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Susan Ann Faulkner

An examination of ritual and meaning in the Christian Eucharist

This thesis emphasises the importance of the experience of intersection points in the ritual of the Eucharist. Through the intersection of many layers of experience, tradition and history, meaning can be discovered and created afresh. This is illustrated with a detailed description of the regular Eucharist service in the particular context of the Anglican Parish of St Silas, Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne. This narrative is included as an exercise in narrative theology, concentrating on the importance of actual experience (in this case from my own personal perspective) as well as the theoretical and doctrinal issues which have been important in developing Eucharistic theology. There is a brief analysis of theories of ritual as well as a discussion on the nature and functioning of diversity today. Throughout, the Eucharist will be understood as a foundational part of Christian identity. Although this is an examination distinctly from a Christian perspective, I use the term 'Divine' in referring to what is traditionally understood as 'God' and the priests are referred to in feminine terms to challenge traditional male gendered language.

I come to conclude that it is the diversity that each individual actor and context brings to the Eucharist that makes it possible to glimpse the Divine and eternal. This is ever present, however it is when human *being* is open to a creative future by meeting the 'other' that a more fully liberated future is possible. This leads me to conclude that not only is diversity important, it is an essentially good and necessary experience. In society today there are many points of tension in our experience of diversity, and this thesis illustrates why a need to conform is ultimately futile and unfaithful to Christian theology.

**An examination of ritual and meaning in the Christian
Eucharist: Diversity and difference as experienced in the context of a
Sunday Eucharist in the Anglican parish of St Silas, Byker**

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Chapter One: Introduction

The object of this study is to examine the relationship between ritual practice and the communication of meaning within the particular setting of an Anglican inner city parish Eucharist. I am seeking to develop a theory of intersection points in ritual and in life where spiritual truths are encountered. Intersection points are moments in life where experiences and influences come together; different aspects of life and context come together. I am not concerned here with those intersection points which happen accidentally in the course of daily life, but rather in the constructed occasions of ritual. In these the context is pregnant with potential meaning and human actors are filled with their own narrative potential. These moments, if they are regular as in the case of a weekly Eucharist, form the basis for shaping those more accidental intersection points. If one is formed in an inclusive encounter with difference and otherness in our ritual religious life this develops a propensity to inclusivity in life as a whole. It is a specific purpose in religious life to create spaces for special encounters to take place. Ritual space indicates a differentiation between ordinary time and significant time and this is what the liturgical space of a church creates. The ritual is laden with meanings acquired and set aside through history and tradition. It indicates a place where the extra-ordinary may occur, that which is not divorced from reality but may be expected to break through reality in those specific circumstances. There is an essential link between the ordinary day to day and the sacred which is acknowledged in ritual actions, as Martin Buber describes in his book The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism ‘The not-holy, in fact, does not exist; there exists only the not yet hallowed, that which has not yet been liberated to its holiness, that which he shall hallow’ (Buber 1960, 171). Thus although there is a differentiation in the spaces and times, they are inextricably linked in a way that each transforms and informs the other.

It is within this context that I as priest function. The academic interest has arisen from this very personal point of view as I am a parish priest who presides at the Eucharist each Sunday in my own parish. It also follows the impulse behind the Alcuin Liturgy Guide by Benjamin Gordon-Taylor and Simon Jones in developing an understanding of the underlying principles of Eucharistic ritual ‘the appreciation of which form the basis for the making of local decisions.’ (Gordon-Taylor and Jones 2005, xi). As local parish priest I am interested in uncovering within myself those principles which inform my local practice and decision making processes.

Throughout this study I am aware that I wrestle with the temptation to describe the ritual of the Eucharist in a rather utilitarian way, lapsing into ideas of the effectiveness or otherwise of the ritual. Rather than ‘effective’ I believe the Eucharist to be an opportunity for the Divine to be encountered at its closest and most immediate (in this study I prefer to refer to God as the Divine and to avoid where possible gendered or hierarchical language although this is not always possible). The meaning communicated has more to do with the nature of Divine/Human relations and the possibility of transformation by this encounter than a meaning intended by human beings, either individual or communal. The Eucharist will be taken as a special but not exclusive point in which eternal and temporal time collide. Hopefully I will avoid over emphasising the importance of the Eucharist as a ritual in which it is possible to approach the Divine to the exception of all other possibilities. I wish to use the Eucharist as anthropologists might use any ritual from another culture. Just as one might study an antiquated or alien ritual so I would like to approach the ritual of the Eucharist. It is my belief that temporal and eternal time intersect at many points in life, some in conscious and intended

circumstances and at others by mere chance. For many Christians it is possible to say that the space created by the Eucharist opens up the possibility of such an encounter, which has a long embedded history and tradition in Christian theology, including the spectrum of theologies from Transubstantiation to Revelation.

My primary interest is in developing a theory of the importance of 'intersection points' as key mechanisms by which meaning develops and is understood. I understand intersection points as those points in which many meanings, narratives, traditions and interpretation meet. I will look at sedimentation of meanings laid down by the passing of time and the variety of contexts and how the points in people's personal lives (narratives) intersect with these layers. The interest in this for me has arisen in my experience as a parish priest who leads a worshipping community for whom no common assumptions can easily be made. The members come from many countries, many cultures and indeed some are converts from other faiths and from none. Several languages are used as first languages and personal backgrounds vary from industrial Northern English, professional teacher from Pakistan, to those having a long term disability preventing regular employment. Yet we come together to worship, there is a sense of common bond that transcends our differences. It is not that everyone understands one another but that there is space for each to be present and part of the ritual in their own way. In some way despite, or I would argue because of, our differences we are able to glimpse something of the eternal transcendent mystery which we are proclaiming. As both professional practitioner and worshipping Christian I have been challenged and excited by this experience and have sought through this study to understand the process by which this revelation of transcendence in difference takes place week by week in the Eucharist. This study will therefore take the concept of

intersection points and explore it further from several directions. After having been very descriptive of my central ritual, the Sunday service in my church, I will look more closely at the current thinking on the subject of diversity and equality to see if there is anything useful here to cast light on the concept of the intersections between differences. It is through encounter with theories of diversity and difference that people's personal narratives can be approached. Then I will look at what the major themes and influences in the development of the ritual itself in the light of tradition and interpretation have to contribute.

Intersection points

A useful way to consider intersection points is to ask if the means by which they create meaning for a ritual is in intensifying the meaning and experience, as Douglas Davies describes in his conference paper;

Within Judaeo-Christian traditions the interplay of the Passover, the Last Supper, and the liturgical anamnesis of the Mass or Eucharist might stand as a prime example of an act of remembering that brings the past into the ritual present where emotions aligned with associated values or beliefs may be intensified. (D. Davies 2008, 1)

In this paper Davies uses Harvey Whitehouse's models of Semantic memory and Episodic memory as a starting point for analysis, personal identity and religious experience. I am looking at the interplay, the intersection, of these modes too as a way in which meaning is expressed and conveyed in ritual form. Thus it is in the meeting of the doctrinal mode which ' . . . involves centralization of authority, the maintenance of orthodoxy, but the capacity to reach very many people.' (D. Davies 2008, 11) and the

imaginistic mode which is personal and more often related to traumatic events which, ‘ . . . gives rise to small groups of closely bonded individuals who have experienced such events together’ (D. Davies 2008, 11)

It is my contention that it has always been in the interplay of the personal and authoritarian modes that what is commonly called tradition has stood. No matter who and how few may seek to guard an orthodoxy, unless it is assented *to* and made meaningful *for* many people it will not persist. In his conference paper Davies posits that it is ‘with an eye to the power of social worlds to classify experience in types of emotion’ (D. Davies 2008, 20) that much of the work of the study of religion should look in the future. It may well be that it is in an analysis of the role of emotion in the Eucharistic ritual that further progress could be made in the understanding of what meaning is being produced; however for the purposes of this study it is the arena with all its layers rather than the result that is being outlined. There will obviously be points at which much rests on the feelings produced by the ritual, the emotional realm of human relationships, however I will allow in this study that this may well be a key means by which someone may negotiate complex intersections of meanings and process their own response but will not analyse this as a resulting meaning rather than merely acknowledge the need to look at this avenue further. In many ways I am looking at the object about which people are feeling rather than what those feelings are, or mean. Throughout, there will no doubt be theological hints as to the bigger picture, to the vision of the future and the theology that underpins my own ministry, yet this study is not an exercise in elucidating this but rather asking the question as to the role played by ritual in expressing not only my own belief as priest but the reception of the congregation as believers. As such it is legitimate to ask how far my theological

predisposition may be predeterminate of the ritual I conduct without having to articulate what that presupposition is.

Myself as both priest and researcher

At the heart of this study is a detailed description of a typical Sunday Eucharist in the Church in which I serve as priest. During my research I have found very little literature which gives a blow by blow account of the Eucharist. There is plenty of work done on specific parts of the service, the wider implications of the service for the church as a whole and discussions of what sort of liturgy the church needs in the modern/postmodern world. In this study I have concentrated on a descriptive phenomenology within which I locate both a specific phenomenon (the Eucharist) and examine the layers of meaning which influence the phenomenon. Indeed it is theologically justified to be an ‘eye witness’ to the faith of the church today.

The Canonical scriptures themselves are, especially in the cases of the Gospels, also eyewitness accounts, describing the life of Jesus and the early church. I felt it was appropriate to take some time and trouble to record an expression of that faith today. Rather than taking some theological principles and examining the Eucharist in the light of these, I would prefer to describe the ritual and examine the principles emerging from this. Of course this is problematic in that I cannot pretend to come as a blank canvas, however the methodology of contextual theology and feminist theology which takes lived experience seriously as its material for study has always been my academic interest. Throughout earlier theories of ritual I am always asking questions such as ‘what do the participants in the ritual believe they are doing?’ rather than standing

theoretically as a dispassionate observer and forming conclusions from this stand point. In a strong sense this study is a voyage of discovery for me as I peel away the layers of my own intentions and preconceptions and analyse how I apply them to my specific context.

This study will necessarily be a ‘priest’s eye view’ of the Sunday liturgy in an Anglican parish church. It will look at what is intended for the service and hopefully occasionally provide insights from the congregation as to the reception of those intentions. The relationship between ritual and intention and the problem of belief and effectiveness is also wrestled with by G. Ronald Murphy in his analysis of the Roman Mass and his perspective as a practitioner of the ritual too. He is aware in his contribution to the book The Spectrum of Ritual that ‘ . . . many readers do not share the belief system on which the ritual of the Mass is predicated and thus do not have access to the ritual ‘from inside.’ ’ although he acknowledges that ‘There are reports of ‘aesthetic’ experiences on the part of individuals observing rituals, whose cognitive content they could not subscribe to.’ (Murphy S. J. 1979, 319-20)

As such while at one time seeking to transcend the simple approach of textual analysis I do seek to render accurately the actual words of the service which we use. Thus there is full inclusion of the texts being referred to through the description. Whilst I emphasise the language barriers which occur in the congregation it is also important to remember the language of the other members of the congregation and so the words themselves are important.

In studies such as that by Martin Stringer (Stringer 1999) there is an attempt at an objective and detached analysis of the services of a variety of denominations. I am the parish priest of the congregation in this study and as such I have both a unique insight into its life and workings but also a vested interest which precludes any absolute objectivity. I think it is important when looking at the position of the priest and the laity, however, to remember that both the priest and people are coming to *worship* at the service and that the priest has a background of her own, her own story of faith and worship formed before she was ordained. I feel sometimes that the distinction between the priest and the people is over-emphasised almost to the point of disconnection. Priests themselves come from a variety of backgrounds. They do not arrive in a parish fully formed, holding all the answers as some powerful gatekeeper, and somehow unlike the congregation they serve. Thus, as described in the opening chapter of Testimonies of the City with regard to studying oral history in the urban context, Herbert and Rodger explain that,

The social location of the researcher has also been problematized. The extent to which the researcher and respondent share the same cultural background and world view has been noted as an important factor in gaining access to the respondents and also securing their trust. (Rodger and Herbert 2007, 8)

Although I share neither the exact same cultural background nor world view as the congregation and community in Byker, just as Herbert and Rodger go on to discuss, people have come to know me and I have shared their experiences and hopes and fears over the last seven years. People know my background and opinions and as parish priest I have a very privileged access to their lives. This does impress upon me the demand for sensitivity when discussing my parishioners in such an academic study and it is a project I have undertaken with the support and indeed interest of my congregation. The

chapter describing a Sunday morning has been read by members of the congregation to ensure that, although it is a view from the altar, what is described is recognisable to the lay members too. Indeed it has had the positive effect of holding a mirror up to some members who have been encouraged by the description. In one particular instance the lay member challenged my statistic of participants in the service. However when he sat down and analysed the numbers himself he was pleasantly surprised that the figures were correct and realised the depth of commitment and activity of his fellow members. For external researchers who may come to a study a congregation like this one for a limited period of time, dipping in and out of the daily flow of the life of the parish as a whole, I would expect and indeed hope other aspects of the parish and worship would come to the fore. However, as the concept of narrative and memory will be themes in this study, it is important to state that my experience is one of having been part of the narrative in the last seven years and I hope will continue to be part of the future story of this community for some years to come. This locates me as someone with an explicit vested interest in the relationships already formed and those that will be formed in this worshipping community. This then colours my view of what has been and will shape my view of the future. This could balance very closely on presenting only a relative perspective, being unable to say any more than this is the truth from my point of view yet as MacIntyre suggests, ‘one cannot go on indefinitely saying ‘you always stand somewhere, like it or not’ without giving some account of how that claim arises from where oneself stands.’ . (Hovey in *Studies in Christian Ethics* Vo.19 no 2, 173).

In giving examples from my experience I am aware that I am being quite personal with some of the stories I give. This can make my theoretical approach seem overly anecdotal. However I am using this method as a specific one for narrative

purposes as well as an academic expression of a personal practice. I do not see it as my role, either as academic or pastor, to put words into the mouths of other Christians. As such all that I describe is a view from where I stand rather than presuming to speak on other's behalf. As such this piece of work is an example of a key intersection point itself. It is the intersection between my learning, reading and thinking, and my practice. It is in no way meant as an empirical study of the views or intentions of other members of the worship community. I hope the members of my congregation will see that the examples I give are presented with both love and pride from their priest. I hope I am following the tradition of telling the story of Christian faith and commitment. Indeed I have often preached that although the Bible is a closed Canon of sacred scripture, all the lives of faithful Christian communities and individuals are the unwritten texts, and as such our times and narratives are also important. The narrative I present in this chapter is both personal and selective, and yet I hope I render faithfully the experience of my time in Byker. As authenticity and recognisability by those being studied is an important part of my methodology, Chapter two, which is a detailed description of my congregation, has been read by several of my congregation members to ensure it is recognisable as who we are.

I must also add that in discussing diversity in the third chapter most of the focus will be looking at what could be described as the most obvious aspects of diversity, those of culture. However I would like to stress that in the context of St Silas it is not just a cultural diversity which is prevalent in the congregation, and that there are significant examples of diversity in all its forms, but which in many cases for pastorally sensitive reasons cannot be illuminated by myself as priest and pastor of the

congregation. As such I am using the most visible and accessible aspect of diversity as a model and exemplar of the theories I wish to explore.

