the long main street became thronged with silent witnesses. The Royal British Legion local standards were mustered, and as the cortege arrived, it halted for a two-minute silence. Flowers were placed on each hearse. TV cameras observed each sad event as the Colours dipped. No commands, no words or music, and at first no national recognition.

Perhaps, in these times of a new sort of war where individual deaths are mourned nationally, the spontaneity of the now officially designated *Royal* Wooton Bassett gathering is a sign of recognition and care for 'neighbours' that cynics have pronounced as simply a golden past.

There was no written down order of service or liturgy. The gesture had emerged from the concern of ordinary people. The custom ceased when the nearby air-base closed in autumn 2011, but will it begin spontaneously elsewhere?

## **A possible Short Liturgy usable at times of great national stress which might cross cultural boundaries**

This material is for individual or group use. At its heart is a prayer which is said before a minute of stillness/ silence and is followed by an extempore prayer (extemporising on that prayer and personalising it/ adding to it with a personal petition). This moment can be discretely shared at moments of extreme anxiety, and also after a successful outcome is known.

The form is simple and the material may be selected to suit the event:

- Approach;
- Listening;
- Responding.

### ***Approach***

Take a sentence from the psalms eg Ps 62 v1/2; Ps 67 v1/2; Ps 54 v1/2.

*Kyrie* – said slowly and deliberately:

Praise God

**Praise His Holy Name**

Praise Jesus

**Who has redeemed us**

Praise the Holy Spirit

**Source of new life, yesterday, today and tomorrow**

### ***Listening***

Check also lectionary readings for these days:

Day 1 Matthew Chapter 6 vv1-15

Day 2 Matthew Chapter 5 vv1-11

Day 3 Matthew Chapter 8 vv18-22

### ***Responding***

Say the Lord's Prayer (in the version you know best) SLOWLY

You may try inserting 'Thank you Jesus' between each sentence.

Keep a minute (loosely) of stillness or silence. Under pressure,



this can be in your head.

Repeat the Lord's Prayer in your own words using the opportunity to add to each stanza your personal concerns.

*Final Prayer:*

Take me now, Dear Lord of life

With all my neighbours across our dear mother earth

From where I/ we am/are

to where you want me/us to be

for Christ's sake.

**Amen Amen Amen**

## CHAPTER 7

# Prayers and Resources for Young People

The first part of this chapter is contributed by **Fr Stuart Parkes**, a Roman Catholic Priest working in the West of Scotland. The issue of Sectarianism most felt locally, has been overcome with a mixture of 'knowing the rules' of a divided community, and an attitude of kindness and personal acquaintance with the local community....

### **A CHAPLAIN'S EXPERIENCE IN A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

One of the strange things I have come across is the unwillingness of secondary schools to get involved in marking grief – whether that is the death of a pupil or of parents. Both secondary schools I have been chaplain to have been very limited in both. With parents of pupils who have died, the pupils themselves decide they are going to the funeral and take the time off school. Often the school prefers this, as it means that they don't have to deal with the difficult issues of grief.

I have had some experience of pupils in secondary schools dying. The first time I conducted the funeral in my own parish, which meant I was more involved with the family in the parish setting. The funeral was in many ways a 'normal' funeral as per the family's wishes although the homily itself addressed in part the young congregation. Following the funeral, we had a mass for the class in school, which had its own issues. It included times of silence, but very much directed as to what it was for – remembrance and prayer. At the mass pupils were encouraged to talk about their feelings. There were a number of opportunities to do that, including with myself and the school guidance staff. Not being a full time school chaplain, the guidance (pupil support) staff often know the pupils better.

With my second and third experience nothing was done in school. The school felt that those who had wished to do so had attended the funerals, and did not want to create situations where pupils are left alone to deal with issues following a liturgy in school. However, many of the pupils will though take part in services during the month of the Holy Souls, in November, where they will be encouraged to pray for families and friends who have died, often done as a class service in the small school oratory led by their RE teacher. Some will light candles for those who have died and say prayers. Music is limited at these, but communal prayers and times of silence would be part of them.

School situations provide their own difficulty for elements of any service. I use a powerpoint for school liturgies. The pupils don't know the texts or lack the confidence to speak them out loudly. By providing the text for all to see I find many will respond. I keep my powerpoint presentations for liturgy very simple, either black text on white background or vice versa. Powerpoint is familiar to pupils but everyone tends to have weird colour schemes – so keeping it simple I find doesn't distract and sets liturgy apart. In terms of music, I just can't get secondary school congregations to sing, so often use a choir or cantor to sing. Instrumental music is helpful, but I find that they are so used to general background music that they often think nothing of talking over it, I find to create silence it really does need silence and is often greatly respected – I think they need an explanation of what it is for. I tend to work on the model of school liturgies not being too different from what they would experience in their parishes as it then provides continuity between both experiences.

In schools all the usual things about using technology apply – it has to be set up and used well. The pupils know how to do it and just laugh at the staff who can't. The biggest difficulty I find in school settings is trying to create a liturgical environment out of a common space that is used for many other activities. We tend to use banners, flowers and often decorate walls with work from the art department. It is never perfect, but creates a sense of something different. With smaller groups, I have given everyone candles, but find that it's difficult to keep a sense of the sacred while doing this with bigger groups.

I think all the usual modern expressions seem to be used by young

people – flowers, football strips at the roadside, etc – seem to happen automatically. I suppose in school I have tried to use the RC ritual approach and try to show it as an expression of faith and hope in the resurrection.

A non-denominational special needs school I was involved with had the tradition of marking the death of a pupil by planting a tree in a sort of memorial garden. It was something they could get pupils involved with – buying the tree, preparing the large tub, planting it. The school chaplains, at that point in time Baptist, C of S and RC, were all invited to lead a short service of remembrance. It worked well with the small number of pupils at the school, as everyone was involved. I suppose secondary schools in the west of Scotland, with 1,000 pupils, present a different challenge, and services are often limited to the class or the year group, and only then if it coincides with a larger planned event.

## **FINDING SPACE FOR THE FAITH OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

Older academics have written at length about ‘Generation X’ and ‘Generation Y’ and some have begun by warning the reader that the task of dealing with bereavement is too sensitive for any but the qualified ‘expert’. Do not be put off; if you are familiar with young people, use common sense.

*‘We couldn’t do this at a cemetery. It’s just depressing. We do want to be where he’s still alive’. A young person frustrated by the rules and regulations of a public memorial space.*

Clearly, many young people are immersed in the rapidly evolving realm of social networking, with all of its potential for ephemeral noise and distraction. How can this be reconciled with the requisite atmosphere and environment of the highly adult-focussed handling of a funeral? Nonetheless, the incessant use of ‘social media’ surely evidences, at least on one level, a desire for ‘interaction’ with other people. This is the abstract space where the things that are said are ‘direct, honest and frank’. Here there is no geographical space to go to for grief.

