

## Anglo-Catholicism, theology and the arts, 1918-1970

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*[A lecture given to the Annual General Meeting of the Anglo-Catholic History Society, in the church of St Magnus the Martyr, London, in June 2008. It was privately printed by the Society and distributed to its members, but is otherwise unpublished.]*

I must first of all express my thanks to the Society for the kind invitation to give this lecture this evening, and secondly begin with some prefatory remarks upon its scope.<sup>1</sup> This lecture represents a first attempt to sketch the outlines of a much larger undertaking: a parallel history of Anglo-Catholic theological engagement with the several different arts in the twentieth century. Whilst research has been done on aspects of each art form in isolation, such a combined analysis as this has, to the best of my knowledge, yet to be attempted.<sup>2</sup> As such it covers a great deal of ground, and is necessarily selective rather than exhaustive. The lecture is fundamentally concerned with Anglo-Catholicism, as a set of theological emphases and attendant practices and preoccupations, and not so much a register of the work of this or that Anglo-Catholic in relation to the arts. Readers may object to the absence of one or more names in this account, although it will be the case that some particular names will occur very frequently. My definition of whom might count as an Anglo-Catholic in this context is drawn very broadly; it will become apparent that many figures who, whilst they might not immediately spring to mind as being Anglo-Catholics in all particulars,

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<sup>1</sup> For this printed version, I am grateful to the members of the Society who attended the lecture, and for the questions posed. I gratefully acknowledge the permission of Dr Ian Jones to adapt and include here some sections of text from a joint lecture given previously elsewhere. The footnotes have been kept to a minimum; readers who care to read further about much of the narrative detail are referred to the general works suggested.

<sup>2</sup> Useful general surveys include: for the visual arts, Michael Day, *Modern Art in English Churches* (London, 1984); for music, *Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England. The Ecumenical Century, 1900-65* (Princeton, 1965) and Erik Routley, *Twentieth century church music* (London, 1964); on religious drama, many of the issues are examined in Kenneth W. Pickering, *Drama in the Cathedral. The Canterbury Festival Plays 1928-1948* (Worthing, 1985)

could nonetheless be found expressing one or more parts of the distinctive theology of the arts which I hope to outline this evening.

The subject is fundamentally the history of theology; and, more precisely than that; of theological understanding where the 'rubber hits the road' as it were; historians at one time made the distinction between the history of ideas on the one hand, being an account of the progress over time of unit ideas, such as Democracy, through the works of professional philosophers; and 'intellectual history' on the other, being an account of the governing assumptions and paradigmatic understandings that were operative amongst the generally educated world at large. It is this latter sense that I pursue an Anglo-Catholic theology of the arts here.<sup>3</sup> A good deal of academic theology related to aesthetics was written during this period, but it will tend only to appear here as and when it made an impact on the pastoral clergy and on the laity both within the church and in the artistic world.

The theology of the arts that I have in mind is also a broader theology of culture, the central question of which may be framed thus: how did twentieth century Anglo-Catholics understand the relationship between beauty in works of art, and the cultural health of the nation as a whole? Of all the theological centres of gravity within the Church of England, it was the Catholic mind which placed the greatest emphasis on the capacity of mankind to participate in the creative work of God through acts of making: of works of art, drama and music at one level, but also in any craft activity or manufacture. My interest this evening is in the way the arts were made both a mirror of the spiritual health of British culture, and at the same time a tool of mission; the arts as a uniquely powerful means of excavating the recently submerged basis of "Christian civilisation" in Britain. That this connection was regularly made will be apparent from some of the statements made about

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<sup>3</sup> See Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas' *History and Theory* 8 (1969) 3–53.