In analysing the ritual and its impact on human *being*, I believe that there is a distinct sense in which each individual person is always in the process of *becoming*, is always *on the way to becoming* the fulfilled and complete person. This process of becoming is a locus at which so many influences intersect. In the Eucharist we see a very specific and intentional point of intersection. It is a ritual pregnant with potential for growth and change. This echoes the description of the principle of the Gathering in the Eucharist described by Gordon-Taylor and Jones,

. . . in the movement from the Greeting to Collect, a specific and unique identity is given to each local expression of the Body of Christ which gathers for worship at a particular time and in a particular place. After a period of personal preparation, the Gathering transforms a group of individuals whatever size into a community gathered for worship, investing in them with a corporate and catholic identity which will remain valid from Gathering to Dismissal, as they seek to encounter the Christ who reveals himself in word and sacrament. (Gordon-Taylor and Jones 2005, 28)

This indicates the possibility of comprehension of a common meaning in the ritual rather than isolated and inaccessible individual ones. There is always a tension between the way in which these meanings are generated and the resulting meanings themselves. It is in the very act of gathering together that a gathered identity is produced. The two things, method and result, are inextricably linked and cannot be posited as separate. This is in contrast to Stringer's conclusion to his study that he has tried to 'explore the way in which individual meanings could be generated within the context of worship rather than exploring the nature or form that those meanings may

take.’ (Stringer 1999, 199) He also helpfully notes that Humphrey and Laidlaw conclude,

That rather than defining ‘ritual’ as a particular type of ‘activity’ we should rather define ‘ritualisation’ as an approach to any kind of activity such that it defines a particular way of doing things, not a set of things which are done. (Stringer 1999, 201)

Thus it is not that ‘this or that’ is done but that what is done has a role as a canonical act defining a way of doing things. This means that not all acts will become ritualised but rather that there is a potential for acts to become ritualised. This leaves the question hanging as to what determines whether an act is ritualised or not? This is indeed what Stringer wants to question in their theory. His study of various contexts illustrates the likelihood that the meaning is intrinsically linked to the ritualised act. Relevant to my context of an Anglican ritual he identifies the festival as of prime significance,

. . . .(I)t was the ‘significance’ of this experience which gave ‘significance’ to the belief and ritual statements which were used within that context. These statements, with their borrowed ‘significance’ could then transfer some of that significance to any context in which they might subsequently be used either within worship or elsewhere. (Stringer 1999, 212)

I would wonder however what the origins of the indicators of significance are, and what defines one situation as significant and another as merely one instance.

The importance of place and context

The setting for this transformation is intentional but not prescriptive. The individuals and their narrative speak to the context as much as the context speaks to the individuals. If we are to make this claim about our Eucharistic theology we have to take seriously where our theology takes place. Our rituals take place somewhere and those places are imbued with significance and power. As Philip Sheldrake states 'It is therefore appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning.' and 'we need environments that offer access to the sacred (however we understand it) - or, better, relate us to life itself as sacred.' (Sheldrake October 2006, 108-9) The actors and the actions are embedded in their context and history. Anthropologists would take seriously the context of their study, which when looking from the outside in some ways is easier. In this study I am at once insider and outsider. I have a vested association with my place as well as my personal history and relationship with the congregation. When I was first appointed at St Silas the congregation had recently taken the decision to embark on a major remodelling project and it was this that I saw through with them in my first year in Byker. One of my major roles has been to accompany the congregation in their journey to realise their hopes for the remodelling, to explore the possibilities for ministry and community contact that have arisen, and to allay fears that such an alteration to a key community building would fail to secure its future and would in fact destroy its links to its history. My role has been about the very relationship between continuity and transformation. To illustrate the continuity and change in the very concrete example of the interior remodelling, the pictures below are of the worship area firstly from a picture acquired by St Silas Church Pentonville of St Silas Byker circa 1930 and the second a photo I took myself,



When we think back over the centuries and examine the present and even speculate about the future we can see that each specific context for worship shapes the outcome of that worship. Whether it be set in a great cathedral, hidden away in the catacombs, in the open air on a piece of derelict land in a city (where my first

celebration of the Eucharist as a priest took place in Scotswood) or in a damp and disused taxi-cab office (once again where many of my early celebrations of the Eucharist took place whilst the parish church was being remodelled) the collective identity of the gathered congregation is refreshed with each instance.

Memory is another indicator of significance. Some memories are of significant events which are memorable because of their emotional or psychological impact. Obviously a study which takes seriously lived experience must take seriously the context of memory in which that experience is stored.

Some theoretical comments

Throughout this study I will generally be referring to the priest in feminine terms; specifically because in the context being examined both the current priests are women. With respect to the theme of diversity and inclusivity I hope this gendered language will also give rise to considerations about how people read themselves into narratives, especially when for so much of the time it has been women reading themselves into the normative male language. Although this study is not specifically about or for women it cannot help but draw from the works of women such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who have developed an approach to theology and, in her particular case, reading the scriptures from the experience of alienation and exclusion of women's voice and experience. In my concern for diversity and inclusion in a wider sense in my own context and experience it is those principles expressed in the collection of works entitled Searching the Scriptures which inform my approach. In her contribution to

Searching the Scriptures, Marjorie Proctor-Smith outlines the approach I would like to take in this study,

Feminist proclamation is dialogical, communal, and participatory. It may take the form of public proclamation by a single individual, but the content and purpose of the proclamation are borne out of on-going honest dialogue among women. It is particularly critical that this dialogue include women of different races, classes, cultures, and so on, including as much diversity as is embodied among women, lest the proclamation give the illusion of universality. Therefore feminist proclamation is also fluid. Emerging out of on-going dialogue among women, suppressed questions, denied experiences, silenced voices begin to surface, to reshape the meaning of feminist proclamation. (Proctor-Smith 1994, 314)

When considering how meaning may be conveyed by a particular ritual, the issue of intentionality must be taken seriously. It is important to consider whether it is the intentions of the people which give the meaning to the Eucharist. How much scope is there for re-interpretation of ritual and does this need to be controlled, guided or restricted? There are many theories of ritual with perspectives from anthropology; sociology and philosophy. Some see religion as a whole as a human construct. However, even allowing for the possibility that religion itself may be a human construct, Peter Berger reminds us that

. . . sociological theory must, by its own logic, view religion as a human projection, and by that same logic can have nothing to say about the possibility that this projection may refer to something other than the being of its projector. In other words, to say that religion is a human projection does not logically preclude the possibility that the projected meanings may have an ultimate status independent of man. (Berger 1967, 180-1)

Theologians such as John Milbank (Milbank 1990) have also resisted the analysis of social science, arguing that the two disciplines are incompatible when read from the starting point of social science and that what he developed was more a social science from the basis of theology.

I have chosen to contest this secular positioning of theology within one particular field: that of social theory. This is the most obvious site of struggle, because theology has rightly become aware of the (absolute) degree to which it is a contingent historical construct emerging from, and reacting back upon, particular social practices conjoined with particular semiotic and figural codings. (Milbank 1990, 2)

What must be borne in mind in this study is not so much the truth or otherwise of the beliefs behind the ritual, but that those who participate take these beliefs seriously. I take seriously both the theories and the beliefs. As Stevenson says ‘For at the end of the day, there is an objectivity about the command to ‘do this’, as God himself takes the initiative to engage with us wherever we are, regardless of our circumstances.’ (Stevenson 2002, 31)

Whether we take this as a record of the historical Jesus and belief about his divinity or otherwise or as an anthropological projection by a community to explain its own actions figured in Divine imagery is important but not definitive. It is still legitimate to examine what humans are saying about themselves in their religious projections, what sort of human society they are modelling. ‘Men, collectively, externalise themselves in common activity and thereby produce human world. This world, including that part of it that we call social structure, attains for them the status of objective reality.’ (Berger 1967, 81) For myself I am comfortable in asserting both that

the Divine has acted in human history, and that all we have to analyse is the human reflection of this which is open to all the critiques human knowledge can bring to bear on it. In religious communities, signs, symbols and sacraments take on a particular significance and importance. In other studies their efficacy is judged often on terms which would not be familiar to those using them. The criteria for judgement come from different and sometimes seemingly mutually exclusive basic truths. It is perfectly possible to set criteria to judge efficacy which are a priori set in a way in which the subject can never be judged effective. In any case it begs the question: effective at what? The subject may operate on several levels all at once or in sequence. There is the possibility the symbol may be said explicitly to operate in one way but in practice work in another. They may have unintentional effects, or effects which seem so far removed from their explicit appearance that without penetrating the complex narrative contained within them would render the symbol meaningless. There are also both personal and community roles for signs, symbols and sacraments. It is possible for something to have a variety of personal meanings but one communal one. This I would argue is most evident in the Eucharist and the ritual around this. I am assuming the Eucharist is an archetypal Christian ritual in the sense that it conforms to the principles below;

At the most fundamental level interaction rituals involve,

1. A group of at least two people physically assembled;
2. who focus attention on the same object or action and each becomes aware that the other is maintaining this focus;
3. who share a common mood or emotion. (Bellah and Tipton 2006, 153)

Speaking of religious symbols which serve to orientate people in their world, symbols such as that of 'Christ' rather than a historical Jesus, Kaufman outlines

When symbols like these become important constituents of attractive, meaningful, and effective frames or orientation for human life, persuading men and women that they make sense of human existence and provide significant salvation from major ills of life, they survive and (may) grow in influence. As each generation passes on this sense of meaning and power to the next, the religious traditions focused by these symbols live and develop. (Kaufman 1996, 112)

Here it is not so much the individual symbols as the attitude to having symbols that may be expressed in the ritual that attends to symbols which mark their significance even when the symbols themselves may change in concrete form. Ritual cannot intellectually develop and function without a prior symbolic concept, a necessity that there are things which defy human comprehension, in Kaufmann's words the area of 'mystery'. Thus an individual symbol may 'lose its power and eventually die' (Kaufman 1996, 112) but the world of symbols and the means by which they communicate does not. At a point when science and human understanding replaces a symbolic or mythical explanation a particular ritual may no longer function in a form that would once have been recognised by the likes of James G. Frazer (Frazer 1979) as sympathetic magic but may develop a new function in the self-understanding of a community. Likewise a belief may be tenaciously held in antagonism with the prevailing rationality. This may however operate in a different way to its origin, existing within a metanarrative using different symbols or references which are not altogether incompatible with other rationales. Whether this is a product of human creativity or of an ultimate Divine reality is determined by faith and does not ultimately present itself to rational enquiry. That the life of symbols and rituals is still in evidence today can be observed (not uncritically) even within movements which themselves are explicitly 'non' or even 'anti' religious. The humanist movement is developing funeral rites, and child naming ceremonies (see the website <http://www.humanism.org.uk/ceremonies>). These may even contain vestiges

of religious language, of which I can give evidence from personal experience of observing humanist funeral services which still use Psalm 23!

There is of course a distinction between the concept of symbol and that of a sacrament. The ritual of the Eucharist is full of symbols which clothe the central sacrament. A helpful description of the difference between symbol and sacrament is given by Martin Buber

A symbol is an appearance of meaning and becoming apparent of meaning in the form of corporeality. The covenant of the Absolute with the concrete manifests itself in the symbol. But a sacrament is the binding of meaning to the body, fulfilment of binding, of becoming bound. The covenant of the Absolute with the concrete takes place in the sacrament. (Buber 1960, 165)

There is something at a deeper ontological level involved in a sacrament which a symbol merely points to. Rituals can be recognised as such by their use of symbols which operate on many levels and not just the straightforward signified object one. Although Buber is speaking of Hasidism in more general terms his principles hold fast for the Eucharist which has, as one of its several antecedents, Jewish rituals.

Looking through the development of theories of religion, what strikes me as significant is that despite some seeming to provide fairly damning critiques of religion and its failings in response to science and human endeavour, some means by which people understand the world outside its verifiable and observable reality is very persistent and is in some cases in the ascendancy and other contexts on the wane but never completely missing. In what way is the Christian world view and theology,

malleable enough to respond to a variety of contexts and to persist in the face of overt and covert persecution? Being told that Britain is an increasingly secularised country and even behaving politically, economically and in social policy as such does not make the statement true. Fractures occur when communities treat something as ‘truth’ and behave in such a way without the consideration that this is not necessarily ‘truth’ to others. These fractures can be simply expressed as puzzlement or outright conflict.

A key element of this study is one of description. This is an exercise in reflexivity and a theoretical imperative in focusing on orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. I am interested in recording what people actually do and speculating from there about underlying principles or doctrine rather than assuming that it is from doctrine that our practice flows. In theological terms this stems from an interest formed from observing in scripture Jesus’ tendency to illustrate deep truth with lived experience, be that in parables or the examples he highlights of people around him. Thus as is common in the Gospels we hear that ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field’ Matthew 13:44 and the example in Luke chapter 7 of the woman washing Jesus’ feet with her tears gives a precedence to look at actual lived practice as exemplifying deep spiritual truth. I believe that that continues to be true today, and it is legitimate therefore to speak from our experience so that we may say something along the line of ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a community of people who behave in such and such a way’. In his development of a theory of ritual itself J. Z. Smith recounts

If the Temple ritual may be taken as exemplary of ritual itself Such conjoined instances of myth/ritual are not so much invitations to reflectivity as invitations to reflexivity; an elaboration of memory. (J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* 1987, 112)

Thus the combining of the ritual of the Eucharist with the recollection of what could be described as the myths contained in the Gospels is clearly an invitation to reflexivity. It does not determine that which is remembered but rather calls all forms of memory, both communal and individual into a complex intersection.

Oral testimony can reveal how groups create mental maps of the city and in essence create spaces for themselves that are typically distinct from dominant cultures. (Rodger and Herbert 2007, 4)

In this sense although I am not conducting a specific oral testimony of the Eucharist in Byker, I am reflecting the complex understanding of the layers of meaning and understanding in a community which a surface analysis would not bring out. However I would also argue that if one did a formal oral investigation into the attitudes and beliefs of the community then this would be contradicted by their actions. For example a conversation with some members of the congregation about immigration and ‘foreigners’ would bring to the surface some attitude which one may find unsettling, even racist, however the actions of the congregation towards the members from the diversity of countries which worship together on any given Sunday would suggest a great generosity of spirit and acceptance.

In the context of urban history, oral testimonies also show how people’s experience of the city is not a passive one; rather, they are active agents that attribute meanings to and invest in the urban landscape. (Rodger and Herbert 2007, 4)

One would have to ask the question how far the conscious opinions must necessarily concur with the lived experience. Just as many beliefs are not consistent nor thoroughly worked through but work in the context that they are appropriate for so it may be with the approach to worship and the meanings contained within the ritual.

Rappaport and ritual

A very informative approach to the process of ritual enactment and its power has been developed by Roy Rappaport, set out in detail in his book Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity. This critiques the relationship between rituals and the bonds which hold society together. Drawing on the work of J. L. Austin, Rappaport describes the complex interplay of ritual and meaning thus,

In the absence of performance liturgical orders are dead letters inscribed in curious volumes, or insubstantial forms evaporating into the forgotten. A ritual performance is an instance of the conventional order to which it conforms. Conversely, a ritual performance realizes the order of which it is an instance. Participants enliven the order that they are performing with the energy of their own bodies, and their own voices make it articulate. They thereby establish the existence of that order in this world of matter and energy; they *substantiate* the order as it *informs* them. (Rappaport, Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity 1999, 125)

This helpfully focuses on the embodied element in such conventions and orders. This may be a helpful analysis to use to understand the interrelations between diverse enactments, even of the same apparent liturgical convention affirming an established order, such that it is in the energy of embodiment that ethnic, cultural, gendered and other forms of diversity may be at play. There is both the creative process and the foundational canon as material for the creative process. It is, according to Rappaport, a

fundamental office of ritual to be the 'establishment of convention' (Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* 1999, 126). Thus,

It is fundamental in a second, formal sense, because the establishment as convention of whatever is encoded in canon is intrinsic to the form of ritual that is, to the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performer. We observe here the profound importance of invariance and formality. These are the features that maintain constant that which is accepted. In the absence of such constancy that which is accepted would not be conventional. Indeed, acceptance would be inconsequential, meaningless, or even logically impossible if the canon were made up afresh by each participant for each performance.' (Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* 1999, 126)

In wondering what the relationship is between the ritual of the Eucharist developed, refined and interpreted over many centuries and the immediate effect and reception of those meanings Sunday by Sunday, it is necessary to consider how much it is necessary for the individual or the group to understand or have access to the origins of this ritual for the rite to be meaningful.