Yet there are some public places/spaces for remembering. An example is the convergence of all the members of a car club somewhere that mattered to the deceased. There is an atmosphere of respect but not in any way that would be recognised by people who are not members. It is an exclusive gathering, where the participants 'really connect'. There is a liturgy, also exclusive, with moments like honking the horn for 2 minutes. Later visits will amount to 'a blessing'.

Another space, picked to remember and to warn, has evolved in London, where white-painted bikes are left on the street as an eye-catching symbol, placed by the roadside in the spot where life ended in bicycle accidents. These very public memorials may have the tacit approval of the Mayor of London, but they also challenge authority to change traffic legislation to improve cyclists safety on the road.

It is clear that there is a huge gap to bridge when the young wish to show respect, and mark their faith in the public sphere. In 2011, when the artist Amy Winehouse died suddenly at home, many gathered in silence, bringing flowers and messages to the grass verge opposite the house. Apart from a police presence, no-one took responsibility for this, which seemed to be the correct response. 'It's her essence,' young tribute payers have said, explaining why they must come to find this beautiful spot nearest to her home.

## CHAPTER 8

# Prayers and Suggested Orders of Service

### FORM ONE

Music

Gathering, with or without formal processions

Formal Exchange of Greeting

Informal Words of Welcome

Music or Singing

Bidding Prayer or Declaration of Purpose

Act of Penitence with Silences

Music or Singing

Psalmody – Recited or Sung

Readings interspersed with Silence and Music

Reflections, Music and Silences

Celebration of God’s Goodness

Recollection and Intercession

Music or Singing

Act of Blessing

Final Ascription of Glory

Recessional Music

### FORM TWO

From *Common Worship*

#### *The Gathering*

Welcome and Introduction

Scripture Sentences  
Prayers of Penitence  
A Collect

***Readings and Sermon***

Readings, with psalms and hymns  
Sermon, Address or Testimonies

***The Prayers***

Remembrance of the Departed  
Prayers for those who mourn  
Penitence, if not occurring earlier  
Prayers in the light of eternity  
Commendation of the Departed

Music or Singing

**FORM THREE**

*(This service in Southwark Anglican Cathedral took as its central moment the reading of the names of those who died in The Marchioness disaster. Equally important was the exchange of the Peace, a particularly painful experience for some of those attending. Some people had not met since the disaster, and the emotions in the gathering were both conducive to resolution for some, and reopened old wounds for others.)*

Hymn  
Introduction  
Hymn or Psalm  
Readings  
Hymn  
Sermon  
Anthem  
Prayers of Remembrance and Intercession  
*with Psalm Quotations*  
Hymn  
Blessing

## **FORM FOUR**

*(Taken from The Dunblane Memorial Service)*

Welcome and Call to Worship

Act of Praise

Prayers of Approach

Anthem

Act of Remembrance

Short Non-Biblical Reading(s)

A Lament

Act of Silence

Old Testament Reading

Anthem

New Testament Reading

Sermon

Prayers of Commendation and Intercession

Act of Praise

Blessing

## **FORMALITY AND INFORMALITY IN STYLES**

- A cathedral or a large and traditional religious building usually lends itself to a degree of formality. It often helps to begin and end the event if those with the principal speaking parts or leadership roles walk in and out in a predetermined procession.
- If civic leaders and national representatives are invited there is often a procedure to be followed.
- Wherever the Act of Remembrance or Commemoration takes place it will help if there is a certain amount of silence and appropriate music as people assemble and leave.
- A printed order helps people to realise they belong to the commemoration and are not onlookers. They will also have something to take away and to share with family or friends not present.
- Those speaking in the service, unless they are seasoned professionals, may appreciate some form of rehearsal to project their voices



in the worship space and to remove some of their nervousness.

- There will be an expectation that the prayers, the scripture passages and the extra-scriptural readings chosen will help those who are bereaved, distressed and bewildered by the event at the heart of the act of commemoration.
- Requests will undoubtedly be made for the inclusion of poems or short readings or songs that are not part of any recognised religious repertoire. Great sensitivity is required in encouragement and discouragement of offers and suggestions (see also Chapter Eight).
- Is it better if some material is contributed, discussed and then finalised by a semi-professional hand or can it be used just as it is? 'Only the best' may need to be balanced by other considerations.
- The bigger the event perhaps the more 'objective' the texts need to be. A tragedy or memorial service involving primary school children would differ in style and content from the death of a public figure or the death of those who fell in the line of public duty.
- It may be appropriate to have music played, with group singing and solo performances and not to have hymns or lyrics that few people know or could sing well!

## **COLLECTS AND PRAYERS**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
for whose birth there was no room  
and for whose death there were many cries,  
never let us close our door against you,  
nor against the least of your children in their need.

*Daily Prayer, 1941*

Inflame us with your love, O Christ,  
that we may fly to the assistance of the needy,  
that we may clothe the nakedness of the vulnerable  
and that with endless compassion  
we may bind up the wounds of the broken;  
for your name's sake. Amen

*Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179*

Only when we are weak, O Lord, are we strong:  
As we pass through the vale of suffering  
grant us the gift of your safety and peace,  
the gentleness of your Spirit  
and a sense of your mercy and love;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*Bishop Jeremy Taylor, 1613-67*

O Blessed Jesus, immortal and victorious,  
by the sorrows you suffered  
when all the powers of your heart failed you,  
have mercy on us and help us in our days of darkness  
and in our hours of weakness,  
that we do not lose hold of you either in this life,  
or in the life of the world to come.

This we ask for your own love's sake. Amen

*St. Bridget of Sweden, 1303-73*

O God, when it is dark and nothing seems real any more,  
and our faith has been shaken by distress,  
help us to remember the times when we were sure of your presence.  
Let the light we once experienced return to us again,  
and may we know that you are always with us,  
always waiting, always loving,  
in and through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Frank Topping, 1994*

Love blesses the bereaved,  
love prepares the way,  
love is not deceived  
when death has had its say.  
Love in Christ puts death to flight,  
love prepares the place  
where love, with love, will all unite

before that loving face.

*Frank Topping, 1983*

O God, the Lord of life, the conqueror of death,  
our help in every time of trouble,  
you do not willingly grieve or afflict your children;  
strengthen those who mourn,  
and give us grace, in the presence of death,  
to worship you, that we may have sure hope of eternal life,  
and put our whole trust in your goodness and mercy;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*W.E. Orchard, 1877-1955*

God of compassion,  
when we look upon the grief of your children  
and the pain of the world  
and our heart fails;  
help us to look upon your face  
that hope within us may rise again.