the connection between cultural health and the built environment. W.R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, writing about the rebuilding of London after the Blitz, made the connection explicit: "The cities which men make reflect their souls. Those who have mean thoughts of themselves and their fellows will build mean and ugly cities, and those who respect themselves and their fellows will build cities which express their spirit and are an abiding witness of their quality to those who come after."<sup>4</sup> A. G. Hebert in his *Liturgy and Society* of 1935 argued that in architecture 'the design expresses the spirit of a period and a civilization' and so 'sin likewise expresses itself in ugliness: the meanness and sordidness of modern commercialism has stamped its image on [parts of] Bristol and Birmingham.'<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, clergy and artists alike were apt to argue that all creative activity was in some sense 'religious'. The sculptor Henry Moore, by no means a Christian in any straightforward sense, suggested late in life that 'all art is religious in a sense that no artist would work unless he believed that there was something in life worth glorifying. This is what art is about.'<sup>6</sup> An introduction to an exhibition catalogue for paintings in churches during the war expressed the point thus: 'Although these pictures are not of intent religious in character, they embody as fully as any purely ecclesiastical painting the moral principles which all true art expresses. There is the deeply religious sense of the poetry and intensity of human life and natural phenomena, the perception of truth and fearless integrity in giving expression to that particular vision, and a toleration of nothing less than perfection. These are the principles on which all true art must depend whatever its nature and purpose.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh Casson (ed.), *Bombed churches as war memorials* (Cheam, 1945) p.3.

<sup>5</sup> *Liturgy and Society: The Function of the Church in the Modern World* (London, 1935), p.239.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Wilkinson (ed.), *Henry Moore. Writings and Conversations* (Berkeley, 2002) p.130. The interview was given in 1968.

<sup>7</sup> Draft description of 'Pictures in Churches' loan scheme. Lambeth Palace Library, Bell Papers vol.151 f.13.

This paper will confine itself to an examination of the developments in three of the arts: in music, in the visual arts (mostly painting and sculpture) and in religious drama. It will argue that in the written comment and analysis accompanying developments in these three areas, there was a common intellectual trajectory: to begin with, a gradual recovery of consciousness of this notion of the integral nature of culture and art, rising to a high point in the years either side of the Second World War. It will then argue that all three spheres encountered a similar crisis in this thinking, in the 1950s and supremely in the 1960s, in which developments both in the arts and society more generally made such an integrated vision more difficult or indeed impossible to sustain.

### **Church music**

The story of church music in this period illustrates very well my main themes.<sup>8</sup> Of the three areas under discussion tonight, church music was the one in best health in 1918, since it was in the first forty years of the century that major composers began seriously to engage with religious music, building on foundations laid by Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry. Two pieces by Ralph Vaughan Williams from the 1920s stand out here: the Mass in G minor (1923), and the Te Deum for the enthronement of Cosmo Gordon Lang in 1928. Despite the general raising of standards of workmanship in composition in the wake of Stanford's work, neither Stanford nor figures such as Edward Bairstow can be said to have utilised the techniques of continental musical modernism as employed by Stravinsky and others; those techniques once described by Stanford as 'modern stinks.'<sup>9</sup> Fundamentally, as the musicologist Erik Routley put it, Stanford had taken the repertory of the Victorian church and had said '[t]his, using the same materials and the same vocabulary, can be done better.'<sup>10</sup> However, the work

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<sup>8</sup> For general accounts of the music of the period, see Erik Routley, *Twentieth century church music* pp.13-31; Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1979), i:315-38.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Spicer, *Herbert Howells* (Bridgend, 1998) p.47.

<sup>10</sup> Routley, *Twentieth Century Church Music* p.15.

of a number of clerical patrons was instrumental in engaging a generation of younger composers, not previously employed by the church, who wrote in a style self-consciously and deliberately more modernist than their tutors. The most remarkable series of commissions was by one of the figures who will recur several times during this paper: those of Walter Hussey, Vicar of St Matthew's Northampton from 1943 until 1955 and his promotion to the deanery at Chichester.<sup>11</sup> The series of anthems commissioned for the annual St Matthew's Day service at Northampton included Benjamin Britten's 'Rejoice in the Lamb', written in 1943. The piece itself was extraordinarily daring at the time, and in many senses has few peers since. Hussey was to go on to secure anthems from the Catholics Lennox Berkeley and Edmund Rubbra, the agnostic Gerald Finzi and the radical Michael Tippett, none of whom had before that point a significant corpus of church music to their name. Hussey, in so far as he was able to articulate the rationale for what he was doing, was determined that the church should be commissioning the very best of genuinely contemporary music.