Anthropological attention to effects is based on theories of cognition that argue for the centrality of embodied interactive processes in the acquisition of knowledge. . . . But anthropology is not calling for an end to origins in quite the same way. By insisting on temporality, on the importance of the history of past relationships, anthropology can emphasize the ways in which preconditions (if not origins) have an implicit presence even if their exact nature or moment is not visibly relevant to present concerns. (Harvey 1996, 175)

Combining this with Rappaport's statement that 'Ritual, this is to say, not only ensure the correctness of the performative enactment; it also makes the performatives it carries explicit, and it generally makes them weighty as well.' (Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion* 1979, 190) The performative meaning in our Sunday Eucharist would be a commitment to 'belonging' to the group worshiping rather than giving

explicit assent to a formula or statement of beliefs. For many coming from so many backgrounds and experiences a common theme might be one of marginalisation, a sense of *feeling* they do not belong. In the repetition of the ritual, members make a commitment that they do belong and the other members acknowledge that commitment and agree they belong. It is a mutual commitment to one another.

In studying difference in the congregation I am more interested in what we are saying about ourselves in relation to this than to deeply analyse the individual differences themselves; how the process of speaking and acting our identity through each Eucharist shapes our self-comprehension and our self-expression. This is akin to the study of the Expo'92 analysis and methodology employed by Penelope Harvey such that,

This project does not, however, *require* anthropologists to study cultural difference. There is a role for auto-anthropology, and for the critique which the reflexive ethnographic study of our own cultural products can generate. (Harvey 1996, 179)

What role does repetition play? The Sunday service is a fairly rigid ritual in its shape, language and action. By developing better practice for gaining accurate eye witness testimony, Geiselman et al in the book Memory: Current Issues, have developed a technique called *Cognitive Interview*. This has echoes for me of what a ritual is doing in terms of a communal memory and transmission of various truths. The four principles outlined for this technique are as follows:

- 1 Mentally reinstating the environmental and personal context at the time the event was witnessed. The witnesses are encouraged to 'think back' and recall immediately preceding events, their own actions and their mood.
- 2 Encouraging them to report every detail, however trivial.
- 3 Asking them to describe the event sequence in different orders, both forward and backward.
- 4 Asking them to describe the event from different viewpoints (e.g. to say what they would have seen if they had been standing on the other side of the road).

These principles are designed to maximize the number of possible retrieval routes.' (Cohen, Kiss and Voi 1993, 39)

Although not claiming that the Eucharist is some form of retrieval of actual eyewitness testimony by those present, the principles outlined above could be applied to the function of ritual in reconnecting with memory of past events and transmitting 'accurately' the key themes and meanings. However accuracy is itself not necessarily a static concept. By this I mean that in the case of a ritual which carries an intention to convey a meaning beyond its primary form, in other words one that is metaphorical/symbolic, the accuracy can be perfected over time by reassessing and re-describing the events. Once again in the study on current issues on memory Cohen, Kiss and Voi use an experiment conducted by Loftus, Miller and Burns, ' . . . showing that the memory representation of an event can be modified by subsequent information.' (Cohen, Kiss and Voi 1993, 38) adding that 'Integration does not occur if the misleading information is 'blatantly incorrect'. (Cohen, Kiss and Voi 1993, 38)

When access to the information in a ritual is not straightforward, due to a barrier of languages cultures and understanding, repetition of the same concepts but from different angles and perspectives may be one fruitful way of transmitting a deeper and clearer meaning. In wider society and community there may be intended a sense of belonging for all and yet many still 'feel' on the outside. Ritualising this belonging is a

way to assure it in terms that are not possible in another context, 'Moreover, it becomes apparent through consideration of ritual's form that ritual is not simply an alternative way to express certain things, but that certain things can be expressed only in ritual. (Rappaport, Ecology, Meaning and Religion 1979, 174)

Thus included in this study there are both theoretical tools for analysis of the ritual and the personal narrative running through. These two are not mutually exclusive. Firstly I set out a detailed description of the service in our church on an average Sunday. This will be my model of an 'intersection point' which is an event of opportunity rather than a prescriptive event. The church and the individual are always in the process of 'becoming' and it is in this process that the points of intersection are ripe with the opportunity to effect change and transformation. To a certain extent, I develop the idea of an intersection point in the ritual being one of a Kairos moment when the eternal intersects with the Chronos of human nature. The Eucharist in this light is a significant time for this to happen, created by liturgical space and form. This is comparable to the ideas of *music* as a technical and performance phenomenon and *being musical*, an ontological state. In this sense there is always the potential of music from one who is musical but this does not determine the actual instance of music, its shape, form or existence. In such a way the Eucharist is a possibility of Divine and human intersection which cannot be forced or determined. There is always the potential for becoming transformed.

Therefore this study is a process of understanding and discovering what I think I am doing in the Eucharist, what I expect from the Eucharist and an attempt to learn from problems (such as the Swine Flu outbreak) what principles my decisions are

founded on. In this way I am throughout a reflexive voice speaking both as analyst and analysed. As Gordon-Taylor and Jones describe, the Eucharist is a performative text and as such part of the role of the president is to discern these 'invitations and interpret them in the light of theology, tradition, local custom, culture and appropriate style.' (Gordon-Taylor and Jones 2005, xviii)

As a personal journey this study can be seen as an opportunity to reflect. In more general terms it is also a study that looks at the modern context through the lens of a particular ritual, drawing out examples of modern concerns for society in a similar way that more ancient or so called 'primitive' societies are examined through their rituals.

Brief historical background to Byker and the parish of St Silas.

The contexts in which ritual practices unfold are not like the props of painted scenery on a theatrical stage. Ritual action involves an inextricable interaction with its immediate world, often drawing it into the very activity of the rite in multiple ways. Exactly how this is done, how often, and with what stylistic features will depend on the specific cultural and social situations with its traditions, conventions, and innovations. p. 266 (Bell 1997)

St Silas, Byker is an Anglican parish in the east end of Newcastle upon Tyne. The parish currently has a population of around 5,000 people. It has seen significant depopulation in the post-industrial era, dropping from a peak of apparently around 12,000 residents (or even 15,600 as recorded at the time of appointment of Rev C. Freeman in 1913). It had developed as an industrial area, reliant for employment primarily on a few large companies engaged in ship building and engineering. As these industries declined so did the relative stability of employment in the parish and as a consequence the population numbers declined. The last radical change to the area came in the late 1960s early 1970s with the wholesale clearance of the old terraced buildings and the creation of a new council estate designed by the Swedish architect Ralph Erskine and listed Grade II* in 2007 for its architectural relevance. One dominant feature of the new estate was the 'Byker Wall', designed on the northern side of the estate to act as a sound barrier to the proposed motor way into the city. The motor way was never constructed and the resulting effect is a highly visible barrier enclosing the estate. In the parish of St Silas, this development had significant impact. Thus, where once the church building had been surrounded with terraced streets it became increasingly isolated.

For the Centenary of its consecration, the Parochial Church Council, with the help of the Byker Priority Team, produced a booklet detailing the history of the area and the development of parish and church entitled 'From Roman Wall to Byker Wall' in 1986. It records words from Bishop Wilberforce (the first Bishop of Newcastle) in his sermon at the consecration of the building that 'whatever might happen to this population, whether it become poorer or remained as it was, the church should not be moved out into the midst of a wealthier population if the population in this district became poorer'. These words still ring true for the current congregation.

The building is situated at the west end of the Byker estate although detached from the estate by not only the Byker Wall but also a dual carriage way and a metro line. This has the effect of dividing in two the parish itself, with only the western part of the Byker Estate being in the parish whilst the northern part of the parish, which is more often known as Heaton, has retained more of the original buildings in terraces. These buildings have lent themselves well to being divided up into student accommodation and so there is a significant student population amongst the 5, 000 residents. Students are of course a transitory population. Much of this area feels somewhat of a ghost town in the university holidays. The parish does include what was once a thriving shopping centre for the whole of the East End of Newcastle, the Shields Road. However this is now one of the most run down and economically disadvantaged retail areas in Newcastle.

Today St Silas ministry can be characterised as having an openness to those on the margins, those who do not feel they belong. This can be said to be an echo of its past in different circumstances. In From Roman Wall to Byker Wall it is said that after

World War I when ‘the land was unfit and unready for its heroes to live in.’ St Silas staff ‘tried to help people come to terms with bereavement, disability, continued overcrowding in housing and increasing unemployment.’

This is a very brief outline of the context and history of the parish and some notable positive changes have taken place in the last ten years. In regeneration terms there has been commercial building in the area, notably a new supermarket, bingo hall and fast food outlet right next to the church itself on what had once been a terraced residential street but for many years had been derelict land. This, as far as the setting of the church is concerned, has opened the area up where once the church stood in isolation. It has enabled it to have a more prominent visual presence where once it was unnoticed. The other significant change has been to the demographic of the population as a whole in the East End of Newcastle. In the late 1990s there was a shift in government approach to the accommodation of people seeking asylum in this country. Whereas previously the responsibility for housing asylum seekers had primarily fallen to the areas, such as Dover, where asylum seekers first entered the country, a dispersal policy was put in place so that areas such as the East End of Newcastle, which had historically had little experience of asylum seekers but had a significant amount of vacant properties, were almost overnight housing people from a wide variety of countries and circumstances. There was little or no assistance given to the community to prepare them for this change. Many of these communities felt very vulnerable already due to high levels of multiple forms of deprivation. So it was with Byker. In broad terms, for many years it has felt itself a part of the city that has been marginalized and excluded.

Some statistics setting the context of Byker and Newcastle

The statistics available are of course based on local government areas such as Council Ward and Lower Super Output Areas and as such do not bear an exact match to a parish boundary. However they are close enough to give a broad brush stroke description of the context which would be sufficient for the purposes of this study.

According to the Department for Communities and Local government report on the Index of Multiple Deprivation in 2007, Newcastle was ranked 45th out of 56 English cities which was a rise from 2004 when it was 51st (Aldershot coming top and least deprived both times). For Newcastle's view of itself we can turn to the Performance and Improvement Unit: Newcastle City Council report for 2007 which ranks Wards not in order of prosperity but rather ranks against other areas of deprivation. This document plots the changes from 2004-2007, summarised in this way:

Newcastle has improved from 20th most deprived in the country in 2004 to 37th most deprived in 2007.

All other authorities in Tyne and Wear have also improved during this period.

Newcastle has improved more than most of the other Core Cities (with the exception of Leeds) during this period. This is against the trend of many of these Core Cities, which have experienced consistent or worsening relative levels of deprivation over the last three years. (Performance and Improvement Unit: Newcastle City Council 2007)

Thus the city as a whole may be seeing progress but a closer look at the gap between the more deprived areas and the city average show that the gap has not been

closing, although both are improving. This can be seen in the vitality scoring, which is scored based on statistics for Crime, Health, Income, Unemployment, Education and Housing. Thus in 2001 the vitality score (the higher the number the better the vitality) for Newcastle was 46.6 with the score for Byker being 27.1. This rose for both in 2007 to Newcastle average 54.3 and Byker 32.5. There have therefore been some significant improvements but Byker is still significantly below the Newcastle average. Within these statistics there are particular improvements for Byker such as with the individual score for Crime where Byker has improved to such an extent that it is now more or less level with the Newcastle average, Newcastle 75.5 and Byker 72.4 in 2007 from a low of Newcastle 67.9 and Byker 46.3 in 2003. This is especially noteworthy when considering the general fear there is of inner city areas in relation to crime and criminality.

Here it is interesting to note that deprived areas can sometimes find themselves in a race to the bottom, so to speak. To provide the evidence of your need for funding you need to show you are in a worse position than other areas with which you compete for funding. This is no less true of faith communities such as Church of England parishes than it is of resident or community groups. When a church congregation is expressing its identity in its worship as an equally valued and valuable group of people this can sit at odds with both the community's self understanding through long years of marginalisation and also through the mechanisms of regeneration themselves.

In my own time in Newcastle over the last ten years, there has been a visible change in the ethnic and cultural make up of our city. not only in that the people you see are no longer generally white working-class Geordies, but also in the range of shops on streets such as the Shields Rd. The area has seen the setting up of an African food shop,

which offers services such as money transfers to Nigeria etc. as well as several other shops which cater for a diverse range of cultural and food needs.

It is probably worthwhile to briefly outline the makeup of our congregation. As already stated, each Sunday there may be between 30 and 40 people out of a regular 51 people. An analysis of attendance by age would suggest we would have 14% up to 16yrs old, no one 17-30yrs, 41% 30-50yrs, 31% 50-80yrs, and 14 % over 80yrs. Obviously there is a fair turn-over in membership due to the transient nature of many of the local residents, however, as well as white British, we currently have members from the following countries: Kenya, Iran, Pakistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Burundi. Some of these people have received asylum or indefinite leave to remain, and some now also have British passports, others are destitute asylum seekers lost somewhere in the system and others are currently going through the process of claiming asylum. Most have a good grasp of English however some are still very hesitant speakers. In the congregation as a whole we have a range of professions represented including the legal profession, teaching, engineering and child nursing, civil service and also numerous retired people. Some people have spent substantial amounts of time off work for health reasons and some are unable to work due to their immigration status at present. Some of the professions represented by our asylum seekers are teachers, ship engineers, embassy staff and legal clerks. Amongst some of our older members we have those who served during WWII in the Paratroops' regiment and Royal Engineers. Most of the older members were born in the area and have lived all their lives here. Occasionally, because we are in a partnership as a church with a Housing Association which specialises in housing and caring for people who are homeless or at risk, some people who attend some of the services are sleeping rough or staying at the hostel across the road. Also as

the church building is pretty visible passers-by do drop in occasionally to join in, and as people frequently move in and out of the neighbourhood some will visit to try us out.

It is from this pool of people that all the activities and volunteers are drawn. There are about 14 people who read the Bible passages for the Sunday service. Some of them also do not have English as their first language (in the case of those Farsi speakers Arabic is their second language and English their third). However this is no barrier to their participation in the service. Where the members of the congregation are chosen to read the Bible passages I envisaged that this may be a point of tension for the English speaking congregation who might not be comfortable with someone not reading the passage clearly. However to my surprise it was offered by the lay council that the readings can be read aloud in which ever language they are most comfortable with. So far the response has been that people who wish to read in English are showing a commitment to being part of the British community but there is an openness to inclusivity demonstrated here.

The church building to the present day

In 2004 a major remodelling of the Victorian church building was embarked upon. One aim was to create office space for Byker Bridge Housing Association (B.B.H.A) which works to house and support people who are vulnerable to homelessness in the city and surrounding areas. B.B.H.A. runs health care services for people who sleep rough as well as hostel accommodation and supported living flats and houses. This company became the major partner for the church as well as other community and voluntary sector organisations who were in need of accommodation for

meeting, lunch clubs and similar activities. This was in keeping with the activity of the church throughout its history, for example there had been a drop in centre for the unemployed in the 1920s. This remodelling aimed to provide high quality facilities in a community hall which occupies two thirds of the main space within the church, the offices for B.B.H.A in the north aisle and a worship space divided from the hall by a large glass screen.



Main door to worship area

As for the church building, the main church wooden doors are open for much of the time and there are automatic glass doors next giving light into the entrance hall that also serves as the baptistery. From the north side the church building has two obvious doorways. One has a large ramp up to it, which is the entrance to the Housing Association, open during office hours weekdays. The second set of double doors has a shallower ramp and is not only the way into the church on a Sunday but also the way into the community hall, through the worship area, for the many organisations which use the building every day. These are often open through the week too and are opened

by the first person arriving on a Sunday morning. The whole building is accessible to people with mobility problems which also means it is accessible to parents using buggies for their children. In many churches, being unable to see inside the building without entering is a significant barrier for people. The main doors are often heavy wooden ones which are both a physical and psychological barrier. Not only are the main doors to the worship area at St Silas made from glass, allowing someone to see right into the worship area without stepping inside the building, but they are also automatic. I feel this removes the physical barrier immediately. This glass openness has the two fold effect of making almost everything we do inside visible to passers-by but also means that as we worship and pray we are also able to see out of the church and never forget the world outside such as the buses going past.