*George Appleton*

## **PSALM PRAYERS OF PENITENCE AND LAMENT**

O God, our helper and defender,  
deliver us in our weakness,  
answer our longings  
and vindicate our faith,  
that we may see your glory  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*Michael Vasey*

In the depths of our isolation,  
we cry to you, Lord God;  
give light in our darkness  
and bring us out of the prison of our despair;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*David Stancliffe*

God our hope,  
when we are troubled by fear and uncertainty,  
teach us to commit our lives to your care  
and to go forward on our pilgrimage,  
trusting in the knowledge of your love and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*Psalm Prayer 39: Book of Alternative Services,  
The Anglican Church of Canada*

Gracious God, in the night of distress  
we forget the days of sun and joy.  
Even when we do not know your presence,  
preserve us from the darkness of despair.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Psalm Prayer 42: Book of Alternative Services,  
The Anglican Church of Canada*

Lord God,  
in a threatening world  
we look to you as our rock of hope.  
Hear us as we pour out our hearts,  
and give us your grace and protection,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Psalm Prayer 62: Book of Alternative Services,  
The Anglican Church of Canada*

Gracious God,  
in times of sorrow and depression,  
when hope itself seems lost,  
help us to remember the transforming power of your steadfast love  
and to give thanks for that new life we cannot now imagine.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

*Psalm Prayer 79: Book of Alternative Services,  
The Anglican Church of Canada*

## CHAPTER 9

# Suggested Themes, Bible Readings and Music

Verse numbers are as in the New Jerusalem Bible.

### ***A. Articulating Despair & Anxiety***

1. Job 3.1-16 – Job curses the day he was born
2. Job 19.19-22 – The alienation brought on by disaster... *yet hope remains: continue with verses 23-27*
3. Ecclesiastes 1.2-11; 2.16-23 – World-weariness
4. Ecclesiastes 3.1-22 – World-weariness
5. Isaiah 38.9-20 – Hezekiah's song in his sickness
6. Lamentations 2.11-13 – My eyes are worn out with weeping
7. Lamentations 3.17-26 – My soul is shut out from peace

### ***B. Articulating Anger***

1. Isaiah 38.9-20 – Hezekiah's song in his sickness

### ***C. Pleas for Help***

1. Isaiah 45.8 – Rain justice down  
Jesus, Saviour of the world *Common Worship*, p. 801

### ***D. Prayers of confident trust***

1. 1 Samuel 1.1-10 – God breaks the powerful but raises the broken
2. Isaiah 12.1-6 – I will draw water from the wells of salvation

### ***E. Prayers of acceptance and resignation***

1. Job 1.21 – The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.  
As it has pleased the Lord, so is it done.  
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

## ***F. Mourning those who have died***

1. 2 Samuel 1.11-12, 17, 19-27 – David mourns for Saul and Jonathan
2. 2 Samuel 19.1-5 – If only I had died instead of you!
3. Wisdom, 3.1-9 – The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God
4. Wisdom 4.7-15 – The virtuous man, though he die before his time
5. Ecclesiasticus 38.16-23 – How to grieve and then let go
6. Ecclesiasticus 44.1-14/15 – Let us now praise famous men
7. Daniel 12.1-3 – The resurrection of the dead
8. 2 Maccabees 12.43-45 – Judas Maccabaeus mourns the slain
9. John 11.17-21, 32-45 – Jesus mourns the death of Lazarus

## ***G. Reassurance***

1. Genesis 8.15-9.17 – The promise of the rainbow
2. Deuteronomy 8.2-6 – God's tender care for us
3. Job 19.23-27 – I know that my redeemer lives
4. Wisdom 15.1-6 – God loves us even when we sin.
5. Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 – Notwithstanding its biblical context, many find this a text of comfort.
6. Ecclesiasticus 43.1-12 – God's in control of the universe: witness the rainbow.
7. Isaiah 25.6-9 – He will destroy death for ever
8. Isaiah 51.12-16 – God the comforter
9. Isaiah 52.7-10, 12b – He will save us
10. Isaiah 55.6-13 – God's word is ever fruitful
11. Matthew 5.1-12 – The mourners shall be comforted
12. Matthew 10.28-31 – God cares more for humans than sparrows
13. Matthew 11.28-30 – Come to me, you weary
14. Matthew 18.19-20 – God always answers prayer
15. Luke 11.9-11= Mt 7.7-11 – Ask and it will be given you
16. John 5.24-29 – The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God
17. John 6.37-40 – I shall raise him up on the last day
18. John 14.1-3 – Do not let your hearts be troubled
19. Acts 10.34-43 – God raised him to life
20. Romans 5.17-21 – The certainty of eternal life
21. Romans 6.3-9 – We shall return to life

22. Romans 6.23 – God’s free gift is eternal life
23. Romans 8.14-23 – Nothing we suffer here compares with the glory to come
24. Romans 8.31-39 – Nothing can come between us and God
25. Romans 11.33-36 – The unfathomable riches of God
26. 1 Corinthians 10.13 – God will not allow you to suffer beyond endurance
27. 1 Corinthians 15.20-28 – All will be brought to life in Christ
28. 1 Corinthians 15.51-57 – Death, where is your sting?
29. 2 Corinthians 4.14-5.1 – When our earthly tent is folded up...
30. 2 Corinthians 5.14-15 – The love of Christ overwhelms us
31. Philippians 3.20-21 – He will transfigure our wretched bodies
31. 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18 – Do not grieve, like those who have no hope
32. 1 John 3.1-2 – The unknown glory to come
33. Revelation 14.13 – Happy are those who die in the Lord.
34. Revelation 20.11-21.4 – Death is destroyed. The new creation.

### ***H. God can deliver us – God has done it before***

1. Exodus 4.13-31 – The crossing of the Red Sea
2. Exodus 15.1-21 – Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea
3. Isaiah 35.3-10 – Be strong; he will save us
4. Isaiah 43.1-7 – Do not be afraid, I have redeemed you
5. Jeremiah 32.17-27 – Jeremiah’s prayer trusts in God’s power to save
6. Zechariah 8.1-8 – God can build us up recreating what has been knocked down
7. Ephesians 3.20-21 – God is more powerful than we can imagine

### ***I. Why does God allow it to happen? God and evil.***

1. Genesis 50.15-21 – The story of Joseph teaches that God can turn evil to good
2. Luke 13.1-5 – The victims aren’t any worse sinners than the survivors

### ***J. Prayer that we may have faith***

1. Mark 9.14-27 – Lord, I believe, help my unbelief... *either the whole story may be read or the phrase above can stand alone as a prayer.*
2. Ephesians 3.14-21 – Paul prays that we may have faith

### ***K. Forgiving those responsible for the disaster***

1. Matthew 18.21-22 = Lk 17.4 – You must forgive
2. Luke 11.1-4 esp. v. 3 – Forgive us our sins, as we forgive others

### ***L. Arguing with God***

1. Genesis 18.22b-32 – Abraham pleads that the righteous may be spared

### ***M. In Christ, God too has suffered***

1. Isaiah 53.1-12 – Like a lamb to the slaughter
2. John 11-44 – Jesus is moved by Mary's tears; he weeps for his friend(s)
3. Peter 2.21-24(25) – through his bruises we are healed

### ***N. Different disasters***

1. Isaiah 9.1-6 – War & violence
2. Mt 8.23-27 = Mk 4.35-41 = Lk 8.22-25 – Jesus calms the storm
3. Matthew 18.1-10 – Children
4. Mark 10.13-16 = Mt 19.13-15 = Lk 18.15-17 – Children
5. Acts 11.27-30 – “Christian Aid”
6. Acts 16.25-34 – Earthquake
7. Acts 27 – Shipwreck

## **MUSIC SUGGESTIONS**

Choosing music can be difficult when time is short. Many will opt for traditional hymnody, and in particular for traditional tunes. Many communities are losing singers, choirs and bands, although as a recession bites, there is a growth not only of school music, but recently of ‘community orchestras’.