So we see that there was considerable Anglo-Catholic involvement in the refreshing of the English choral repertoire, with a stress being placed on the necessity of real engagement with the most contemporary styles. However, this period also saw a seemingly contradictory effort, in which Anglo-Catholics were also centrally involved: the effort to recover older and indeed ancient forms of music, and in particular, plainsong and the Tudor repertoire. The first key publication of plainsong for practical use was *The Psalter Noted* by Thomas Helmore, which appeared as early as 1849, with the edition known as 'Briggs & Frere', the *Manual of Plain-song* published in 1902. However, plainsong in its unadorned and unaccompanied form was and is

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<sup>11</sup> Hussey himself documented much of his work in his *Patron of Art. The Revival of a Great Tradition among Modern Artists* (London, 1985). See Garth Turner, "Aesthete, impressario and indomitable persuader": Walter Hussey and St Matthew's Northampton and Chichester Cathedral', in Diana Wood, (ed.), *The Church and the Arts*, (Studies in Church History 28, Oxford, 1992) 523-35.: David Coke with Robert J. Potter, 'The Cathedral and Modern Art', in Mary Hobbs, ed., *Chichester Cathedral. An Historical Survey* (Chichester, 1994), 267-82

difficult for both choirs and congregations alike. With this difficulty in mind, two separate publications sought to make the form easier to use, both connected with Percy Dearmer and Primrose Hill; firstly, the *English Hymnal* of 1906 included some plainsong office hymns with organ accompaniments. Secondly, Martin Shaw's *Anglican Folk Mass* of 1917 sought to provide a functional congregational setting for regular use.<sup>12</sup> Despite the name, the setting has little in the way of folk melody in it, but is rather a syllabic setting that owes much to the melodic style of plainsong, with organ accompaniment.

The *English Hymnal* was a highly significant publication in several other ways. As well as reviving the use of plainsong, it was instrumental in the introduction of English folk melody into hymnody. This was theologically significant for several reasons, since folk melody fulfilled a number of important criteria; not least, it was indigenous. This whole lecture could have been given over to understandings of the place of 'Englishness' in the arts during this period, and the story is so complex that there is only time to allude to it here. Suffice it to say that the attraction of folk song must be understood as in opposition to the supposed Germanic nature of much nineteenth century hymnody; the 'Englishness card' was also later to be played against supposed Americanisation in the 1950s, as we shall come onto shortly. Its impact in hymnody can clearly be seen in the *English Hymnal*, with several traditional tunes being used in harmonisations by Vaughan Williams. Examples include the tune Kingsfold ('I heard the voice of Jesus say'), the Irish tune Slane ('Lord of all hopefulness') and, perhaps most famously, the tune Forest Green, now indissolubly wedded to 'O little town of Bethlehem'. Vaughan Williams was also on the editorial team, with Martin Shaw, of the *Oxford Book of Carols* of 1928, through the influence of which a host of traditional tunes and texts were insinuated into the church-goer's

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<sup>12</sup> Donald Gray, *Percy Dearmer. A parson's pilgrimage* (Norwich, 2000) pp.62-8, 70-71; Temperley, *Music of the English Parish Church* vol. 1, p.333-4

imagination, including the now familiar carol 'The Truth from Above' adapted by Vaughan Williams from a Herefordshire tune.