View from altar to worship

area and community hall beyond. There are windows to the left and the B.B.H.A.

offices in the aisle to the right.

The worship area is directly in front of the main doors, once again accessed by passing through glass doors. You enter to the side of the area roughly in the middle and in general the congregation are seated to the right hand side as you enter. The area is

traditionally orientated east west with a late Victorian stained glass window, depicting the Transfiguration, a primary feature of the east end. Since the whole building was remodelled and modernised five years ago the main space has been divided into a worship space and community hall, separated once again by a very large glass partition with doors in, about two thirds of the way down. The worship space is about one third of the building with the hall, kitchen and toilets in the other two thirds. There is a large wooden cased organ on the north side of the worship area. There is seating for 60 people consisting of new wooden chairs upholstered in a burgundy material, some with plaques commemorating former members. The altar is new and was chosen by the congregation. Once we had moved to worshipping back in the remodelled space for a while we continued to use a small altar that had been in a small chapel in the old hall. As a community we spent some time getting used to the new worship area and then at coffee on several Sundays we looked at the brochures from companies who made new altars. People considered many factors in deciding what sort of altar would suit the space, taking advice also from the diocese. Some of the main considerations were to keep the flow and openness in the sanctuary area, to keep the old altar frontal, which now stands as a centre piece at the foot of the reredos, and to keep it visible. There was also the opportunity to have space for the Crib and Christmas and prominent displays of flowers at the foot of the altar at other times of the year. As the space was also all on the level and had been designed to be adaptable in its use the altar needed to be relatively portable. This is not to say it would be moved around randomly each week, but that at certain festivals and services it could be moved more central or further back. It also enables the space to be used for other purposes such that the community groups using the building might need.



Streetwise Opera group (working with vulnerable and homeless people).

The final design was approved by the Church Council and Diocese and is as shown in the pictures of the worship area above. At the back of the church there is a corner set aside for the children with comfortable patterned sofas and small chairs with various Christian children's books and Bibles. Over time people have also donated soft toys for this area, however there have been times when people's generosity meant there was not much room left for children amongst all the toys! When this has happened we have asked the children if they would be happy to give away or sell the excess toys at a church fayre which they have been happy to do. This area is simply part of the main body of the church and so the children are free to come and go as they please during the service.

The sanctuary area obviously focuses on the altar but has also retained most of the original features from the sanctuary as it was before the refurbishment. The area is semi-circular and surrounded by wooden panelling which has a war memorial inscription. There is also a large stone reredos which was lowered to reveal more of the stained glass window during the refurbishment work. The main seating around this area consists of three prayer desks with prie dieu which are over 100yrs old, and a couple of the burgundy upholstered seats from the main congregation.

Chapter Two: The Sunday Eucharist.

I now turn my attention to a more descriptive part of my research. This chapter deals with a priest's eye view of the service. In it I will describe the service in detail, focusing on an attempt to examine my intentions and reflections on the reality of the practice of a priest in such a context. It is neither my place nor my intention to attempt anything like a quantitative study, nor to interview and analyse the thoughts and intentions of the members of my congregation. They are the subject of my study from the perspective of my own priesthood. What follows are my own thoughts and reflections put forward for examination and critique. It is through the detailed narrative description of a Sunday service that I wish to draw my understanding of intersection points, trying not to take for granted any foreknowledge of the liturgy, actions or words themselves. The narrative is part of my process. It is an example of practical theology, where theory meets practice, and where theory is tested and adapted to context. Indeed it is a part of the very nature of this study that such reflexive work must be done. Just as my theory of intersection points illuminates the way difference in all forms has an impact on our understanding, shape and forms our beliefs and experience, so this study and description of the everyday nature of a Eucharist service is an intersection point in itself of the academic with the practice.

Pre service organisation

Therefore it is in the context of this inner city parish that my congregation of between 30 and 40 people, including up to 6 children, gather together each Sunday for

the Parish Eucharist. The main service starts at 9.30am. People usually begin arriving for the service from around 8.45am onwards. Some of the first to arrive begin to organise the hall and kitchen for the tea and coffee after the service, putting out cups and tables and filling the water boiler. These are some of the communal tasks which those who do not speak much English are able to join in with and have been identified by some members as an important part of the whole service. It is important here to acknowledge that in this context it is the whole activity of that morning which I believe to be worshipful; the hospitality and the contribution the congregation make to the practicalities of this, sacred. It is not my intention that the welcome and the sociality afterwards are merely an adornment or appendage to a sacred set aside ritual. The ritual of the Eucharist intersects with the atmosphere and inclusivity of the preparation and the continuation of friendship and conversation afterwards. Thus the roles are intentionally non-hierarchical and involve as many as possible to the fullness of their ability. Despite my belief that there is not so much a right and proper way of doing things but rather a priority of valuing all contributions, each service takes place in good order. It is in trusting peoples' efforts and my responsibility for training and support that all things are possible. In this light, the sacristan, a lay person who himself has significant educational and health challenges, arrives to finish setting all the necessary communion equipment ready for the priest to use during the service. One lady, who usually arrives early, greets everyone who arrives with a smile and cheery hello and makes sure they have their books ready. Soon after this the people who are on sides person duty arrive. These are the specific people who are asked to make sure that everyone has the correct information for the service and show newcomers to their seats and explain what books they need. There usually then begins a lively conversation in the entrance way about the past week and news is passed on to everyone as they arrive. Any mistakes I may have

made on the notice sheets are generally a source of amusement so no one stands on ceremony here.

During this general melee at the entrance way people are asked to take part in the offertory part of the service. The sides-people choose members of the general congregation to bring up the bread and wine for the Eucharist at the appropriate time in the service, and also those who are to pass the collection plate around. Care is taken to try to include everyone in this, and often it is the children who are asked. This can prove tricky as they often turn up right at the last moment. It is important that it is the congregation themselves that organise these tasks, rather than them being handed out by the priest. It encourages them to interact with one another and although they often get into routines of who to ask, it also encourages the diversity of people to interact/intersect with one another. In a way which may not happen in daily life, the differences, such as ethnicity or disability, which may separate us, have to be met head on and channels of communication opened if only to achieve the tasks at hand. As more people arrive the vestry itself fills with people wanting to serve at the altar.

Our standard altar team is myself, our assistant priest, and the sacristan who is also the head server. The rest of the team depends on who turns up in time to robe up. In developing this part of the ministry of the church we had a useful insight from another area of our ministry, the young people in our congregation. In trying to make sure we connected with the youngsters who had joined our congregation myself and a Church Army Captain, who was working in Byker, had once visited all the children in the congregation and asked them what they wanted the church to provide for them. Our expectations were that they might ask for their own service more relevant to them or a

Sunday school, or that the music be something livelier. However, almost unanimously, they wanted to dress up in white and do what I do on a Sunday. Obviously we are not ordaining children, but we took them at their word, bought white robes for them and candles for them to carry and so, if they manage to get to church early enough, they robe up and join the altar party. This was for us an obvious response, as the nature of the ritual meant there were roles which they could undertake and also it is in the nature of our service to visually represent an inclusive attitude. It is not just in what we do at the Eucharist but in how we include people and who takes part in which the meaning is conveyed.

One experienced member of the congregation is also regularly at the altar as 'Master of Ceremonies', a grand title for someone who basically acts as book stand and is prepared to assist the priest with any last minute difficulties that arise during the service, such as fetching any books we have forgotten to bring to the altar. It is very useful to have someone who not only knows where everything is but how everything should run smoothly and so is able with dignity seamlessly to cover any mistakes, errors or omissions on our part. Indeed, this has encouraged several members of the serving team to be able to improvise and cover for any chaos that may ensue at any point in the service. We also have several people who take it in turns to be 'servers' which means they help the president prepare the altar and collect the offering of the people during the service. We have made attempts to try to organise who does what week by week, but as attendance can be quite ad hoc this has proved futile. We work with whoever turns up. The vestry when fully staffed can be quite a lively place. The atmosphere could best be characterised as dignified but easy going. Not for us silence and serious prayer before the service, in fact we are developing quite a tradition of joke telling (after the model of

the Vicar of Dibley perhaps). I might best describe the pre-service atmosphere as a whole as organised chaos, but by 9.30am everyone who needs to has popped their head around the vestry door to give me a message or ask me a question. By this time between 30 and 40 people will be at church, or about to enter. As I said, many turn up at the very last moment if not just after the service has started.

Various other things are also happening whilst the altar party is forming up. Whoever is to lead intercessions are sought out by anyone with a particular concern to have someone prayed for by name that day, and provision is made for people to replace any of the roles in the service in case people do not turn up. Indeed the rotas have become more of a vague hope for who may be taking part rather than a strict expectation. I believe there is a great deal of trust within the congregation that it all comes good in the end and it usually does. A couple of members of the congregation have also begun practising the hymns for the day with the organist in the half hour before the service starts.

Each Sunday I and my colleague alternate between presiding and preaching. The preacher also acts as deacon for the service. Once it is 9.30am the president puts on the chasuble, a large cape-like vestment, assisted usually by the sacristan, who ensures neither the priest's hair is caught up nor the stole, the priestly scarf, disarrayed. The head server also acts usually as the crucifer carrying the processional cross. The deacon takes up the Gospel book. The altar party then leaves the vestry and stands just in the entrance way in a circle for a brief formal prayer to prepare themselves. When I am presiding I usually extemporise a prayer along the lines 'bless and guide us as we lead these your people in your praise and worship. Keep us always mindful of the needs of

our community and the world around us' and if there is a particular issue of concern I may add a specific prayer.

The ritual itself

I will now take a more detailed look at each part of the service, its actions and words, to illustrate some of the main themes of my thesis. In doing so I find useful the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, (taken from the Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer book Documents in Early Christian Thought) as examples of early descriptions of this same ritual. As Cyril describes his work on the Eucharist '*for our intention today is to put the crowning piece on the edifice of your spiritual equipment.*' (Jerusalem 1975, 190). This sentiment feels familiar as this detailed description and examination of our Sunday ritual has proved an illumination for my own spiritual equipment.

Opening of the service

We signal the expectation that the service is about to begin by the crucifer carrying the processional cross towards the glass doors into the worship area, taking care to hold the cross in front of himself and prominently above the heads of the congregation. The prominence of following a cross, albeit a refined version, indicates to the gathered community that we follow the way of the cross, one of a suffering Christ, a faith that is about death and resurrection. To any visitor not familiar with this symbol I would argue that the juxtaposition of an instrument of torture with the stylized and ornate versions of the processional cross used in churches is an intersection point which challenges and opens up the possibility of interpretation in a creative way. That it is

held in front of the altar party and its entrance signals the congregation to make the ritual action of standing signifies its importance. For those more familiar with the Christian story reminders of Good Friday and the pain of crucifixion conflict with the artistic representation of the cross in church but may also speak of the transformation of suffering into the glory of God.

The organist is continuing to play some gentle music. I once thought this was in the hope that the gathering congregation may be quiet and pray before the service; however they are so comfortable with one another that the relaxed atmosphere is somewhat hard to penetrate. Once the altar party has begun the procession it turns down the short aisle between the two sides of the congregation and forms a line in front of the altar with the servers, acolytes and crucifer and master of ceremonies standing either side, with the president in the centre. The altar party then moves to the chairs surrounding the altar, the candles (if there have been acolytes to carry them) are placed either side of the altar in their holders and the processional cross is clipped to the wall just behind the lectern on the right hand side. When our assistant priest is presiding she will go behind the altar and kiss the white linen cloth covering it before she goes to stand at her chair as a mark of reverence to the holy table, indicating to the congregation its prominence in this ritual. Someone will normally at this point close the glass doors separating the entrance way and the main worship area. This maintains an open feeling to the area whilst also protecting the congregation from any drafts that may occur as people pass by the automatic front doors. It is important to us that the life of the world outside the church is allowed to be visible and to intersect with the ritual we are performing inside.

Greeting

After a general greeting the president announces the first hymn and everyone remains standing to sing this. Hymns are taken from *One Church One Faith One Lord*, the hymn books which were donated to the church (Sayers, Simpson and Thomas 2004). This was chosen by the congregation as it contained hymns and songs which had a breadth of the familiar and the new. Thus the diversity of ages could feel comfortable with it.

The president begins the opening dialogue, setting up the relationship of communication between the congregation and the clergy, saying,¹

The Lord be with you

To which everyone replies

And also with you.²

There is an alternative greeting

The Lord is here

to which the response would be,

His Spirit is with us

However this response includes the male gendered language for naming God and this would not be appropriate in our setting. The inclusivity of language is always considered even though it cannot always be avoided.

¹ Words from the service are taken from Common Worship order one in contemporary language and are Copyright The Archbishop's Council 2000, unless otherwise stated.

² Words in bold type are those said by the congregation.

Confession

A simple sentence or two is used to invite people to confess their sins, which may have a seasonal tone to it or may be more general such as

Brothers and sisters in Christ as we prepare to meet Christ in word and in sacrament let us call to mind and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Everyone then says together a prayer such as,

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
We have sinned against you
And against our neighbour
In thought and word and deed,
Through negligence, through weakness,
Through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
And repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
Who died for us,
Forgive us all that is past
And grant that we may serve you in newness of life
To the glory of your name. Amen.**

The president would then pronounce the absolution in the following words

May Almighty God
Who forgives all who truly repent,
Have mercy upon you,
Pardon + and deliver you from all your sins,
Confirm and strengthen you in all goodness
And keep you in life eternal,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To which all respond

Amen

The president would make the sign of the cross in the air at the point in this prayer beginning 'pardon', which I have indicated with a cross above. Some members of the congregation also make the sign of the cross upon themselves at this point. Thus along with the spoken commitment of confession a physical action acknowledging the Divine forgiveness is given.

The confession is a general one, which does not require the listing of specific or individual instances in need of repentance. It would be expected, however, that those speaking the words are at that point opening their individual lives and actions to intersecting with everyone else's frailness and failures, so that as a body of the church we share the forgiveness freely offered. The sign of the cross inscribed in the air by the priest should be large enough to encompass all there, yet not ostentatious.

Praise

Whilst we are all still standing, organ music introduces our singing of the Gloria, a song of praise to God, the words of which are as follows.

**Glory to God in the highest,
And peace to his people on earth.**

**Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

The musical settings for the parts of the service which are sung are from either 'Rutter' or 'The New English Hymnal' versions of the liturgy. At certain points during this Gloria it is traditional to bow slightly from the waist, which some members of our altar party and a couple of congregation members do. These points are, when we sing 'We worship you', at the mention of 'Jesus Christ, receive our prayer', and some people would sign themselves with the sign of the cross at the end when we sing 'In the Glory of God the Father'. These are points indicating humility in worship and when we approach the Divine and require something of a sense of awe.

Collect

When we have finished singing the Gloria I would introduce a prayer with the simple bidding ‘Let us pray’ and then would say the Collect, the prayer set for the day which collects our thoughts together and usually reflects the theme of the day’s readings or the church’s liturgical season. It is printed on sheets which the congregation have which enables them to read it later at home too. Once everyone has responded to the prayer by saying ‘Amen’ I would ask everyone to ‘please be seated for the readings’.