Much traditional music is easily found in the local church. A particularly useful new resource has been provided by the compilers of



*Sing Praise*, published in Autumn 2010. Subtitled *Hymns and Songs for Refreshing Worship*, this ecumenical publication aims to include most of the new words and tunes that are included in BBC1 'Songs of Praise'. All the traditional elements for public worship, the seasons of the christian year, the themes and some of the simple new praise music and reflective choruses are included. The compilers aim to encourage congregations to own familiar words and tunes that they have heard, but have yet to use.

## **SUGGESTIONS FROM HYMNODY**

*Sing Praise* should be on the shelves of everyone involved in church and community life. Many of these hymns offer new words to traditional tunes. The words are mainly written by living writers and therefore their work reflects the search for spirituality and solace in contemporary Britain.

Come, light of the world – *Paul Inwood*

From the deep places, hear my cry – *Breslau – Timothy Dudley-Smith*

How deep the Father's love for us – *Stuart Townend*

Stay here and keep watch with me – *Jacques Berthier – Taize*

Christ, be our light – tune same name – *Bernadette Farrell*

Word that formed creation, earth and sea and sky – *Noel Nouvelet –  
Marty Haugen*

Christ's is the world in which we move – *Dream Angus – John Bell/  
Graham Maule*

We cannot care for you the way we wanted – *Jennifer – John Bell/  
Graham Maule – child death*

When human voices cannot sing – *Barbara Allen – Shirley Erena  
Murray*

From heaven you came, helpless babe – *The Servant King – Graham  
Kendrick*

Be still, for the presence of the Lord – *David J Evans*

Spirit of God, unseen as the wind – *Skye Boat Song – Margaret V. Old*

Bless the Lord, my Soul, and bless God's holy name – *Jacques Berthier  
– Taize*

Love is his word, love is his way – *Cresswell – Luke Connaughton*

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair – *tune same name* – Graham  
Kendrick/ *arr: John Barnard*

Gracious God, in adoration – *Rhuddlan* – Basil Bridge

Oh, the life of the world is a joy and a treasure – *Life of the world* –  
Kathy Galloway

We do not hope to ease our minds – *St Patrick's Breastplate* – Marnie  
Barrell

As the deer pants for the water – *Martin J Nystrom*

Brother, sister, let me serve you – *Servant Song* – Richard A M Gillard  
*arr Betty Pulkingham*

Christ triumphant, ever reigning – *Guiting Power* – Michael Saward

Earth's fragile beauties we possess – *Kingsfold* – Robert Willis

How shall I sing that majesty – *Coe Fen* – John Mason

I do not know tomorrow's way – *O Waly Waly* – Margaret Clarkson

Lord, make us servants of your peace – *O Waly Waly* – James Quinn  
*after Francis of Assisi*

*Love is the touch of intangible joy* – *Great Stanmore* – Alison Robertson

O God, you search me and you know me – based on Ps 139 –  
Bernadette Farrell

The Lord's my shepherd – *Stuart Townend* – based on Psalm 23

There's a wideness in God's Mercy – *Corvedale* – Frederick William  
Faber

God is forgiveness, dare to forgive and God will be with you – *Taize*  
*arr Geoff Weaver*

Within our darkest night – *Taize* – Jacques Berthier

## *Appendix 1: A media experience*

# **Guns, Roses and God?**

A paper given first as a Robert Runcie Lecture, honouring the late Archbishop of Canterbury and his interest both in theology and media, formed a reflection on the tragic shooting at Dunblane Primary in 1995 and the issues raised by media interest in an event which immediately became a moment of both national and international grief. At the time, the author Andrew Barr was Head of BBC Scotland's Education and Religious Broadcasting. Subsequently the lecture was delivered in the University of Glasgow and at New College, Edinburgh where the lecturer was Chair of the Media and Theology project.

The lecture is reprinted here in full for its study of how both church and broadcaster reacted, and pointers to lessons learned.

**This is not the story of the children and the families – those who personally still mourn the loss of lives. They will tell their own stories if they choose to in the future. This is about the rest of us, our response to the response of media professionals, the questions we've asked and the search for answers.**

### **SO THE STORY BEGINS**

It is a dull mid-week morning. No hint of spring in the quiet streets of the town. This is a routine working day. The many residents who commute to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling are long gone. In a brief flurry of traffic, children have been delivered to the Primary School gates. It is 9.45 when first one, then another and another wailing siren is heard. Somehow rumours spread that something has happened at the Primary School. The phone lines become jammed as concern

mounts. Parents and friends converge on the Primary School. By 11 o'clock, there are the briefest of BBC Scotland and ILR radio reports of a shooting at the school, and now with every other sort of phone jammed including mobiles, the only possible human response is to go and join the anxious crowd at the gate.

Pat Greenhill, then Lord Provost of the town heard the news first on the radio doubly shocked because no-one had told her about something so terrible in her own community. She felt it was like hearing a fatal diagnosis in her own body, on the wireless.

In my own department in the BBC, the senior education producer dropped her editing work to rush to her home in Dunblane. Her son has a cold and so he's at home unable to join friends in class at Dunblane Primary School. She knows that to be a fact, but the rumours that are spreading distress even the most level-headed of mothers. Her husband a respected BBC Scotland current affairs reporter is at home in the town too. It's surely one of the toughest challenges any journalist faces to report a catastrophe on your own doorstep.

When the reporters arrive, there is nothing that they can or will see. And there is almost nothing else that I can or would wish to say about what happened in the school just after 9.30.

When the police make their first statements they are brief and factual. "At 9.38 am we received a call about a firearms incident in Dunblane Primary School. Six minutes later the first officer attended the scene. He found a scene of carnage...". 16 children's lives lost; a teacher dead; 2 teachers and 10 children wounded – all the result of a shooting incident in the school behind the gates where the police spokesmen stand to speak to cameras and reporters growing by the minute – joining the growing crowds of anxious parents and friends who must stay there because at first no-one can say who is alive and who is dead. Being there is the only way to learn the truth.

The fact is that an unspeakable event, which few heard and (can I say?) mercifully fewer still saw is over. There are no close witnesses to come to the gate. It will be almost 5 hours before the last parent knows the worst.