In the mid 1950s, English church music and the 'establishment' of organisations, critics and people that populated it, were arguably in rude health. Although it is difficult to verify systematically, it is probably the case that musical standards of choirs of all sorts, their training and direction were at their highest point in over a century. The repertoire was in many ways a successful mixture of the best of previous centuries with a controlled infusion of modernism. All this was backed with an active and growing musicological industry, and by institutions such as the Royal School of Church Music, which celebrated its 40-year anniversary in 1967. Here was a profession of church musicians, with close links with the academic and critical spheres, a clear sense of its own purpose and history, and an equally clear idea about the standards to be applied whilst going about fulfilling the role. As Erik Routley expressed it 'On Christmas Day 1955, some of us thought we had Church music pretty well where we wanted it - "taped."'<sup>13</sup>

Routley's choice of date was quite deliberate, for it was during the last week of that year that he received the first inklings of the first of the two waves of change that were to upset this settled state of affairs. The work he received to review, the *Folk Mass* of Geoffrey Beaumont, heralded a massive growth of interest in popular music for worship, and will be discussed in greater detail later on. The other part of the pincer movement in which the establishment found itself caught was the avant-garde movement in the secular classical field. It may be fairly argued that the degree of public engagement with the most contemporary of British music declined markedly between the end of the war and the 1970s, as the styles which emerged became progressively

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<sup>13</sup> *Twentieth Century Church Music*, p.151; on the 'establishment', see Ian Jones and Peter Webster, 'Anglican "Establishment" reactions to "pop" church music, 1956-c.1990' in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, eds., *Elite and Popular Religion*, (Studies in Church History 42, Woodbridge, 2006) pp.429-41.

more experimental and less accessible. Hence the degree to which the most contemporary of art music could be absorbed into the repertoire of even very capable cathedral and parish choirs was severely restricted. There were some successes: new works were commissioned for the new Coventry cathedral, and there also appeared the evening service for St John's College Cambridge of 1961 by Michael Tippett. However, the distance between contemporary secular music and church music was perhaps wider in 1970 than it had been all century. Not only was there a practical difficulty with performing avant-garde music; it also presented a serious challenge to the integrated theology of the arts that had been prevalent twenty years before: how could theologians meaningfully speak of an integrated national style, with its roots in 'Christian civilisation' that could encompass Harrison Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies and the early work of John Tavener, as well as Howells, Stanford and Thomas Tallis ?

From the mid-1950s, a minority of those concerned at the disappearance of a common church music vernacular began to experiment with a quite different source of inspiration: light music. The 1930s, 40s and 50s were arguably the heyday of 'light music' as a popular and recognisable musical genre. With the particular help of BBC broadcasting (which of course broadcast its own Light Programme), light music arguably represented the closest thing to an English musical *lingua franca* in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is unsurprising, therefore, that church musicians looking to develop music for worship with a broad but accessible appeal should have turned to this genre.

The main impetus for experimentation with light music for worship came from clergy on the liberal-catholic wing of the Church of England in the 1950s, first with the publication of the *Folk Mass* by Geoffrey Beaumont in 1956, and subsequently from the Twentieth Century Church Light Music Group, with hymn-writer Patrick Appleford at its head. Though Beaumont's work has largely fallen from use, and it is Appleford's hymn tunes (such as



*Living Lord*) which have better stood the test of time, it was the *Folk Mass* which attracted both greater media attention and greater discussion in the pages of learned church music publications. As my colleague Ian Jones and I have argued, although the response from what we might call the 'Anglican musical establishment' was by no means uniform, it attracted unusually vociferous condemnation from some, who found it (amongst other things) poorly composed, too overtly populist and insufficiently 'English' in style.<sup>14</sup>

One of the more peculiar aspects of discussion of the *Folk Mass* was that it seemed to some critics at once both too new and too old. Too new because it appeared to some to show a wilful disregard of a longer liturgical tradition, and too old since it did not stand up to scrutiny as contemporary music either: as one correspondent to *Musical Opinion* wrote in 1958, 'Playing the examples on my piano I was taken back to schooldays, when one could buy the latest hits for sixpence. All the faded vulgarities are there – the vamp-like bass, the facile syncopation, the added sixths. Is that how we are to worship God?'<sup>15</sup> That the *Folk Mass* did not draw on the newest musical styles can hardly be questioned; however, the accusation in fact misunderstood Beaumont's original intentions. Although the composer himself was keen that the music appeal to younger churchgoers who found much existing church music archaic, he nevertheless saw the necessity of writing in a more general style which would not just appeal to the young; at one stage characterising his compositions as 'housewives' choice music'.<sup>16</sup> The light church music composers of the 1950s and 1960s were not so much accidentally behind the times as deliberately seeking to create music for worship sufficiently contemporary to be a genuine alternative to the European classical tradition,