Liturgy of the word



Now a member of the congregation moves to the lectern stand at the front of the church to read the first passage from the Bible, which is set for that day. This reading throughout most of the year is taken from the Old Testament, except during the Easter season where both first two readings are from the New Testament. As with the Collect,

the readings set for the day are printed on the sheets, and so even if the congregation cannot quite follow what is being read they can read it for themselves. There are about ten members of the congregation who read regularly and a couple who step in if someone is absent. They range in age from 10 years old upwards and are also drawn not only from the white Byker population but also from the Iranian and Kenya members of our congregation. Indeed it was suggested by a member of our Church Council that the reading could be done in whatever language the reader was most comfortable with as the rest of us have it written in English anyway, however everyone who reads wants to do so in English at present. Although the offer has been made, to those who do feel confident to read in public, all have preferred to do so in the language of the rest of the congregation. This raises interesting questions about inclusivity and how we reflect our diversity which will be explored in a later chapter. At this point it is important to give and reflect on one example of the importance of this support from the congregation. On one occasion one lady who was reading the passage set for the day struggled greatly to get through it. She was not only reading in English rather than her first language but also was having great difficulty with her eyesight as well. She was quite emotional by the end of the reading and I was aware of an almost impulsive move by the congregation at the end in support of her (I thought for a moment they were about to applaud). Even later in the service at the exchange of the peace I heard people congratulating her on her effort and how well she had done.

The lectern from which these passages are read has a surface mounted microphone which not only amplifies some of the quieter voices but is also linked to a Hearing Loop system which enables those members who use a hearing aid to be able to participate more fully in the service as a whole. The microphone is surface mounted so

that it is not intimidating to those who read the passages. A traditional microphone can make people self-conscious. The priest uses a traditional microphone on a stand and a small radio microphone at the altar also, to include everyone in the service as best as possible.

The readings themselves end with the words:

This is the word of the Lord

to which the congregation respond:

Thanks be to God.

This indicates that listening to the word of God is not a passive activity but one to which we are invited to pay attention to and one which expects a response of thanksgiving.

There are normally two readings taken by two different members of the congregation, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. Once the second reader has returned to their seat the president asks the congregation to stand to sing the hymn before the gospel. As the congregation begin singing the crucifer collects the processional cross from its clip on the wall and whoever has carried the Gospel book into church picks it up ready to process to where it will be read from. When it is nearing the final verse of the hymn the gospel procession would begin. If there are acolytes at the service they collect the candles from their stands beside the altar and the deacon would move to the centre of the altar facing it. The rest of the processional party gather either side and, once in a row, they bow to the altar and turn around. The person carrying the gospel book goes first and stands towards the middle of the congregation in

the centre aisle. They turn to face the altar and the deacon steps forwards and opens the Gospel book to the correct page. The acolytes would stand facing each other either side of the gospel book and the crucifer stands behind the deacon facing the congregation too. All this ritual action indicates the special prominence the Gospel has for Christians, it marks attention to the importance of these words. The deacon says,

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to (and names which ever gospel
the passage comes from)

to which the congregation sing the reply

Glory to you O Lord

The gospel is then read in a clear loud voice and ends with the deacon lifting the gospel book from the hands of the server, holding it aloft and saying

This is the Gospel of the Lord

to which the congregation sing the reply

Praise to you O Christ.

The deacon may kiss the page of the gospel book from which they have just read during this response. This indicates both the preciousness of the words just spoken and

also the personal nature of them. The altar party then turn to face the altar, step forward, bow and return to their seats, once again replacing the acolyte candles in their holders and the processional cross in its wall clip. The deacon will then move either to the lectern or to the centre of the church to preach the sermon. With the congregation still standing the deacon prays something like the following ‘May I speak in the name of our one God, creator, redeemer and sustainer’. Once the congregation have responded ‘Amen’ they are seated once more.

The sermon follows which is usually about ten minutes long. During the sermon the congregation have even been known to ‘heckle’ or at least respond to questions given by the preacher. The sermon ends with an ‘Amen’ and the preacher returns to her seat.

Affirmation of faith

After the sermon there may be a moment of quiet before the congregation are asked to stand to affirm their faith in the words of the creed. This is a basic formulation of the fundamentals of Christian faith. That everyone stands indicates a personal commitment to the statement, standing indicating attention and action.

The following is our most used version of the Creed. It has been formulated through many centuries in the church, and has been constructed through argument debate and controversy. As we in our modern context ritually mark our attention to it and its layers of meaning, it is unlikely that the full depth of its theological references will be understood and apprehended by those reciting the words. However as each speak

it afresh into their own life and belief, the intersection between formulated words and personal experience opens up potential for deeper understanding and interpretation for us all as individuals and as a cooperate congregation.

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, +
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.**

The creed is introduced by the president and said together by the whole congregation. Once again key points of faith in the creed are indicated by ritual motion, such as bowing from the waist at the recitation of the mystery of the incarnation (at the point ‘for us and for our salvation’ to the words ‘and was made man’) and marking oneself with the sign of the cross at the point marked with a cross above. I myself do both actions with my personal intention of denoting the Divine affirmation of our humanity in Christ, not a favouring of maleness but our universal humanity. There are points in the service which are problematic in terms of gender inclusivity about which we are sensitive. Indeed that is one reason why God is referred to in Trinitarian terms of both Father, Son and Holy Spirit and also Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Whilst such subtle differences may not mean a great deal to some members of the congregation they signal our intention to be inclusive as well as honouring tradition. The Creed itself has been a battle ground over centuries, with theologies worked out in its wording including the place and sacredness of Mary Mother of God *Theotokos* and the substance of Jesus Son of God *Homousion*. It is in the general as well as the specific references to the

problem of universal humanity and our diversity and an open approach as an overall atmosphere, that we touch on the transcendent mystery.

To give another brief example, a member of our congregation who worships with us as well as in another denomination has a daughter who lives with Down's Syndrome. Her daughter, due to her disability and the difficulties in communication and understanding this brings her, is usually very sensitive to situations amongst people she does not know, and as such does not usually attend church. However her mother has said to me that she is happy joining us occasionally as she has felt comfortable and welcome and at ease. Reflecting on this I see that we make no demands on her for participation - her presence is sufficient - nor for her comprehension of the liturgy. The members of the congregation she meets simply welcome her where she stands in life, in a manner which to me seems Christ-like. I would suggest that the theology of this is that God meets people where they are and not where we think they should be. The exchanging of the peace as detailed below is also an important indication of this belief in that people make a point of including everyone, not waiting for others to come to them but moving about the worship area to see others.

Intercession

After the Creed the president introduces a period of prayer, the intercessions, which follows a pattern of praying for the church and the world, for the sick and for those who have died recently and whose anniversary of death falls the following week. These intercessions are led each week by a different person, mostly lay people who, whilst the rest of the congregation sit to pray, remain standing wherever they are in the

congregation. Some people are confident to write their own intercessions and others read from a set pattern in the Susan Sayers book (Sayers, Living Stones: Prayers of Intercessions 1998). The names of those who are prayed for regularly are also included on our notice sheets each week, including a relative of a congregation member who is missing in Iran and someone in Iran who has been called up for army duty. We also pray for those of our congregation who are older and infirm and unable to come on a Sunday, thus reminding us that we are an outward looking church in all ways. The intercessions follow the theme of the readings for that week and will also respond to any major world events. The normal response for the intercession prayers is when the person leading the prayers says,

Lord in your mercy'

the whole congregation respond

Hear our prayer.

The prayers end with

**Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus
Christ Amen**

The liturgy of the Sacrament

There now begins the most apparently chaotic part of our service; the exchange of the peace. The president stands, an action that signals the congregation is also to stand. A sentence reflecting the themes of the season is said such as in Advent

In the tender mercy of our God,

the dayspring from on high shall break upon us,
to give light to those who dwell in darkness
and in the shadow of death
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

This then ends with the president saying

The peace of the Lord be always with you

to which the congregation respond

And also with you.

The president then invites the congregation to exchange a sign of peace. This is usually in the simple form of a handshake however as each member of the congregation wants to shake hands with everyone else, symbolically including everyone present, this can descend into something of a 'scrum'. Some people prefer a more formal act at this point although for our context this is an appropriate action as there are not too many people. In a congregation of hundreds this would be simply impractical. It is also yet another physical sign of unity in our diversity, which transcends barriers of language, although it may not always be sensitive to barriers of culture and physical contact. The altar party also mingle with the congregation to exchange the peace, although one will usually remain near the altar setting up the books for the next hymn. Once again this has a long tradition and its symbolism has been explained over the centuries. Cyril of Jerusalem described this action as the exchange of a kiss,

'The deacon then calls out: 'receive one another and let us kiss one another.' You must not suppose that this is the usual kind of kiss which ordinary friends exchange when they meet in the street. This kiss is different. By it souls are united with one another and receive a pledge of the mutual forgiveness of all wrong. So then, the kiss is a sign of the union of souls and of the expulsion of all

remembrance of wrong. This is why Christ said: 'If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering on the altar, and go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift' [Matt.5:23-4]. So the kiss means reconciliation, and is therefore holy, as was declared by the blessed Paul, 'Greet one another with a Holy kiss' [Rom. 16:16; 1Cor. 16:20], and by Peter, 'Greet one another with the kiss of love' [1Pet. 5:14]. p191 (Jerusalem 1975)

Once we have indicated our unity in the peace given us by God we move to the specific ritual actions which affirm the Divine action of salvation by reminding us of the shedding of Christ's blood and the giving of his body as a sacrifice for all humanity.

During the peace those members of the congregation who are going to bring down the elements, the gifts of bread, wine and water, which are to be consecrated and also those who are to take the monetary offering of the congregation, make their way to the back of the worship space.

Offertory

Once the president has made her way back to the altar, she announces the next hymn during which obvious order is restored, people return to their seats and the first two people collect the silver box containing the wafers of communion bread and the two glass cruets, one filled with water, the other with fortified wine. As mentioned in the description of the organisation of the beginning of the service, various members of the congregation are invited to take part in bringing forward to present to the priest the bread and wine for communion. Although this may seem merely a practical aspect of the service it is redolent of meaning far beyond the outward appearance. Without making any overt or conscious statement about inclusivity and universal value, the very

fact that many different people are invited by the lay people to participate demonstrates these values. It is also an action which does not require the use of a language. This means that after having observed what others do, our members from diverse countries also take part. I have noted the care with which the lay people assist each new member to participate, and often a new member may have only been with us a couple of weeks before they are asked to join in. This illustrates that it is not simply the words of the liturgy or the overtly ritual actions of the priest that convey the meaning of the Eucharist, but on another layer it includes what may appear the innocent and incidental embellishments.

At this point the president stands behind the altar and begins to set the altar for the Eucharist itself. On the altar there are already two brass candle sticks one at either front corner with candles which are lit throughout the service. There is also a small brass book stand on which either a folder or book containing the words of the service stands.

The service now enters a period of detailed ritual action with many layers of meaning, rich in the possibilities of misinterpretation as well as re-interpretation. Each ritual action is an intersection point, where history, personal experience, culture and background intertwine. Predominantly these are actions which are carried out by the priest and the altar party. I acknowledge the delicate balance between inclusivity in participation by lay people and the role which setting aside a priest plays in indicating something beyond the mundane. In this ritual the priest embodied the accessibility of God to our common humanity. There have been great debates, which in the Anglican Communion as well as elsewhere still rage, about the position of the priest. This is brought into sharp focus in the divisions about women priests. These tend to focus

around the theology of the priest as representative of the specific person of Jesus, and which specific elements of the nature of Jesus are important. Without I hope being too flippant (although as a woman priest myself and my colleague also being a woman it is unsurprising) I assert that too much attention is placed on the maleness of Jesus. The arguments follow that Jesus was a man and therefore a man needs to stand in His place at the altar. However asserting that Jesus was not a woman as a reason for a solely male priesthood could also mean that asserting that Jesus was not a black African, Chinese, white American but came from a very specific ethnic cultural and religious background would limit the priesthood dramatically. In my chapter on diversity I will also wrestle with this intersection point; the intersection of specificity and universality. May it suffice to note at this point that all the following ritual actions, performed by a woman priest, already intersect with a layer of meaning which is controversial.

The description that follows may seem overly detailed. However it is in the details of the ritual as well as the broad strokes that meaning is expressed. It is in an intersection of the practical and the theological that the congregation and priest together make meaning. As the altar is set not in a haphazard manner but in a stylised one, a movement in sacred time is indicated. Highly ritualised action in a setting where languages, cultures and interpretations intersect is a means of containing multiple meanings and negotiating conflicts. As an exercise in a full narrative of the Eucharistic ritual I also wish to indicate that as the ritual practitioner all details are important. It is the small stories as well as the meta narrative that shape the human interaction with the Divine.

The server moves to the small credence table which is laid out with the communion vessels on a white cloth. The server first takes the larger communion chalice which is covered with a coloured cloth, a veil, and has a square rigid 'burse' on

top which contains the white linen corporal. This is then handed to the president. The server takes the chalice by the stem and places a hand on the top of the veil to hold it steady. The president then receives it in the same way and each bows to the other. The president turns and places this all on the altar, firstly removing the burse and taking the corporal from inside. The corporal is then laid on the altar in the centre at the back with one edge placed against the back edge of the altar. Next the coloured veil is removed and placed to one side next to the burse which is stood upright. This gives another indication of the colour of the liturgical season. There are four seasons each with a different colour to mark the progress of liturgical time through the year, as not only is ritual time marked weekly by the observance of the Eucharistic ritual on a Sunday, but so is the year divided to mark attention to different aspects of Divine action in the world, such as incarnation at Christmas and redemption at Easter. Underneath this and on top of the chalice is a small square of cardboard covered with white linen called the pall. This is also removed to reveal the silver plate called a patten on which are two large round wafers of communion bread. These have divisions on which when broken make 24 small wafers each. This silver paten is placed on the corporal in front of the chalice. The chalice is now only covered with a three way folded white cloth called a purificator which is removed and placed to one side. The president now turns once more to the server who is offering the second chalice in much the same manner as the first. This chalice however only has the pall and purificator covering it. It is placed alongside the first chalice and the pall and purificator removed. Turning once more to the server the president receives a small bottle containing wine and a small brass coloured pix, similar to an oversized pill box but which is used to hold the consecrated bread, both of which are for use for taking communion to the housebound. Placing these on the corporal, she removes the tops of both of these. At this point the president gives a brief bow to the people at the offertory table at the back of the worship area who proceed to

walk towards the altar carrying the bread and wine offering. The server moves in front of the altar to receive these and, with a bow to each person, receives the silver container of bread and the two cruets of water and wine. One of the lay people will usually whisper a number to the server who will whisper this to the president on passing her the silver box. This is the number of people expected to receive communion and has been counted by the sides people during the service so far. If the number is less than the 48 pieces the two large wafers will divide into, the president must decide if she needs any extra wafers from the silver box to allow extras for home communions and a reserved sacrament. If not, the silver box is handed with a small bow back to the server who then places it on the credence table behind the altar. Attention now turns to the water and wine cruets. The president takes the two chalices by the stems and turns to the server who firstly pour wine into both of them, a small bow from the president indicating how much to pour into each. Then a small amount of water is added to both chalices. Once again the amount is indicated by a small bow to finish. The two cruets are then placed on the credence table.

Whilst the bread and wine have been arranged at the altar, a couple of members of the congregation (once more these are chosen by the lay sides people before the service and are drawn from the whole congregation and is very inclusive) have been going around the rows of worshipers with two brass collection plates on which either cash offerings are placed or the small weekly offering envelopes are placed. All this time the hymn continues to be sung (so it has been chosen to be one of the longer ones). Once the chalices are replaced on the altar the president nods to the people holding the collection plates to move forward and one of the servers has picked up the large brass plate which was on the floor behind the altar and moved directly in front of the altar just in front of and between the two people who brought the bread and wine to that altar and who have remained there ever since. The collection is placed on the large plate by the

two lay people and the server turns to the president holding up the offering. The president says a quiet blessing and makes the sign of the cross towards the offering, bows and dismisses the offertory party. This ritual indicates that the communion is offered from the congregation at the hands of the priest. This is true of both the bread and the wine as well as the practical money offering for the day to day running of the church. The offerings are brought by lay people representing the whole congregation and are brought down the central aisle symbolising being brought from the very heart of the people. Several decisions are already made about the nature of the bread and wine offered, some of which are from the regulations of the Church of England and some more local decisions. The local decisions have been that the wafers used are the larger ones, which divided into 24 pieces each rather than a smaller priest wafer and individual people's wafers. Thus everyone shares a piece from the same wafer and the wafer itself is large enough to visually represent this during the service rather than the ritual being performed by small gestures almost furtively by the priest alone. This is an important consideration when one remembers that many of the words of the service will be unfamiliar to members of the congregation. Actions which are bold and clear become important to indicate transitions and significant points.