By then, there is an understandably human if not humane response

to two other facts. There is no criminal to search for. No justice to be done. The man with the guns is himself dead in the gym. And perhaps the worst fact – people realise that they knew him. In one sense, the story is over.

But the TV cameras and the microphones can only record ambulances coming and going and the faces of those, imagining the worst, and tortuously slowly, the faces and cries of those who know the worst. Huddled backs of ordinary people for whom the day had begun so normally. The dutiful professionals of the emergency services show in their faces that they were dealing with horror. A horror that tragically isn't so unusual in Pale or Goma or even Oklahoma City – but this is Dunblane a small beautiful city of refuge and refreshment for travellers and tourists. A place too where church leaders meet, a place of prayer, of beautiful old buildings and also home for many young and upwardly-mobile articulate professionals – perhaps the face of modern secular Britain. On the morning of March 13th, Dunblane became not a place – but an incident. That's how it felt to a local doctor, who nine months on is still asking the world to let Dunblane once again be a quiet and unexceptional community – gateway to the Scottish Highlands. People cannot live their lives in “an incident”.

But by noon on March 13th, the world's media – are mobile – on the road moving as fast as they can – to phone in, write or talk to camera – telling broadcast audiences and newspaper readers throughout the globe that they and thus their audiences and readers are in Dunblane.

“Standing here in Dunblane, I can only tell you that there is little yet to tell you”. And you can see, hear or I can try to use words for you to read, what it is like for us all here knowing that there is so little yet that we can be sure about. So we wait with the frightened and the bewildered.

And so there are big questions. The professionals who daily make sense of the news for us all (and BBC Scotland has some of the best) use words sparingly and simply to try to express these big questions we are all trying to formulate. Initially, it is unrealistic that anyone can answer any questions at Dunblane Primary School. Not that that satisfies some of the world's news editors. “Someone's gonna have to tell

us,” snapped a senior newsman from the USA justifying the search for witnesses and comment. The Provost of Dunblane received over 500 requests for interviews in 24 hours. 300 journalists swelled the population of the town.

The questions that religious broadcasters faced on March 13th lie behind all social and political debates:

- *God? Who are you? Where are you?*
- Why did you let this happen?

...and then some people provide answers to those questions which lead to more questions –

- *There is a Devil – this proves it. There is no God – this proves it. There is a cruel God – this proves it.*
- I want to believe in a God of love, but how can I?
- I want to shout and scream at God, but I can't find God and anyway I couldn't bring myself to do that. I am a rational person.
- What do you Christians have to say now?
- Who can help me?
- God – I know that you are there but I don't understand? Please answer now. A message from the distant Newsroom – please answer briefly, truthfully, completely but above all for our viewers and listeners in America or Australia, briefly.
- We haven't much time – is Thomas Hamilton already burning in Hell? We haven't much time – have we? Who is going to speak first?

Your coming here tonight may indicate your belief that together people can answer these questions – that Christian communities by their very existence answer these questions or that so far Christian communities have failed in any convincing way to answer them. This Church I know contains individuals who have found their own unique ways of answering these questions expressing the faith where answers may be found in action as well as in word. They are not on the News for they form the everyday business of a healthy parish life. That in itself as you know is not news. But because of Dunblane, God is on the news.

Ten years ago I was editor of religious broadcasting for the ITV

company Television South when God was again linked with tragedy in the world's headlines.

Shortly before midnight one Friday, I was driving home in a wild gale from a Gospel event in Brixton. The news headlines reported the capsizing of a ferry boat, *The Herald of Free Enterprise*, at Zeebrugge. It was on the Dover run – in the heart of our area. One person was reported dead. I felt a dreadful anxiety that something much worse had happened. And so it had – through the night the numbers missing rose and rose to more than 200. In hours, a horrible tragedy of a different sort was, like Dunblane, drawing global media attention. The vision of the upturned hull – the only TV picture to place beside not only grieving, but wondering relatives. Who was on the ferry? Could anyone have survived? Perhaps their loved ones had not even boarded as they had planned? Questions no-one could answer.

In the course of the next six days as all hope drained away, we re-made our nightly religious programmes, co-operated with the Newsroom and helped put together and ‘televise’ a service from a Church by the Harbour in Dover. Relatives and friends grieved together and noticeably young men and women joined in the singing of the most traditional of hymns. And most noticeably when a Bishop was sought to sum up for viewers (in a matter of minutes of course) what Christianity had to say – the day after the disaster – he was delayed in the Newsroom for a further 2 hours – the request of the most hard-nosed journalists who needed to talk to someone. Could he answer their own personal questions. The same questions – Why? Why should innocent people suffer? Why doesn't God do something to stop this?

This year on the morning of 13th March I was in a different time zone. I spent the morning planning far ahead to this year's Christmas night Service for BBC Scotland. As so often for programme-makers, scarcely half way through Lent, we were already devising Christmas.

I tuned the radio to our own schools news programme, which was then transmitted “live” for Primary School listeners throughout Scotland – and heard the first brief report of Dunblane. Later, listeners revealed a division of opinion – should we have included it or not? But “Check This” took its young audience very seriously and how

could we having broadcast news each week of Bosnia, of the Japanese earthquake in Kobe, and of terrorism nearer home not include something of such significance from home. And what better place to hear than in the classroom where the teachers in their valuable role as intermediary could help the children.

That decision had to be taken very quickly by one of the most experienced members of the BBC Scotland Education and Religion team (herself a former teacher). There was no time to think – and yet – thinking there had to be. Now errors and mistakes – bad judgements – are never excusable in broadcasting – that is how it is for each of us as producers, camera people and editors. At times of national crisis we must do the best we ever do. It can mean unscripted words spoken by a Bishop drawing on years of experience, it can mean the expression of faith in a man or woman, whose belief is new and raw. It could mean any one of you singly, or it could mean a whole congregation in Church drawn together in music and prayer.

Of course it is an unsought opportunity. It is the time when the world is suddenly listening to you – it is as unexpected as it is unwanted. There can be no warning, anymore than there is when tragedy befalls someone in the community. It is just infinitely more complicated as millions of people queue up electronically to hear or see your answers to those questions. They're questions which can perplex us in the happiest and most secure moments of our own religious journey. Not surprisingly people often choose silence. "The difficulty that believers have is a world view that encompasses evil", said one writer after Dunblane.

The world's news broadcasters will be on your doorstep in very short order. Denying access to one broadcaster, with rapidly growing numbers of programme providers and global satellite operations in competition for a fragmenting audience, will simply mean another will be ringing your bell. Saying "Not today, thank you", as a former Dean of an English Cathedral once advised, is not an option. There were a dozen or more major broadcasting organisations in the town each with their own satellite dish. We are fortunate in Britain. After the terrible bombing in Oklahoma City there were 90 separate broadcasters around the wreckage.



I don't have any authority as a broadcaster to tell you what you should do if you become an "Incident" but I do ask you to think about it. We will not have time on our side. So I will devote the next part of this paper to trying to describe what was asked of people after Dunblane, how they responded to the worlds media in general and to the BBC's religious programme-makers in particular.