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<sup>14</sup> For a fuller analysis of the debate around the *Folk Mass*, see Ian Jones and Peter Webster, 'Anglican "Establishment" reactions'. See also Jones and Webster, 'Expressions of Authenticity: Music for Worship' in Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams (eds.), *Redefining Christian Britain. Post 1945 perspectives* (London, SCM, 2007) pp.50-62.

<sup>15</sup> J.P. Jackson to the Editor, *Musical Opinion* 964, (January 1958) p. 239.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in a letters page tribute to Beaumont soon after his death, *Church Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1970, p. 4.

yet sufficiently 'mainstream' and evocative of an older, more familiar, style to have broad-based appeal.

It is over the question of popular church music that the fault lines in Catholic theologies of the arts come into sharp focus. The artistic conditions of the late 1950s and 1960s made it almost impossible simultaneously to maintain that religious art had to be authentically English and of the highest possible musical quality, but at the same time genuinely of the people, and contemporary in style. As I now move on to consider developments in religious drama and the visual arts, we shall see many of the same trends emerge.

### **Religious drama**

In religious drama, the trajectory of development over the period from 1918 to about 1970 is slightly different. Whilst church music had a very long early-modern and nineteenth-century legacy on which to feed and against which to rebel, those Anglo-Catholics interested in religious drama were beginning from a base of almost nothing in 1918; at the end of the period, the cause of religious drama was to come up against many of the same issues of cultural change and diversification. I should say at this point that I am primarily concerned with plays written for performance in or near churches, and with explicitly Christian themes. The broader story of the treatment of religious themes on the commercial stage requires separate treatment, which I hope to be able to do in print elsewhere.

It would be fair to say that historical work on the religious drama in the twentieth century has scarcely begun, but a few observations about the situation in 1918 may safely be made. There had been a recurrent interest in the Oberammergau Passion Play in the later nineteenth century, with a steady stream of English clerics travelling to witness it, and repeated attempts were

made to bring the original cast to England, but to no avail. In general terms drama (excepting that of the liturgy) had no established role within English worship, and the default reaction of many, and not only the more vocal Protestant pressure groups, was to regard such performances as at best rather wasteful and of uncertain end, and at worst an incitement to idolatry. The 1911 play *The Miracle*, which was produced at Olympia in London, provoked a storm of controversy over its portrayal of the Virgin Mary, including one pamphlet posing directly the question of the play's idolatrous nature.<sup>17</sup> There were in the years immediately surrounding the First World War some low-key attempts at *rapprochement*: one of the guest preachers invited to Dick Sheppard's St Martin-in-the-Fields in 1917 was Henry Irving, who thought the event of a theatrical director preaching in an English church unprecedented.<sup>18</sup> There were also performances of plays in London churches connected with Canon James Adderley, with one attracting some press attention since the play was one that had been refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain.<sup>19</sup> These were however still low-key, and it was not until 1928 that George Bell, then Dean of Canterbury, although soon to be promoted to the see of Chichester, took an audacious step that was to significantly raise the profile of religious drama. He successfully persuaded the soon-to-be Poet Laureate John Masefield to write a play for performance in the cathedral, *The Coming of Christ*, which was performed to four successive packed houses at Whitsuntide 1928. This was significant for several reasons: whilst it may not have been, as has been suggested, the first dramatic performance in an English cathedral since the Middle Ages, it was certainly seen as such in much of the commentary at the time; it also emboldened the chapter at Canterbury, under Bell's successors, to commission a series of very prominent plays, which included T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). There is also some

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<sup>17</sup> Anon., *Is this idolatry? Catholic or Protestant? A strong word on the controversy about "The Miracle" at Olympia, London* (London, 1912).