A server has now stood just behind the president holding a small silver bowl and jug and with a small white cloth draped over their arm. The president briefly takes each of the patten and chalices, lifts them slightly and replaces them in turn. She then turns to the server and with thumb and forefinger pinched together places them over the silver bowl whilst the server pours water over the tips of the fingers. This symbolises the cleansing of the fingers which are about to touch the bread and chalice during the consecration. The president then dries her fingers and returns to the altar. This action has a very long tradition and is described by Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Fifth Address on the Mysteries*,

You saw the deacon giving water to the priest to wash with, and to the elders encircling God's altar. Of course he did not do this because of any physical dirt. That is not the point. Our bodies were not dirty when we entered the church at the outset. No, this washing is a symbol of our need to be clean from all sins and transgressions. Hands symbolize action; and in washing them it is clearly the purity and blamelessness of our actions that we are expressing (Jerusalem 1975, 190)

He continues to reference this action even further back in tradition, citing Psalms 26:6: 'I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O Lord'

The servers all return to stand in their places except the Master of Ceremonies if he is required to turn the pages of the service book for the president.

Once the congregation has finished singing the hymn they remain standing if they are able. Some may sit due to age or illness. The congregation and president say together a prayer

**Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power,
the glory, the splendour, and the majesty;
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.
All things come from you,
and of your own do we give you.**

The Eucharistic prayer

The Eucharist prayer begins with the 'sersum corda' as follows

Priest The Lord be with you

All respond **and also with you.**

Priest Lift up your hearts.

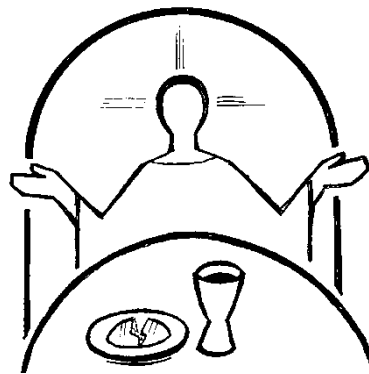
All respond **We lift them to the Lord.**

Priest Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All respond **It is right to give thanks and praise.**

This is sung by the priest, with responses sung by the congregation too, and when a more intricate musical setting is being used this may be accompanied by the organ.

The president stands during this in the ‘orans’ position (possibly from the word orantes: praying), that is with both arms aloft or held up just beside the body with the palms facing upwards as below



The significance, practicality and appropriate use of this is dealt with more fully in Gordon-Taylor and Jones (2005). I personally use quite an elevated position, especially to emphasise the spiritual uplifting indicated in the command ‘lift up your hearts’.

Once again Cyril of Jerusalem comments on this opening exchange stating that,

The priest is in effect commanding you all at this hour to lay aside the cares and concerns of your daily life, and to have your hearts in heaven with the merciful God. (Jerusalem 1975, 191)

In joining voices together in response we also put aside all that may divide us in our diversity and in sound exemplify the vision of unity we have. Once again it is in this specific instance in this specific ritual that we call this most chiefly to mind. As Cyril himself explains ‘We ought indeed to remember God at all times; but if human weakness makes that impossible, one should try especially at this time’ (Jerusalem 1975, 191)

The opening section of the Eucharistic prayer is either a regular one from the primary six prayers or a special one set for the particular time of year. Below is a typical example taken from prayer B

Father, we give you thanks and praise
through your beloved Son Jesus Christ, your living Word,
through whom you have created all things;
who was sent by you in your great goodness to be our Saviour.

By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh;
as your Son, born of the blessed Virgin,

he lived on earth and went about among us;
he opened wide his arms for us on the cross;
he put an end to death by dying for us;
and revealed the resurrection by rising to new life;
so he fulfilled your will and won for you a holy people.

This is a brief description of the narrative of the Gospel, reminding ourselves of the important sacred place of Christ, and although we have all affirmed our common faith at the point of the Creed earlier, this preface indicates the significant theology for the Eucharist. This ends with an invitation to join with saints and angels to sing praise in response to the mystery highlighted in the preface, which all sing accompanied by the organ.

Therefore with angels and archangels,
and with all the company of heaven,
we proclaim your great and glorious name,
for ever praising you and singing:

The president bows during the opening lines of this Sanctus and resumes the orans position for the Benedictus, the words of which are below,

(Sanctus)

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

(Benedictus)

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

The Benedictus begins with the words ‘Blessed is he’ at which the president and some members of the congregation would cross themselves indicating the priority of the Holiness of Jesus. In general the action of making the sign of the cross is seen as one predominantly in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. It is because some of the members of our congregation are drawn from a variety of denominational backgrounds that certain actions are only made by a few members of the congregation. It seems not to matter whether people do or don’t make a certain ritual action or not. Thus diversity in approach to ritual is embraced (here I prefer to think of it in terms of being embraced rather than tolerated as I sense it is a more affirmative approach than mere tolerance). Once the Benedictus ends the congregation and serving party sit and the president, remaining standing in the orans position, continues with the Eucharistic prayer. For example prayer B continues,

Lord, you are holy indeed, the source of all holiness;
grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit,
and according to your holy will,
these gifts of bread and wine
may be to us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ;

who, in the same night that he was betrayed,
took bread and gave you thanks;

he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper
he took the cup and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them, saying:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.

When the lines ‘the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ’ are said the president makes a small sign of the cross over the chalice and paten. As the prayer continues with the consecration prayer of the bread the president takes the wafer in the tips of her fingers and holds it up towards the congregation as she says the words ‘take, eat, this is my body which is given for you’. Pausing briefly with the wafer held aloft it is then replaced on the paten. The president either bows touching her forehead on the corporal, or she genuflects, kneels, and places her forehead on the corporal. This is an indication in movement that something special has just taken place. It points our attention in ritual action to the transformation of the bread. I am not concerned here with meaningful discussion of the Eucharistic presence and the complex theologies of transubstantiation and representative symbol (remembering that some of our members are former Roman Catholics and retain aspects of doctrine from this denomination). Standing once again, the prayer continues and the president takes both chalices replacing one immediately and taking the other in both hands and lifting it up towards

the congregation. The words 'drink this all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me' Once again after a slight pause the chalice is replaced on the altar and the president bows or genuflects. There are many layers of meaning in this part of the ritual, not only from the traditions of the various background denominations represented in our congregation but also in the face value of sharing food, the place of bread and wine (remembering also that some members are converts from Islam). The way in which the ritual actions indicate the importance of the bread and wine in the service as a whole can be shown by an example drawn again from our work with younger members of the congregation. The Church Army Captain and myself organised one Sunday service which was to be led by the children in the congregation, of which there were about ten at the time. They led the prayers and readings and were involved in the sermon, and when it came to the consecration of the elements they encircled the altar to show it was an offering of Christ through them. When it came to the distribution however this did present us with a slight problem. We realised that for them to distribute the wine might be complicated. Adults did this but they all wanted to offer the bread to the congregation which meant we had to find many appropriate receptacles for all ten of them to use! Some of the little silver patens we used I don't think had been used for years and had been pushed to the back of the safe in the vestry and forgotten about long ago.

There either follows a few more words of prayer or the direct statement by the priest,

Great is the mystery of faith

to which the congregation sings in response

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again

The prayer continues to the 'elevation' at which the president takes one wafer and the chalice, holding the wafer above the chalice; she says the final prayer to which the congregation respond either,

Amen

or

Blessing and honour and glory and power

be yours forever and ever.

Amen.

depending which of the Eucharistic prayers is being used. The elements are then replaced on the altar and the president either bows or genuflects as before.

After a brief moment's silence the president asks the congregation to join together in saying the Lord's prayer which we say in its traditional form. The priest invites everyone to join together in prayer saying,

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

To which all respond,

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

**but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
forever and ever.**

Amen.

The breaking of the bread

The president now takes the bread in her hands and holds it aloft saying,

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ

and she snaps the large wafer in half to which the congregation respond

Though we are many we are one body because we all share in one bread.

The Agnus Dei (The Lamb of God), is sung accompanied by the organ.

**Jesus Lamb of God have mercy upon us
Jesus bearer of our sins have mercy upon us
Jesus redeemer of the world grant us peace.**

Whilst this is being sung the rest of the wafer is broken into pieces as is the second one.

For this act to speak as significantly as it should, a minimalist fraction of a small wafer is not enough. I think the bread needs to be large, and sufficient large breads need to be broken that each communicant should receive a broken piece. (Stancliffe 2001, 101)

Once again it is important not to underestimate the power of simple actions such as the ‘fraction’, the breaking of the large wafer. We usually hold the wafer up high as

we actually break it so it is clear to the congregation what is happening. I was reminded of the importance of this and the way in which this conveys meaning to the congregation once again by one of our younger members. This was during a preparation session for confirmation with a young Iranian child who when asked what his favourite part of the service was, replied in essence that it was ‘the bit where you snap the bread’ and when asked why he replied that it meant we all get a bit. It is always a salutary reminder to a ritual practitioner to be shown which parts of the service actually touch the members of the congregation and to remember that actually the children are more observant than we might realise. With the freedom the young members of our congregation have to move around in the service, there have also been occasions when I have been aware of the toddlers standing in front of the altar at times and mirroring all the actions I am performing. For some people all the detailed ritual actions of a Eucharist may seem over complicated, and indeed accusations can be made that there can be a sense of remoteness from everyday life.

The top is also usually replaced on the small bottle of wine at this point, for the practical consideration that as the chalices and paten are going to be removed and replaced on the altar the chances of knocking the small bottle and spilling the consecrated wine are increased.

Giving of communion

The president opens her arms wide in a gesture of invitation and embrace, and invites the congregation to

Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.
Eat and drink
in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

She then ‘communicates’ herself saying ‘the body of Christ’ and consuming one piece of wafer and then ‘the blood of Christ’ and taking a sip from one of the chalices, wiping the chalice with one of the purifications. The altar party and the lay person who is going to assist with the chalice form a semi-circle behind the altar. They then receive the bread and wine in turn, one receiving the wafer directly on the tongue as is his tradition as he was once a Roman Catholic. There is great freedom in the Church of England to retain such practices even once you have been formally ‘received’ into the Church as this gentleman has. Once everyone around the altar has taken a sip from the chalice, the lay person takes it in their hand and the purificator in the other hand. As the president moves to the altar and takes up the paten with the other wafers to it, the deacon takes the second chalice and the three move in front of the altar. The rest of the altar party sit down.

Distribution of communion

At this point the congregation begin to form a line in front of the altar to take communion in turn. For a while we did try to arrange it that the president stood in the centre in front with the two chalice assistants either side so the people could receive the bread, step to one side or the other for the chalice, and then return to their seating, which in many places works as a free flowing system. However we never seemed to get the hang of it and so returned to the system of a line of congregation along which the priest and chalice assistants move. This still causes some problems as at times the line forms so close to the altar that moving along the line is tricky, and also there is little or no rhyme or reason to the order in which people line up. It can be said however that amongst this disorder it is possible for newcomers to slip in and join the line. If someone is unfamiliar with the procedure a member of the congregation will take them up and show them what to do.

During this time the organist plays some gentle background music, she herself does not receive as she is a member of a nearby church and attends as a worshiper there later in the day. Once most people have received communion, which most people do, even the children - except the babies - the communion hymn is sung. Although we have not taken a formal decision to admit baptised children to communion, the children who receive are all preparing for confirmation or have been recently confirmed so it is permissible to communicate them. It is my own personal view that we are not called to withhold Divine Grace and that as our theology is inclusive then we cannot exclude at the point of the greatest importance. However it must be acknowledged that for one family from Kenya it was important for them that their children only received after having been confirmed by the Bishop and this was perfectly acceptable too. As the last person receives communion the president returns to behind the altar and the two chalices are placed on the corporal. They all bow to the altar and the lay person returns to their seat. Various members of the altar party then begin to help the president clear

the altar. First of all any leftover consecrated bread is placed in the small brass pix and then taken to be placed inside the aumbrey which is on the wall to the side of the sanctuary area, along with the consecrated wine in the small bottle. The president then consumes any consecrated wine that remains and takes both chalices in her hands. She turns to the server who pours a small amount of water into each chalice which she once again drinks. Placing one chalice back on the altar she takes the other in both hands wrapping a purificator around it and pinching her finger tips together over the chalice. The server then pours water over the finger tips into the chalice. She turns to face the altar once more and drinks the water. Wiping the chalice with the purificator she scrunches up the cloth and pushes it inside the chalice and places one of the palls on the top. This is then handed to the server who replaces it on the credence table. The second chalice is then wiped and the cloth placed inside with a pall over the top. However this one now has the veil placed over it. The corporal is then returned to inside the burse and this is placed on top of the veil. This is also handed to the server to replace on the credence table. At each of the points at which something is passed between people a small bow is made to one another.

Once the congregation have finished singing the hymn, there is a brief silent pause before the president says the post-communion prayer and everyone then says together

**Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out**

**in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.**

Conclusion of the service

It is at this point that any announcements for the following week are made, such as special services, events or meetings. There is also an opportunity for members of the congregation to suggest things which people need to know about. Often at this point someone will have mentioned it is a member's birthday and so we all join together in singing happy birthday which, considering some of our member's names can be quite tricky to pronounce, shows a willingness to include all in the community and a boldness to attempt to pronounce their names. We have also used this point in the service to congratulate people on passing their driving tests, their A 'level results as well as gaining British Citizenship or receiving permission from the Home Office. We are keen to encourage and value learning and to re-enforce our understanding of ourselves as a church family which shares in celebrating members' good news.

The congregation then stand to sing the final hymn and when that is finished a final blessing is said such as

The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;

and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

The final dismissal is said by the president

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

To which all reply

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Once again there is a choice of dismissal forms but we prefer to use one that extends that action of the ritual into people's daily life and gives an explicit instruction to do so.

The altar party then gather in front of the altar in a line once more, the crucifer having retrieved the cross, and once everyone has bowed to the altar they process out to some gentle organ music in the order they came in. At the vestry door the altar party gathers for brief prayers such as

The Lord be with you

And also with you

let us bless the Lord

Thanks be to God

May the souls of the faithful departed by the mercy of God rest in peace

and rise in glory Amen.

Diversity in this setting

There have been points in the above detailed description where there have been decisions made about the wording and performance of the ritual which have been informed by an inclusivity agenda. The liturgy itself is very straightforwardly taken from Common Worship and uses contemporary language. There are no concrete expressions of cultures other than the local British one. Although there have been points of discussion amongst the congregation about such issues, one key question should be borne in mind which I turn to in the next chapter; “Which culture could be expressed?” There is no one overarching alternative culture which could be expressed. In terms of diversity it is my contention that the basic form of ritual itself gives space for the accessibility of its meaning in its variety. It is to the more theoretical discussions which lie behind such a decision making process that I now turn.

Chapter Three: Diversity and difference, the intersection between the self and the other.

In this chapter I will begin to wrestle with some of the very tricky issues encompassed in the field of diversity and equality. Some of the key concepts will emerge, such as assimilation and integration, respect for difference and equality. Hopefully what will emerge will be a positive view of diversity, recognising all the while the challenges it poses. Diversity in my view is not only inevitable it is essential. It is the means by which all human potential is fulfilled. However if any diverse position is seen as a final destination in itself then it will become a barrier. If diversity is seen as a range of different trajectories rather than completed journeys then the intersection of these trajectories is a point of potential transformation. In this way as I have described earlier, I see the Eucharist as a specific and ritually developed point of intersection for these diverse trajectories.