The task was straight-forward, but colossally daunting.

When the world changes suddenly, all pre-recorded programmes in the considerable daily output of religious broadcasting are quite simply unusable. As are all the scripts prepared for live broadcasts and the complex programmes like Songs of Praise.

But religious broadcasting relies on countless communities – that is where it is most authentically earthed. Men and women everywhere with full time jobs – in ministry or in the secular world must start all over again or others be hurriedly contacted.

So the whole lot has to be dropped and we start again. Channel Controllers go further – Radio Scotland rebuilds its entire schedule to reflect the growing mood of shock and dismay. And we have almost no facts.

The Bishop of Edinburgh is rushed off a plane to say something that will resonate with the whole BBC-1 UK audience. The Minister of St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh on a visit to Manchester, finds he is to conduct the Daily Service there. My senior colleague in radio himself a Minister is the only person available to answer questions about God and evil to the newsroom in a special 30-minute live programme – then he is off to one of the toughest Moral Maze's ever on Radio 4.

One of the memorable contributions came from the late and much loved Rabbi Hugo Gryn, "The question is not where was God in Dunblane? – but where was man – sensible men and women? It's such a cop-out to say 'where were you God?'" (It was something he learnt in Auschwitz and God was there.)

Then and with terrifying haste, we must plan for next Sunday's output for it is of all days 'Mothering Sunday'. We must try to be in Dunblane Cathedral on Sunday. R4 wants a service from Dunblane, but not the one from the Cathedral which we're already asking to

broadcast on Radio Scotland. BBC-1 and Radio 2 and Radio 5 follow on swiftly by mid-afternoon and we still haven't got permission from anyone in Dunblane. We haven't even been able to get any response on the phone – how could we expect to!? But response we must get if huge and intricate preparations can be completed in time for a complicated broadcast which has clearly got to be as unobtrusive as any ever made.

Our plan was simple but it depended on a huge act of trust in us by people who are clearly facing the nightmare of their lives – the Minister of Dunblane Cathedral and his congregation. Some of my colleagues tell me that we should not go anywhere near Dunblane, “If I was the Minister I wouldn't let you in to the Service”.

Our purpose was just to be there and to let whatever normality they sought, be shared by the audience. We would not show the bereaved or any of the Sunday school children in any identifiable way. Of course we could not be invisible. Would this be acceptable. Just after 11p.m. some of us were at a team meeting in Manchester. The planning of Songs of Praise using the Service as a basis for the hymns was under way. We were in the TV schedules but still had not heard from Dunblane. How could we press for an answer? Thankfully it came just before midnight. “Yes”. Relieved, of course, but how conscious we were of the pressure we would now inevitably create in Dunblane.

Someone was standing by the door of the Cathedral for the simple and sensible reason, that there was a step down to catch the unwary or nervous visitor. That step was a godsend because the gentle warning, “careful of the step”, was an icebreaker for anyone in those first dark days. Please take care and feel welcome.

Almost within an hour of the tragedy people took refuge in Dunblane's largest building, the Cathedral. It's not a Cathedral in the English sense but a parish church of the national church, the Church of Scotland. Strictly speaking, it's an ancient monument under the care of Historic Scotland regularly visited by tourists from all over the world – visited for its spacious beauty – the huge nave once roofless, restored 100 years ago and the stonework of the west window branching like an ancient tree and greatly admired by John Ruskin. But also

the spiritual home for over a thousand members of the Church of Scotland who in March were preparing to work together with the other Dunblane Churches to better get to know the needs of their neighbours in a fast-changing town.

So on March 13th the Cathedral became one of the few places of sanctuary where people realised they could feel safe to sit in their bewilderment and shock. Here too, kind arms and hands were held out – without words. People stopped in mid word to sob. The organ alternated with the piano – played gently so that the silence was not overbearing. Little gestures – packets of tissues on all the pews gifted by the Salvation Army answered practical needs.

By the Saturday evening before Mothering Sunday flowers had arrived in almost unbearable number and fresh blooms were piled high in every corner. A table was laden with little teddy bears, a single candle burnt in the chancel and nearby seventeen single roses lying side by side each with a small card containing the name of each child and their teacher.

By then, the Minister of Dunblane, Colin Macintosh and his associate Moira Herkes had spent day and night sitting with the inconsolable.

In the town some people kept their children indoors not because they feared another attack, rather that they felt guilty that they were survivors. Families and individuals, groups of friends and many many young couples walked through the streets with small bunches of wrapped flowers – florists delivered hundreds of arrangements to the Primary School gates and to the Cathedral.

There does seem to be a new understanding about flowers. Writing about this my wife, herself a religious programme-maker, suggests that the flowers placed where a horrific or violent event has occurred are a way in which we symbolise the driving out of evil from our own communities. Then there was the symbolic act of giving football scarves after Hillsborough and in 1994 after the tragic early death of the footballer, Davie Cooper. The stadium, the school gate, the road sign becomes a sacred space. By Saturday night the warm floodlit interior of Dunblane Cathedral had been consecrated with flowers.

That was the scene for Sally Magnusson after she had completed

some short and surprisingly uplifting interviews with the few brave people who were prepared to try to face those “Why God?” questions – interviews done surely as unobtrusively as any ever done for Songs of Praise – and with the extraordinary generosity of neighbours who lent their homes so that we did not intrude on grief first hand. We then began to put together a sparing commentary for the next day’s Mothering Sunday Service. It was a hard task for Sally, herself a mother with young children of the age of those who’d died.

It became clear that if we were in the Cathedral, people felt both free and saw an opportunity to come over to talk. If questions were asked they were about the details of the next day’s service – the vital information a commentator needs. Sometimes the conversations ended with moist eyes, the least obtrusive approach was for us to look at the flowers and the messages attached to them. So upsetting were these that it took four or five visits to look at just some of these messages – they would form the basis of a PhD thesis of folk faith for the 1990’s:

*O Holy innocents look down on your unhappy relatives who  
ask our Lord to help them understand.*

*Darling little ones may you play for ever in the heather with  
the angels.*

*Do remember that you ain’t alone – people from all over the  
world still care.*

*You’ll all make heaven an even more happier place.*

... and many times the single word **Why?**

The flowers had been sent from all over the world – many sent by people who had never been to Dunblane who knew no-one in a town they’d probably never heard of until March 13th – from Singapore, Italy, France, Australia, Holland, Russia.

Was this a consequence of the media invasion? – a visible sign of the sympathy and support which some people in Dunblane have since said meant so much and so astonished them. And was I out of touch being surprised at the number of huge flower arrangements sent by males, firemen, the men of an RAF Guard-room, the Admiralty Floating Dock?