<sup>18</sup> H[enry] B. Irving, *The Amusement of the People. A Lecture delivered in the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields on November 10th, 1916* (London, 1916)

<sup>19</sup> 'A Banned Play. To be given in St. Anne's church, Highgate' *London Evening Standard*, 8th June 1925

evidence that other cathedrals were encouraged to do the same, although not as prominently.<sup>20</sup>

Bell's own rationale for the commission, although only spelled out some years after the event, neatly demonstrates the extent to which an integral vision of Christianity and the arts was possible at this time. It was at once backward- and forward-looking: the church had in the Middle Ages been the cradle of drama, with the proliferation of mystery and miracle plays; the early modern period had seen a divorce between the two, but there was now in 1928 an opportunity to effect a remarriage. Drama was for Bell uniquely effective for two purposes: it could communicate Christian truth freshly to a western civilisation that had (temporarily, as Bell believed) lost contact with its essential Christian roots; and, in achieving such a reintegration, a witness would be given to that essential connection between a healthy civilisation and its art, since correctly ordered art would inevitably reflect those roots. Thus it was that there appeared to be no contradiction between a revival of old forms and the retention of a contemporary language.

The twenty-five years from 1928 until 1953 now appear to have seen a remarkable flowering of religious drama in Britain. The Religious Drama Society, of which Bell was founding President in 1929, had by 1950 several hundred affiliated groups; as well as the plays by Masefield and Eliot, there was also very significant work in this period by Dorothy L. Sayers, both in *The Zeal of thy House*, for Canterbury in 1937, but supremely the cycle of radio plays *The Man born to be King*, broadcast in 1942.<sup>21</sup> Bell, preaching ahead of a 25th anniversary performance of *The Coming of Christ* in 1953, certainly

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<sup>20</sup> See Peter Webster, 'George Bell, John Masefield and "The Coming of Christ": context and significance', *Humanitas: The Journal of the George Bell Institute* 10:2 (2009) 111-24. See also R.C.D. Jasper, *George Bell. Bishop of Chichester* (London, 1967) pp.41-44.

<sup>21</sup> On the Canterbury plays, see Kenneth W. Pickering, *Drama in the Cathedral*. On the Religious Drama Society, see Kathleen Bainbridge-Bell & June Ottaway, *A brief historical sketch of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain* (London, 1957). I am also indebted to Margaret Hunt, archivist of RADIUS (formerly the Religious Drama Society) for information, and for sight of her unpublished history of the Society.

thought the play to have been epoch-making, and the future brighter still. However, the end of our period saw the flowering of religious drama wane nearly as rapidly as it had begun. The number of new plays being written for church performance waned, and there was certainly no repetition of the kind of engagement with leading playwrights as had been the case in the 1930s and 1940s. It was also the case that the Religious Drama Society was to find itself in acute financial difficulty in the 1960s, needing to shed staff, and shutting down entirely for a period from 1963. The historical work on this area is only just beginning, but a number of reasons may be tentatively suggested; a mixture of the mundane and the more intangible. The late 1950s and 1960s saw the increasing impact of television, and other marked shifts in recreation, rendering local amateur drama only one in a much wider selection of recreational options. At the same time, in a manner paralleling developments in music that we've already encountered, trends within theatrical writing moved in directions which made an accommodation with religious sentiments increasingly difficult. The advent of social realist drama of the kitchen sink type, and the increased testing by playwrights of the moral boundaries of censorship in anticipation of the abolition of the work of the Lord Chamberlain in 1968, made an easy recommendation of the most contemporary style in drama as *a priori* the most suitable for the church impossible to sustain.