In my particular subject for study, that of the Eucharist and more specifically the Sunday service in my own church, the ritual is being examined as a means of transmission of certain beliefs. I am looking at the way in which the Eucharist speaks for us and expresses our faith, reflects to ourselves and to the world the way we believe our human relations and Divine relations should be and can be ordered, the way in which it offers a vision of hope without predetermining the outworking of that vision in concrete terms. It should be borne in mind that throughout I see the ritual as essentially a specific point in a process of human 'becoming'. If the ritual of the Eucharist is approached as a process rather than a product then there must always be the struggle against imposing a universal understanding on the ritual and bearing in mind the theme of diversity, keeping open the possibility of transformation and fluidity. This struggle is

analysed by Michel de Certeau in his work Culture in the Plural. He summarises the problem saying,

Culture in the singular always imposes the law of a power. A resistance needs to be directed against the expansion of a force that unifies by colonizing, and that denies at once its own limits and those of others. At stake is a necessary relation of every cultural production with death that limits it and with the battle that defends it. Culture in the plural endlessly calls for a need to struggle. (de Certeau, Culture in the Plural 1974 trans 1997, 139)

Drawing from other research into equality, the following is a broad description of the sort of struggle in society I believe should be modelled in the Eucharist, not a vision of a predetermined future but a model of a process by which a future is shaped and achieved;

Modern societies will depend increasingly on being creative, adaptable, inventive, well informed and flexible communities, able to respond generously to each other and to needs wherever they arise. Those are characteristics not of societies in hock to the rich, in which people are driven by status insecurities, but of populations used to working together and respecting each other as equals. And, because we are trying to grow the new society within the old, our values and the way we work must be part of how we bring a new society into being. (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010, 270)

The values and the way of working are embodied in the recognition of intersection points which are open and vulnerable to transformation. It is in the lack of unitary meaning in the Eucharist, one that can be simplified or reduced that its truth can be discerned. It requires diversity to function. It requires the potential for diverse interpretations and trajectories to open up the potential Divine human interaction.

Britain and diversity

In the past couple of decades in Britain there have been several factors which have changed the face of the ethnic, religious and cultural make-up of the country. This is not unique to this period in history and I will deal with only the factors which have had a specific impact on Christian life and worship. This is not to diminish or dismiss the great debates that must continue in the field of religious pluralism, particularly in headlines concerning tensions between what purports to be a traditional Christian culture and the Muslim communities in Britain.

The expansion of the European Union and the freedom of movement for work this provided meant Britain has become aware of a greater number of migrant workers in several industries. For some areas this has meant a great influx of people from Catholic East European countries. This has led to a trend in some places to offer the Mass in other languages, most notably in Polish where the Catholic Church has grown in numbers through this migration. In my own congregation, despite the offer to include prayers in Farsi or to have readings in French, in consultation with the members from other countries they have always indicated that they prefer to worship in the language of the host country, that being English, out of respect for the freedom and security our culture offers them. It has always been practice however not to assume the answer to these questions but to ask them directly of those concerned. This approach extends to all areas of the life and worship of the church. When wondering how best to develop youth ministry as mentioned in chapter two, the first steps were to ask the young people themselves.

Since the turn of the century the government's policy for the dispersal of asylum seekers has seen much more of the country becoming home to people fleeing oppression, violence and poverty from around the world. This has also meant a change in the Christian map of Britain with greater numbers in the cities in black majority churches, predominantly but not exclusively, from the Pentecostal movement. In the context of Byker, the Christian community is now made up of people from various Christian backgrounds, African Pentecostal, Catholic and Anglican broadly speaking as well as people from countries where Christians are an oppressed minority, such as Iran. I am reminded of something one member of my congregation said about the culture of England which she found strange on seeking asylum here. She was amazed that people did not go to church because, as she saw it, they could, without fear of attack or arrest. She had lived in Iran where she risked arrest trying to attend church. She was aware that her neighbours in Byker who would say they were Christian but did not attend church, did not have to risk anything by saying this.

This has all provided fertile ground for public debate about culture and identity, diversity and integration. In this chapter I turn my attention to some of the key concepts and language used in this debate and look at what an incarnational and liberational theology can add to it. Some of the themes I would like to analyse are those of inclusion and exclusion, integration and assimilation, tolerance and hospitality. I am particularly interested in uncovering the unspoken notions in each of these ideas. One idea I would like to draw attention to is the location and possession of power which is encountered time and again in theories. Identifying the place from which something is articulated already implies that there is a right to articulate from that place. The authority to speak and the recording of that speech has not been granted equally to all over time. There is

also a power relationship between the speaker and the spoken to or indeed the spoken about. This line of thought could quite easily become ‘reductio ad absurdum’ at which point no one could validly speak at all except in the most relative and individually limited way. However the power dynamics and interplay of social, cultural and hierarchical influences must always be suspected. This whole problem is drawn out by Alasdair MacIntyre in his work Whose Justice? Which Rationality?. The final chapter of this book outlines the problem facing someone who has not yet aligned themselves to one position or another,

What each person is confronted with is at once a set of rival intellectual positions, a set of rival traditions embodied more or less imperfectly in contemporary forms of social relationship and a set of rival communities of discourse, each with its own specific modes of speech, argument, and debate, each making a claim upon the individual’s allegiance. It is by the relationship between what is specific to each such standpoint, embodied at these three levels of doctrine, history and discourse, and what is specific to the beliefs and history of each individual who confronts these problems, that what the problems are for that person is determined. (MacIntyre 1988, 393)

In leading a ritual in a diverse context this challenge is met head on. Each worshiper comes with their own background and each aspect of the ritual has its own story. What one can hope to achieve must be that the boundaries of each are permeable enough not to repel but to intersect; not to conflict but to integrate. This leads us to the tricky issue of what the result may be and opens up the question of the possibility or desirability of assimilation.

Assimilation

In the introduction to his chapter The concept of a multicultural society (Rex 1997) John Rex articulates the problems surrounding concepts of equality, assimilation

and multiculturalism. His experience from the early 1970's and his experience of Britain in the late 1990's caused him to encounter some of the contradictory positions which have arisen. From a meeting in 1967 of UNESCO experts he gives an example in which there was a wish by some black American representatives to include within the statement on racism and race prejudice, a phrase asserting the 'right to be different' (Rex 1997, 207). Thus

Assimilation was rejected as a sign of equality. The goal of the black movement was to attain *equality of respect* for a separate black culture The unfortunate thing, however, is that because of the fuzziness of the ideal of multiculturalism, they gain apparent support from those who aim to ensure that minorities should receive something different and inferior, the very reverse of equality. (Rex 1997, 207)

When an assertion of the equal validity of multiple identities is made, be that in culture, ethics, religion or whatever, we must maintain a suspicion of the levers of power that surround that particular assertion. It may be that in asserting an absolute equality, we actually dissolve into a relativism that actually honours nothing, or privileges a liberal theoretical framework without honouring the very important differences and incompatibilities present. We only honour an equality of difference if all pertinent influences are also equal. This would necessarily seem to be a very complex problem. Who can be sure that they have fully grasped all potential influencing factors in any circumstance? In Rex's example, the wish to affirm a right to be different is not necessarily a negative 'end' in itself and cannot be lightly dismissed just because it may be appropriated and applied in ways that were not intended. Indeed to assert difference as a right also leads us to have to wrestle with others' difference which we might find objectionable or difficult to accept. Is the right to difference limited to some existential state or also difference of opinion or action? If it is a right to hold a different opinion

but not necessarily to act on it who would adjudicate which opinions must remain theoretical and which can be enacted?

Uniformity of introduced culture

The current situation of migration and asylum seeking in Newcastle is far more diverse than some previous periods. One might think of areas and times when there was a particular country or region from which the bulk of immigrants have come. This has led in some cities to very distinct cultural and national areas, where there are a large number of people from one particular background and origin. In Newcastle the countries of origin of the new members of communities are varied and the networks of support are more fluid. If one were to pose the question ‘should the worship of our church reflect the culture of its members?’ one would have to ask the counter question ‘Which culture?’

In Byker, those from other cultures who worship with us do not come from static cultures themselves. It would be wrong, indeed impossible, to try to merely import or include some cultural expression from their culture and assume it was in some pure essential form. In the most straightforward sense if the congregation member is an asylum seeker it would be reasonable to assume that there was something in the cultural and political context of their country that they were fleeing from and as such their own cultural or ethnic identity is by no means straightforward.

Iranian congregation members

Not wishing in this thesis to go into great political/cultural or religious discussion about any one particular area that our members come from, I shall momentarily reflect on what I have observed taking as my examples the Iranian members I have met. Predominantly, though happily not exclusively, these members have been women with young families. They have come from a country shaped by many years of conflict and which is at present in broad terms a very patriarchal and religiously oppressive country. Those in power, both religious and political (and as I understand it these two are not clearly distinct in Iran) are men. Thus for a liberal western community what part of the Iranian culture should we honour? For the members it is the liberation of the west, and the Anglican church, which is important to them. They have expressed to me the significance of finding a religious community where those in the visible and prominent positions of authority are women. I personally have found it a timely reminder that in amongst the Church of England's seeming public pre-occupation with the legitimacy of women in the Episcopacy and the provisions for dissenters, we need to remember how far we have come and the strengths we do have. It is not culturally disrespectful to acknowledge that those from other countries can creatively express 'their' culture by including some of 'our' culture and beliefs, just as we should not be afraid to be changed by their culture and experience.

Although this is a specific context and is not replicated in all Anglican churches it serves as a suggestion for all congregations to look at their own cultural assumptions, both about themselves and those they consider other.

Cultural incompatibility

Discussions of ‘belonging’ based on ideas of culture and cultural characteristics, for example, often emphasised the *incompatibility* of cultural traditions where different communities are said to have different values and ways of life over any recognition of how these values emerged in relation to others. (Bhambra 2006, 34)

Thus no values are generated in a vacuum. Nor do they fit together in ways that necessarily imply immutability, such that they may be said to be like jigsaw pieces fitting together but remaining the same shape, but rather like a joint which needs filing down and altering to be made to fit.

Thus it would seem to me that for an individual or group to self-identify as ‘black British’ for example, would in this discourse be nonsensical if both concepts of ‘black’ and ‘British’ are preformed and unchangeable. We would need to recognise that both aspects of that description are influenced by the other and neither is static. They take on a new meaning which is a blending of both concepts influenced by one another. Thus as Bhambra goes on to say

the key problems in understanding identity formation from the perspective of studying groups with primordial or historical loyalties is that this ossifies those groups and misses the dynamism constitutive of all group formation. (Bhambra 2006, 36)

This is also true of the problem of tradition within the ritual of the Eucharist. There is always a temptation for one group to ossify itself in reaction against movements around it. Once ossification takes place conflicts will inevitably arise. There

is also something deeply innate in the Eucharist, in that it is seen as communicating a deep universal truth which tends towards ossifying that truth in a particular time/culture/tradition. It could be argued that it is in the natural human striving for answers that the propensity for conflict in the diversity of answers is sometimes found. An example of this is in anything that offers no definitive answers merely a process for discerning them, which it is my belief in the Eucharistic Ritual confronts us with.

Universals

In wrestling with universals which answer questions of identity and difference I have been struck by the approach suggested by Gurminder K. Bhambra on the subject of integration. She suggests that integration is not a mere adding-to but ‘requires a consideration of the theoretical framework that established the binaries of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in its first instance.’ (Bhambra 2006, 32) To assume a universal culture or notion of culture is a power model in itself. Whether authority is given to the self or the other there still appears to be an allocation of powers and preference. It could be argued that there is a preferring of other in our cultural and religious public life that creates a tension with British culture, which acts as if disempowered. It would be reasonable to ask whether different cultures themselves have within their tradition a notion of duality or whether, rather, it is in Western culture that this dichotomy is prevalent. The theology of the western church is deeply veined through with such dualities. The very separation of the Divine from the Human goes to the heart of Christian thought such that there arises the necessity of reconciliation of the two domains in the person of Jesus. This permeates through theology in notions of body/soul, creature/creator for example.

Nowhere is this awareness of what one might call a transformative openness to others better displayed than in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. He starts by trying to disentangle what it means to be black British. He is concerned with the way in which such identities are seen to comprise the collision of two separate ethnic absolutes, finished in their nature and one-sided in their influence. (Young 1999, 180)

Within discussions of diversity and difference runs a current of a suspicion of some universal essence which binds human beings together and on top of which layers of difference are learnt and inculturated. In his book Human Universals, Donald E. Brown gives a detailed analysis of the pervasive theories of human universals which run through anthropology as he sees it. He traces out nine basic premises which he claims have long been the dominant paradigm of American anthropology (D. E. Brown 1991, 146). These nine propositions are now controversial as Brown says because they are almost all false or misleading. He continues to analyse each one in turn. It is I believe important to hold these nine in the back of the mind when talking about any theory of diversity to remind oneself to be suspicious of any underlying assumptions which may lurk behind an attractive universal theory. The nine propositions are as follows.

1. Nature and culture are two distinct phenomenal realms
 2. Nature manifests itself in instinct (which is fixed action patterns) and culture manifests itself in learned behaviour.
 3. Because human nature is the same everywhere, it is culture that explains the differences between human populations.
 4. Human universals are likely to reflect human nature
 5. Except for its extraordinary capacity to absorb culture, the human mind is largely a blank slate.
 6. Culture (because of 3 and 5) is the most important determinant of human affairs.
 7. Explaining what people do in biological terms (i.e., in terms of nature instead of culture) is a reductionist fallacy (in extreme forms, explaining human affairs in *any* terms other than culture itself is a reductionist fallacy).
 8. Being autonomous, culture has an arbitrary and highly variable character.
 9. Universals (because of 5 and 8) are few (and unimportant)
- (D. E. Brown 1991, 146)

All these points however also presuppose a duality which I have already outlined above; the binary understanding of self and other, Divine and human etc. If we apply the idea of intersection points into this discussion, we would see not an opposition of dual nature and culture, but rather a process of becoming in which it is a universal truth *about* becoming rather than a static concept of completion.

Our own culture is by no means a static fixed point from which the anthropological task goes forth. It is therefore as justifiable to examine our own culture by its intersection with difference, as it is to go abroad or to remote cultures to investigate what we may learn of human nature from their position of difference. This is an argument held out by Donald Brown in his work too (D. E. Brown 1991). It is the basis for my own detailed description of the Eucharist. An assumption to be aware of is that the modern developed (or more specifically white, western, educated, heterosexual male) perspective can view, through its own lens, the nature of another perspective without critiquing its own, or that its own perspective has already been shaped in contrast to the notional 'other'. It is in the intersection points that such reflexivity takes place. Thus it may be true to say that

Anthropologists have claimed and received this task because they have shown that representatives of the modern world do not and cannot tell the whole story about humanity. If we want to know what even *we* are really like, we must compare ourselves with others-and all those others with each other. (D. E. Brown 1991, 153)

Brown continues to argue that in studying human universals it is not necessarily true to say that they are immediately observable in, say, New York and that in some

instances it is necessary to 'go abroad to seek or study them.' (D. E. Brown 1991, 156).

I wonder whether in this increasingly globalised and fluid world, where for many reasons cultures intermingle in so many places, the opportunity to look at ourselves in contrast to others is more readily available and the fault lines of previous approaches to multiculturalism are becoming clearer. In this study I am doing just such a task in that I am recording a snapshot of our culture and ritual practice at a moment when diversity issues illuminate it.

Communal vs. individual identity

Another example of a false binary opposition is that of privileging community over the individual.