Sally Magnusson and I felt like intruders. But what about the

half-dozen or so BBC Scotland technical staff rigging the lights – more than a 100 of them – high up in the Cathedral on the same day before the broadcast? Normally a church would be closed because it's a big, messy and noisy job with people calling from ladders to the ground below. This team were the media's unsung heroes at Dunblane. The scaffolding for the lights was rigged in the middle of the night and the lamps positioned one by one whilst the Cathedral was open without a word being spoken. Complete professionals who needed no word from the production team to do their work with such sensitivity so close and so aware of so many distressed people during that long day.

After a sleepless Saturday night, we seemed a thinly spread team.

On BBC 1's Breakfast with Frost, The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland introduced the national one-minute silence from the Chapel of Scottish Churches House and then stepped smartly next door into the big meeting room to preach in the Radio 4 Service which was already being broadcast. At 10.15, the producer moved swiftly to the TV park to sit in the cab of one of the technical vehicles to broadcast Radio Scotland's commentary for the Cathedral Service. The TV crew, 13 cameras and 10 cameramen went on the air with the most rudimentary of rehearsals.

When the Service was over, there was initial relief it seemed we had kept to our promise. It mattered hugely that we should not intrude on personal grief. What we didn't know then was that another broadcaster had added their own camera to our output so positioned as to catch the parents as they came and went.

By Sunday, the BBC had decided that save for the Queen's visit in the afternoon, we would make a very clear withdrawal before the funerals took place in the town. I asked the crew to take all the complex equipment out of the Cathedral. This would ensure the Queen's visit was truly private – we had had our moment. In what in happier circumstances would have been worthy of a display at the Royal Tournament, everything came out in less than two hours – all the lamps, miles of cable and all but the most inaccessible scaffolding. We stayed out of sight in our vans to assemble a special Songs of Praise from our recordings.

About the Service itself – it was both ordinary and extraordinary.

Ordinary but unusually for TV with nothing being changed from routine, the collection was taken up in full view of the cameras. A visual message of an active church congregation rarely shown.

The biggest impact of the Service was made by the Minister of Dunblane Cathedral. Speaking for the first time in public, he had put together his thoughts almost entirely in private. He had not ducked the challenge of the perennial Children's address. We wondered how he could possibly cope. He did – as I will describe later on.

I said that his preparation was almost all in private – but not quite. Here was an impromptu bit of collaboration between the media and the Church. It came about in the one brief conversation my colleague in charge of the radio broadcasts had with the Minister – the only face-to-face conversation incidentally any of us had with him.

Weeks before for a radio Lent series, a small team had been recording in Jerusalem. Visiting one of the most holy places now a Church, they spotted a sign in English primarily intended for tour guides, "Please no explanations" it said. On Sunday Morning that story describing a friend's experience was broadcast in a small but significant beginning to a powerful Sermon. People are still talking about that little sign and the huge meaning it had for many viewers and listeners.

But the predominant TV image was of the tall angular black-bearded man whose voice was so gentle at times and yet almost despairing and angry as he faced the Why God questions in his own experience of grief. Here's just a taste of what was broadcast in the edited news reports – the "sound bites" of Dunblane:

*When parents die, they take away a large portion of the past;  
when children die, they take away the future as well.*

*... Time will not heal – it will help.*

*... Sometimes words just don't come.*

*... God's heart was the first to break in that school. That is what our faith tells us. God does not go around the world with this finger on a trigger. OUR ONLY COMFORT is of knowing that this was not the will of God.*

What can we learn from Dunblane? What are the lessons for

religious broadcasters? And what might Dunblane tell the hundreds of thousands of people who still go to churches and temples – symbolising to the rest of the world that a faith is important in their lives?

Some theology students who had viewed and listened to our coverage of Dunblane felt strongly that the audience should have been taken beyond the Good Friday experience. Audience and even contributors had been left at the foot of the Cross – why were they not guided editorially to the empty tomb?

We did not find anyone in those days, who felt able to speak about Resurrection. Somebody said to me as Lent came to an end that they dreaded Easter – it would be a hard experience in Dunblane.

I can remember a Good Friday service but I have no memory of Easter this year. As a non-Catholic, a visit to Lourdes on Low Sunday was the first time I felt alive in any sort of way, spiritually.

There in Lourdes when candles light up a sombre cliff-side – a huge candle flickered and by the glow of other candles, the message on that candle was illuminated “Remember the children of Dunblane”.

You did not have to understand the doctrine or sign up to dogma in a place like Lourdes. It is holy because millions of people accept that something of total significance happened there. And so the casual visitor can somehow be touched by that total significance. It is an experience of the religion of the Holy Place.

The religions of the Holy Book are in the Headlines. According to the secular media who are on the spot the Taliban militia in Afghanistan find in the Koran the authority to send women doctors home and to destroy TV sets. Christians threaten each other over the interpretations of Bishops reports, political manifestos, Canon Law and, of course, the Bible. Experience suggests that viewers and listeners find this interesting but it is not involving. But often the religion of the Holy Place seems to be where those flashes of insight come that give us some sense of universal hope and truth. The set-apart place, the roadside flowers, the football stadium, the lone pine, the seat by the Loch, the mountain top. These are the images of a folk faith. People go in search of stillness and space – it’s a TV audience builder.

Do you know why people want to come in to a church building especially when it’s quiet and empty?

Perhaps as a religious broadcaster, I can suggest that you offer them hospitality without pressing too hard for the reason why they are here.

The sociologist Grace Davie has used the difference between “believing” and “belonging” to explain diminishing church-going at a time when people seem increasingly fascinated by spiritual questions. I wonder whether looked at in the light of Dunblane, there is also Belonging without Believing? or Belonging and longing to Believe.

On the Friday after the tragedy, a Vigil was organised in Dunblane Cathedral. Without formality music, prayer and shared silence was planned – no singing – no sermon – no processions. When seven thousand people had joined a queue to enter a building which accommodates a thousand, the Minister was anxious, fearing that the majority would feel excluded. Then it became clear that the long line of people had ceased to be a queue. They simply wanted to stand with each other quietly in the streets of Dunblane. That line included some of Scotland’s church-leaders and there they all stayed for several hours – reported on TV and radio by a slightly puzzled media.

“Huddling together for warmth” is how this and other informal shared experiences are described by people studying signs of change in an apparently individualistic and selfish world. A substantial study of this by Philip Mellor, a political student at Leeds University, will be published in the New Year.

I’ve described the silent vigil in the streets. There was of course another silence – the national one-minute silence at 9.30 am on Sunday. This was a different sort of experience – I was standing outside the Cathedral as it began, marked I have to say not by a clock or a gun, but by one of the numerous media people wearing headphones – I know not from where – they were certainly not part of the BBC team “Quiet! quiet! stand still!” he shouted whirling around in various directions. It was probably a silence that was least effective in the community on which we had been asked to concentrate our thoughts.