### **The visual arts**

In the third and final section, I should like to outline the path taken by Anglo-Catholic thinking and action in relation to the visual arts, and in particular, painting and sculpture. If it was the case that church musicians inherited a tradition from the nineteenth century, but dramatists started with a more or less clean slate, the situation for the visual artist in the 1920s and 1930s was different again. There was no shortage of sculpted figures, stained glass, metalwork and textiles in British churches in 1918, a considerable amount of which had been executed by significant artists. Church art of the nineteenth

century had also been accompanied by formidable scholarly work into the older styles which much of it emulated. The strong impetus in Catholic thinking towards the emulation of older forms had been given a free rein. There was however a significant and growing consensus, visible by the early 1930s, that some vital connection between the church and the most contemporary art had been lost, and was in need of urgent restoration. Amongst the most vocal critics were artists themselves: Henry Moore, in correspondence with Walter Hussey, referred to the 'affected and sentimental prettinesses' that passed for church decoration.<sup>22</sup> John Rothenstein, Director of the Tate Gallery, was still arguing as late as 1956 that 'for a well-known artist to make a painting or a piece of sculpture for a church is news so startling as to be announced in headlines.' This was a recent phenomenon, rather than the norm, since 'in earlier ages the paintings and sculpture made to communicate the Christian message were amongst the supreme works of man.'<sup>23</sup>

I have referred at length in a recent article in *Studies in Church History* to a remarkable moment between c.1935 and 1956 when a small but very well connected coalition of clergy, critics and artists combined to attempt to address this perceived problem, through commissioning of new work, broadcast and written journalism, and ceaseless networking and discussion.<sup>24</sup> The two clergy involved most centrally in this are two we have already encountered this evening: George Bell and Walter Hussey. Between them, they managed to bring into being a quite remarkable series of commissions of genuinely contemporary art for the Church of England. Bell, the older man, was involved first, with some role in commissions from Duncan Grant and the mural painter Hans Feibusch amongst others. The most remarkable series was that commissioned by Hussey, first for St Matthew's Northampton, and then for Chichester Cathedral. They included the 'Madonna and Child' for

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<sup>22</sup> Hussey, *Patron of Art* p.32.

<sup>23</sup> John Rothenstein, 'Art in our Churches', *Picture Post*, 19th May 1956, 27-9, at 27-8.

<sup>24</sup> 'The "revival" in the visual arts in the Church of England, c.1935-c.1956', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds), *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History* (Studies in Church History 44, Boydell and Brewer, 2008), pp.297-306.

Northampton by Henry Moore and a 'Crucifixion' by Graham Sutherland, both at Northampton, and work by John Piper and Sutherland (again) for Chichester.

That this movement had a particular theological impetus behind it is apparent from much of the writing that accompanied it. Hans Feibusch, with whom Bell was in very close touch, identified a strong tendency in the Church to 'shirk the question of style and cling to long-established forms and symbols.' This was for Feibusch a dangerous policy of isolation, which 'tends to separate the Church and all it stands for still more from the rest of modern life and put it into a remote corner. The ordinary man who easily takes the Church for a relic from the past, does so not least for its appearance.'<sup>25</sup> Bell wrote prolifically on the matter, and in particular during the years of crisis of 1939-45 and beyond. He too often stressed the necessary connection between art and contemporary culture. Religious art 'is not a thing which can be isolated from the general artistic movement of an age. Confine it and it becomes corrupted, its expression a dead letter.'<sup>26</sup> Bell also viewed the visual arts as potentially instrumental in a dynamic process by which the Church was to revive and transform society at a national level. A hopeful sense that all was not lost became stronger in Bell's thinking as the outcome of the war became gradually clearer: '[r]eligion and art, the Church and the artist, may yet do something together again to transform the spiritual life of Europe .... There is a void in the human soul, crying out to be filled.'<sup>27</sup> For Feibusch, the horrors of the war meant that the naive and childish language of past religious art would not do in the new world of 1946: 'Only the most profound, tragic, moving, sublime vision can redeem us.'<sup>28</sup>

The years between 1940 and perhaps 1960 now appear to be the high-water mark of Anglican, and Anglo-Catholic engagement with the

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<sup>25</sup> Feibusch, *Mural Painting* (London, 1946), 90-1.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Church and the Artist', *The Listener* 13<sup>th</sup> January 1955, 65-66, at 65.