Somebody said at a meeting of clergy I attended this week, that a congregation needs to “own what is happening” and that I’m sure includes the purpose and timely use of silence. And you should know



that one of the few requests we did receive from the Cathedral community before the broadcast was that any silence should not form part of the Cathedral Service. Perhaps it would have been more than the families could cope with. Or perhaps it was because the ordinariness and the familiarity of the Service was necessary for this terrible Mothering Sunday.

In Dunblane – we showed people together – quiet – shocked – a group that was anonymous save that they were in Dunblane. Our own intrusion going only so far as us being there, with our cameras and lights – our reticence meaning that whilst the faces of those who died become familiar, none of us recognise the bereaved parents if we meet them. So firm my instruction and our agreement with the Church that we should not show them on camera in the Sunday Service, that we also found ourselves deliberately not looking at the front pews where they sat.

They had a strange anonymity. They're there and yet we can't see them. So much broadcasting where just like the original horrible event, there is nothing to see. Yet I believe we need to be there somewhere alongside those unhappy people. Us, the invisible audience (more than 2 million on TV) alongside those who suffer invisibly.

And we got strength through the TV images and radio-stories passed on second-hand, of signs of resilience. The words and music spilling out from the Cathedral as if to sanctify Dunblane – evil has visited but goodness can now return. What was it like for the bereaved in all this, the people we'd all like to make it alright for? Well, all I know is that they all asked for videotapes of the Service and of the Songs of Praise. Other people had told them that what we had shown wouldn't hurt. In the future they will perhaps be able to look at the tapes we've been told. And they're grateful. We didn't do any harm. Is that where it stops?

Colin Macintosh's words were certainly about a belonging when he talked to the children,

*We are all of us very sad today – confused and a little frightened... And how unfair and wrong it all seems to be... and we don't understand... and if we're feeling like that you know,*

*its not wrong to cry. ... There's a story in the Bible of Jesus taking the children up in his arms – they must have felt very safe. I want us to think today that we are very very safe. I want everyone to hold hands and remember we're all helping each other as we remember all the good times and the special things about our friends in school and their teacher.*

and we hear names of those we only knew through a school photo on the front page of a tabloid newspaper.

And in Dunblane on this Mothering Sunday, “Please, no explanations”.

In one Sunday’s Songs of Praise – celebrating the faith of Scotland and her patron saint, a former drug addict rings a bell about belonging and believing: “People talk about religion because they don’t want to go to Hell,” he says. “People who talk about spirituality have been there.”

So perhaps the Service and our broadcast is an act of belonging to an “experienced” spirituality rather than a “learnt” religion.

Dunblane was struggling back from hell and in a strange sort of way and for an awful reason, the world grows up.

Art and mass media make much of these moments when cynics say there are no words of explanation but yet somehow people together begin to realise that sadness will pass.

In these moments of media belonging, we part with those we love, Raquel from *Curly* from ‘Coronation Street’, or with terrible experiences knowing that just like any goodbye in real life that when the waving stops or the enquiry ends we must turn around and face the rest of our lives. Not forgetting but moving on.

There’s a moment like this in *Dragonheart*, a film starring Sean Connery as the Dragon. After adventures of all sorts, the Dragon dies but then instead of a scene of death for the watching world, it becomes one of transfiguration – the stars in the night sky twinkle and re-cluster around a familiar monster outline seen briefly vanishing into the heavens.

There’s a short but deeply moving piece of music in this vein by the Finnish composer Arvo Pärt. In fact its a setting of the “Beatitudes” but what the listener experiences is not so much the literal recitation

of the verses – it’s the increasingly triumphant blend of unaccompanied voices ratcheted up to an ever higher key – and then growing in the last words of blessing the organ peals out thunderously yet almost immediately begins to tail off like the bright flash of a comet carrying all our pain and all our love to safety to where we may yet not go, but to where lies the source of all truth and meaning. Are we through these pictures and sounds in touch with our longing for redemption, for transfiguration – for forgiveness – for acceptance – for belonging?

Bernard Berenson at 92, described as the last great humanist, wrote of Christianity and its rituals in these words:

*I am deeply stirred by them, not only as art performances but I feel enlarged, exalted and inspired – freed for the moment from all that is sordid – as so much is sordid in myself.*

These images sustain me as much as any learnt, catechetical understanding. But then my world is a world of images and people like me – media practitioners, who find pictures to convey ideas, need to be aware of the dangers. No wonder the power of images has had such a part to play in theological dispute. There is a story that the liturgy of the ill-fated “Nine O’Clock Service” used a video clip of an owl flying across the evening sky to visualise absolution. Forgiven my sins by a brown owl. Belonging without believing can be dangerous, and I worry that that idea began with sloppy TV. Robert Runcie has quoted John Henry Newman pointing to an epidemic of unbelief spreading “not by the reason, but by the imagination which presents a plausible view of things which haunt and at length overcome the mind”.

In talking about belonging without believing, have I been talking about an authentic religious experience? And can this be any part of the Christian way of life?

It won’t do to leave it to that eloquent humanist Bernard Berenson,  
*I welcome any SOS in the shape of ritual, of song, of story  
that helps our cry for understanding beyond our present so  
earth-bound possibilities.*

But we cannot simply be wistful and because there are many who are not – philosophers, scientists, theologians, people like you, religious programme-makers are charged to do more for their audiences

in understanding the marriage of heart and mind.

To the thinkers, philosophers, scientists and theologians who I was with not so long ago, who found it surprising that modern men and women would be interested in the question “Does God know the Future?”, I say think again.

To those of us, you and me, who stand in the front line when the “why” questions come up, don’t just leave it to the vicar. A mighty crowd may join you on those occasions. Someone else’s answers won’t do. Don’t turn away from the visual media – look closely at its unblinking eye and listen to the understanding it may or may not nurture in your neighbours. Try to give hospitality to the visual culture of the young. Don’t dismiss the power of the spiritual idea in any form especially when it comes in new or unfamiliar ways.

As a postscript to our broadcasting from Dunblane, we were asked back by the bereaved families group set up after the tragedy. We returned to the Cathedral on October 9th for a memorial service shown on BBC1, heard on Radio Scotland as well as SKY TV and once again broadcasting stations around the world. Dunblane is still in the news. Some say that this has impeded the individual grieving of each person.

The Service paper reflected worship put together with the families. As the Service unfolded each person saw in their order of service a little drawing of a dark hillside. The hills above Dunblane – by the last hymn the little drawing showed a fully risen sun lighting up the world. So the Service moved from Darkness into Light. As the media went away, perhaps a very small corner was turned and believing began to be possible in our belonging. That drawing which people noticed was the work of an agnostic – which brings me finally to something written by another Bishop – the late Mervyn Stockwood. Speaking to his clergy in 1980, he said: *“We cannot hope to do more than to see through a glass darkly. An honest Christian must admit to a degree of agnosticism. When I am asked whether I am a believer my reply is ‘Yes, for two seconds out of three.’”* How can it be otherwise? The traumatic experiences that are part and parcel of human experience are difficult to reconcile with the concept of a loving and purposeful creator.

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