<sup>27</sup> 'The church and the artist' *The Studio* cxxiv, no. 594, Sept 1942, 81-92, at 90, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Feibusch, *Mural Painting*, 92.

contemporary visual arts in this country, a pattern which matches, although not exactly, that which I have already identified for music and religious drama. Why was it, then, that in a 1977 retirement tribute to Walter Hussey, one of his closest collaborators, the critic and historian Sir Kenneth Clark was to style him the 'last great patron of art in the Church of England.' ?<sup>29</sup> Part of the explanation, in Hussey's case, was his lack of interest in engaging with the most contemporary art of his later years. Of the commissionees for Northampton in the 1940s, Sutherland, Moore, Britten and Finzi were all born within 11 years of Hussey himself; Moore was the oldest at 45, Britten only 30. In contrast his most famous late commissions for Chichester, when Hussey was approaching retirement in the mid 1970s, were from William Walton, in his seventies and Marc Chagall, in his late eighties. A wider factor, which may also explain Hussey's commissions, was the marked diversification in styles in the visual arts, which again matches that already discussed in music and drama. Once again, the rhetoric of the necessary connection between a fundamentally Christian society and its arts could no longer be put forward in the face of the posters and adverts of pop art, minimalism and a newly dominant abstraction. For much of the 1960s and 70s, there seemed to be few points of contact between the styles of art making the running, and the church as a commissioning body; few artists who both possessed an understanding of Christian thought, and lacked the common Sixties desire to rebel against the Establishment.

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To conclude: through an examination of the parallels between the visual arts, music and drama, I have attempted to make two main points; one quite firmly, and the second more tentatively. The years from the late 1920s until the late 1950s saw a major enlargement in Anglo-Catholic thinking about the

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<sup>29</sup> Clark, 'Dean Walter Hussey. A Tribute to his Patronage of the Arts' in Walter Hussey, (ed.), *Chichester 900* (Chichester, 1975) 68-72, at 72.



role of religious art, and particularly over the question of style; whilst the impetus towards the recovery of authentic ancient style was still strong, the writings of George Bell and the example of Walter Hussey stressed the urgent necessity of engagement with the most contemporary of styles. This was necessary for two reasons, which are in fact the same reason viewed from different angles: firstly, because the church could not hope to regain the attention of 'Modern Man' without engaging with and speaking through the art in which he was expressing himself - a mission imperative. Secondly, if Britain was still to be considered a Christian country, a part of 'Christian civilisation', then the health of the nation's culture could be gauged by the degree to which the contemporary artist engaged with and was nourished from the nation's Christian soil.

The second point is a more tentative one, partly because of the remarkably patchy state of our knowledge, as distinct from memory, of the 1960s. I don't wish to suggest that all engagement between the church and living artists, composers and dramatists ceased by 1970; far from it, since no modern cathedral is complete without a programme of commissioning of new art or a new festival anthem. The Religious Drama Society recommenced operations later in the 1960s, and continues today, under the name RADIUS. However, it is clear that rapidly diverging styles in all the three art forms under discussion made engagement considerably more difficult, whether with realist drama, extreme abstraction in painting, atonal music or rock and roll. It was possible still for theologians to assert the mission imperative; that the church must remain engaged with at least some of the more congenial of the multiplicity of styles on offer, in order to communicate the Word more effectively. However, it became impossible to articulate the second component part of the rhetoric of the 1940s; the interdependence of Christianity and a stable, relatively uniform national culture, with anything like the conviction of George Bell twenty years before. If Anglo-Catholics had been most prominent amongst those articulating that cultural connection, and

by contrast Anglican evangelicals more closely focussed on the narrower mission imperative, it was the wider catholic understanding that was the major casualty by the end of the period.

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