Liberal democracy has to deal with the problem of how individuals relate to each other and the problem of how diverse communities relate to each other The most common resolution of this is the evocation of the single community posed as the binary opposite of the solitary individual. Thus on one side we have the notion of individualism, separation, selfishness and on the other we have the notion of collectivism, integration and working together. (Young 1999, 173-4)

To illustrate this Young quotes Iris Young

As an alternative to the ideal of community, I develop . . . an ideal of city life as a vision of social relations affirming group difference. As a normative ideal, city life instantiates social relations of difference without exclusion. Different groups dwell in the city alongside one another, of necessity interacting in city spaces. If city politics is to be democratic and not dominated by the point of view of one group, it must be a politics that takes account of and provides voice for the

different groups that dwell together in the city without forming a community. (Young 1999, 174)

In this way of understanding community is very much a static noun. Could community itself not be an active verb, something always in the process of becoming? Thus community itself has the fluidity and future that it so tantalisingly seems to offer. Community as a means of living which has not yet been perfected, but is always by its very essence something which is shaped by all its individual members and its individual members are shaped by relationship to it and to one another. This fluidity is always in tension and can become conflict at any point. Community as described as a fixed concept would deny any notion of difference as Young states, and would indeed be in danger of assimilating ‘diversity into the dominant culture and to devalue those outside of it.’ (Young 1999, 174). People negotiate their community belonging in more creative and fluid ways. This is illustrated in the conclusion to the book Transborder Lives by Lynn Stephen (Stephen 2007) when she describes how

Multiple sets of laws, institutions, values, and social conventions can work at once within one social field, as seen, for example, in the case of male farm workers who learn the rules of undocumented farm labor in labor camps, participate in U.S. churches and immigrant rights organisations, and return home to take on a cargo as part of their community citizenship requirements in Oaxaca. (Stephen 2007, 315)

It is through the negotiation firstly of what Stephen calls cultural citizenship that migrants move towards national citizenship rights. Participation in U.S. churches would be a form of cultural negotiation for these migrants, and as such is also an important means of cultural integration and identification for some asylum seekers in Britain. However the cultural identity of the church itself is not necessarily fixed, and in terms

of society and integration would vary from denomination to denomination, each with its own story.

Multiple identities

The Eucharist, if it is seen as a special time of openness to and awareness of Divine presence and the possibility of transformation, may be the answer to the question ‘in what way might that transformation be described?’ Useful to this answer would be to use the theory from Transborder Lives of marginal zones to describe this special time,

The fact that similar understandings of indigenous ethnic identity have evolved in different parts of Mexico and among Mexicans suggests that a multileveled concept of ethnicity should become the norm and not the exception in social science analysis. This idea builds on Gupta’s and Ferguson’s suggestion that what have often been thought of as ‘marginal zones’ or borderlands (not necessarily literal, but symbolic or Transborder in the sense understood here) are a more adequate conceptualization of the ‘normal’ locale of the postmodern subject (1992:18) (Stephen 2007, 318)

Multi layered is a concept that can apply not just to specifically ethnic identity questions but identity in many other ways too. Otherness as experienced by many individuals and communities may involve negotiating many identities, with a fluidity of movement from one identity to another.

Theories of religion which have their base in a specific ordering of society would not fit very well in a diverse and mixed society, as most are. As Catherine Bell explains in her book Ritual:

Typological systems as different as those of Bellah and Douglas, presented earlier, suggest that different types of social order and cultural world view can be correlated with different styles of ritual. Yet rarely does a society have only one style or one world view. Usually there are several cosmological orders more or less integrated with each other but capable of tense differentiation and mutual opposition. Different parts of a society - social classes, economic strata, or ethnic groups - may hold different perspectives on ritual, or the same subgroup may have different attitudes on different occasions. (Bell 1997, 255)

As a reflection on the specificity and generality of difference I can give my personal experience of the number of times someone has expressed to me that they would not accept women priests, but they would accept me. The specific and the known is not threatening but the general is. Likewise, there are members of my congregation who would certainly be suspicious of the general term “asylum seeker”, but not apply to those in our congregation the same suspicions. How easy it can be to see racism or sexism as binary concepts in themselves. People tend not to be so consistent in their thoughts and actions. There is an underlying assumption that we all hold completely internally logical beliefs. Someone's experience may lead them to a general opinion but that does not mean that that position is immutable or universally applicable. It is in what Rappaport calls Ultimate Sacred Postulates that a shared understanding may be possible. It is their independence from ordinary experience which makes them open to people with widely divergent experiences (Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* 1999, 309). Ritual is a mechanism for sharing the ultimate Sacred Postulates in a way which expects a dynamic engagement with experience, diversity and difference whilst negotiating the boundaries and barriers between cultures. The

Eucharist as a ritual re-described through centuries opens up this space where otherness can intersect with the known. This is a reciprocal action where the Ultimate Sacred Postulate's meaning is discerned in an evolving way as it is restated in diverse contexts. In the case of Byker it is true to state that

There is no such thing as a hermetically separate otherness in the late modern city – there is always a degree of assimilation, crossover and influence between subcultures. (Young 1999, 177)

Putting to one side the hierarchal language of sub-culture, is this equally applicable to the dominant or host culture? The interesting position of Byker in relation to multicultural Britain is that the area has only very recently become multi-cultural. Although over the years there has been immigration for economic reasons primarily and certain cross cultural influence in the city as a whole with Irish Catholic immigration, a fairly stable Hindu population in parts of the West End of the city and some pockets of several generations from the original immigrant families, the notable change for Byker has been since the late 1990s. Thus the members of my congregation and community who are from a variety of cultures, countries and backgrounds are, it is as of this moment true to say, the first generation moving to this country. Some have now had children in this country but those children are barely secondary school age. The families themselves have a diversity of relationships to Britain, for example some of the children came to the country and to Newcastle when they were still quite young and so for many they both sound Geordie and have little or no recollection of their birth country except what is transmitted by their family. Other youngsters came here at crucial times in their teenage or young adult years and so have a dual identity and sometimes ambivalent relationship to Newcastle and Britain. In most cases, especially for the children, it has

not been a positive choice to come away from their homes but rather a situation forced upon them. Whereas much modern theory is looking at the position of more established groupings from immigration a few generations back, Byker is predominantly in the first wave of diversity in this particular form.

Thus Robert Park's picture of a 'mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate' may have been true of areas where immigration is of recent origin, but scarcely corresponds to the usual late modern world of transposition, globalization, hybridization and crossover, where norms overlap, boundaries blur and transformations occur in all directions. (Young 1999, 181)

The Church's place as intersection point for diversity.

Is the church a space where, rather than a space where cultures clash, the early stages of change can be understood and developed in healthy ways which do not over-emphasise or pathologize difference?

With all this in mind the symbolic nature of religion and its narrative form can be a useful tool for integration. There is an empowerment in re-interpreting and reading your own story into symbols. For example, during an advent course an Iranian mother and son were listening to a story about Virgin Mary and Joseph's flight into Egypt with the baby Jesus to flee persecution. The boy said 'That's what my Mum did for me' referring to their leaving Iran for their safety. This is not necessarily a huge leap in interpretation terms but does show the reading of their own personal narrative in a specific image of the Holy family. As they were also converts from Islam there was a trace of surprise in their discovery that a family, and especially a woman with a young

child, was revered within holy scripture such that they could see their own story held as an example of Holy living.

Also what about reflections of the community identity which has to be fluid as it constantly welcomes and loses members? Asylum seekers move on either when they lose their applications or when they are given leave to remain or refugee status. Also the occasional economic migrant who has joined the congregation from the expanded EU have tended to move away to be near to work or better housing. There is a sense in which Byker is a place of arrivals and beginnings but somewhere you move on from. This is also true of the other members of the community, often people aspire to move elsewhere in the city if only job and opportunity came along. The Byker estate, once council housing now run by an 'arm's length management company' on behalf of the council, is designed in a way that restricts the use of cars. Therefore it can sometimes be that once someone gets employment they quite reasonably wish to get a car (often essential to get to work) but find that they can no longer remain in Byker and keep their car near their property or safely on the estate. There are many reasons to be passing through Byker. One marked feature of employment is that the traditional roles of doctor, dentist etc. who used to live in the area not only no longer live there but the surgeries themselves are based some distance away. This difficulty of access to some basic services is one more factor contributing to the fluidity of the population. Also when people are employed the profile of these jobs is one of short term, low paid or temporary jobs.

Social and economic diversity

Reflecting on some of the tensions and differences between those who have recently come to live in Byker, whether for safety or economic reasons, one social difference should be noted. Whereas the predominantly white working class residents have found themselves through industrial and economic changes in the last century increasingly isolated and one might say trapped in the relative poverty of Britain, many of those who are for example seeking asylum in Britain are highly educated, professional people. For young people in Byker there is still a struggle in educational terms to achieve qualifications and therefore stable employment prospects. This is because of a variety of factors analysed elsewhere in studies of urban deprivation. Just as there are factors mitigating against social and indeed geographical mobility in a community like Byker, asylum seekers once they are granted leave to remain in Britain often are able to move away as they are already more socially mobile and qualified (with the caveat that not all qualifications are recognised in Britain). I find myself often reflecting that those who would be in socially and economically similar positions to the community in Byker in the countries from which people flee are precisely the ones who do not have the means to flee to Britain. The stories of the amounts of money and the ingenuity and education required to pay the traffickers, and pass through immigration or to hide in other countries en route, means that such an escape is less accessible to a manual labourer. This of course is not an absolute rule but a general observation. Far from fleeing poverty we meet people who have come from professional and sometimes quite wealthy families. Some have left houses behind, or have sold everything just to pay to be smuggled away.

In the book Modernity and Exclusion Joel S. Kahn, himself an American living in Britain, contrasts the approach to immigration and integration in Britain and the

USA. He looks at the liberal approach in Britain in which he sees undercurrents of primitivism such that black people who are thought to be well integrated often have to be more British than the British, thus they have become civilised in even liberal terms.

British notions of the civilising process rested on an understanding of the process as both a universal and natural one. British Narratives of modernization in other words have always presumed that the English were distinctive not because of the unique characteristics of citizens of the United Kingdom, but only because the English, particularly white middle class Englishman, are farther along the road to a universal human future than anyone else. (Kahn 2001, 141)

We are aware now however that there are many cultures that have progressed along their own narrative of modernisation. These narratives have been formed in their own context, which are also influenced by global factors and also not in isolation. These then intersect with what for many has been a normative understanding from one perspective only. As such then the sudden interpolation of groups of people from other modernised but significantly different cultures in to a white western and marginalised culture (such as Byker) is likely to cause tensions. People's experience of exclusion in the narrative of British modernity can be brought into even greater relief when encountering people who are suddenly sharing the space and indeed deprivation but whose narratives of modernity have been those of a general progression towards empowerment, success. Thus the intersection point can be one of tension and confusion. It may be a very superficial analysis to say the reasons for seeking asylum are often underpinned by the people finding themselves a threat to the state or authorities precisely because they are those with the tools of power and authority themselves. They are people who in general terms have achieved within their own countries but for whom their society has changed. I am thinking here of the stories I have heard about families who have been living 'good' lives but for a variety of reasons have found themselves

threatened by other aspects of politics and power. Stories such as strong, educated, outspoken women in societies which have moved to a more and more patriarchal structure, doctors who have treated the ‘wrong’ people in the eyes of the authorities, someone in a position of trust and access in a government who refused to be threatened by opposing forces into colluding with a terrorist attack. These are not the poor and powerless in these countries, as the poor and powerless are just that and not a threat to the governing power. Not only are their stories harrowing and difficult to comprehend, but to be in the social position for those circumstances to arise is not a common experience for the people of Byker themselves. For those asylum seekers coming to Britain finding themselves in the situation of being dependant on the state for shelter and food, on hand-outs and charity, is also a great adjustment.

It is into this situation that the church speaks of resurrection and redemption week by week and Sunday by Sunday, not only to the marginalized and vulnerable residents of Byker but to all the lives which intersect in our community for however short a time. It must be remembered too that there is no universal experience of the asylum seeker or migrant worker. I was reminded of this when I first arrived at St Silas when it became clear that two of the families from Africa in the congregation were rather wary of one another. Although worshipping in the same church there was a fundamental level of unease. I have to confess that I realised then how much in my mind I had put together black African as a category overall. What I learnt from these families was that, although they were both fleeing the violence in their respective countries, they were actually from the two groups (tribes, although the situation was so complicated as it was explained to me I cannot be more specific) who were committing

atrocities against each other. The narrative of their own family and experiences meant they at that time could not trust one another.

There is an increasing tendency now to think of Britishness as once again a racially neutral identity, but this time one that is inclusive of at least certain categories of 'blacks', white English-ness (along with Scottish-ness, Welsh-ness etc.) is now used to describe the culturally or racially particular category. Again *contra* the assertions of certain critics of modernity, here a racially exclusive notion of Britishness has become more inclusive, although doubtless now generating new exclusions (to an extent Muslim Asian, as well as newer refugee groups from other parts of Europe, Africa and the Middle East). (Kahn 2001, 142-3)

In his book Culture in the Plural Michel DeCerteau, speaking of culture and the urban landscape, states

What practice does with prefabricated signs, what they later become for those who use or receive them - there is an essential point that still remains, for the most part, unknown. It produces movements or stagnations that a mere analysis of signifiers can never grasp: collapses, displacements, or a hardening mentality; continuing patterns of traditional behaviour beneath their outer metamorphosis, or mutations of their meaning despite an appearance of objective stability; distortions of 'values' invested in the life of a group without its needing to make them explicit, and so on. What can be measured everywhere meets this mobile element along its borders. (de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural* 1974 trans 1997, 133)

This he says in architectural terms is what we call culture, the soft region. For the liturgical practice of the church, if the soft region can be described as the 'tradition' through which the 'appearance of objective stability' is expressed, what is it that is not being made explicit? Despite their differences, the ritual of a Eucharist which takes place in a cathedral, village church or inner city worship centre seems to have a continuing pattern of traditional behaviour. It cannot be assumed however that even in

these contexts the reception of the meaning can be assumed to be familiar. Very briefly in her contribution to the book The Qualities of Time, Julia Powles examines the way in which memory for groups of people in similar circumstances can focus on very different aspects of life. Her examples are in the extremis of an African refugee experience where one community re-organises its memory in terms of the war and violence it has fled and another focuses on the importance of fishing and eating fish to the country they have fled from. Thus 'Perhaps surprisingly, it is the memories of catching and eating fish, and not the violence of war, that are collectivised during the process of on-going social life in the settlement.' (Powles 2005, 331)

One most obvious common feature, despite everything by which we differ from one another, is that all our experience is mediated through our bodies. This is ultimately the location of all experience. What cannot be observed in our internal life, state of mind, emotion or psychology is expressed through our bodies. This does not mean that everything our bodies do is an expression of an inner truth but rather that;

Some states of mind, then, have bodily concomitants which conduce to overt natural resemblances among men, and these states can be mutually recognised independently of their social linguistic forms. (Needham 1972, 143)

Thus bodily posture may be important for non-verbal communication but this can be imprecise and also culturally determined, for example the use of eye contact for some may be a sign of honesty and trust, for others it may seem inappropriately familiar. The context in which the actions are set influences their potential interpretation, and for the Eucharist so many everyday actions, shaking hands, drinking

etc. have had many meanings sedimented over time. It is to some of those layers that I now turn.

Chapter Four: Layers of meaning intersecting in the Eucharist

Paul Bradshaw amongst others has done a great deal to uncover the origins of the Christian Eucharist. Peeling back the layers of history, he describes its origins at its most basic.

I believe that the regular sharing of food was fundamental to the common life of the first Christian communities, as it apparently had been to Jesus' own mission. (Bradshaw 2009, 18)

He then elaborates on the types of occasions and contexts and explores the ways in which it gradually became associated with sayings about Jesus' own death and resurrection. As such the Eucharist shaped the early church and the preoccupations of early Christians were mirrored in the development of the liturgy. As such the Eucharist has been intimately entwined with the identity of the worshiping church. The Eucharist in the context I am looking at once again is descriptive of the kind of community it inhabits and at one and the same time it is a prefiguring of the vision of the community of the Kingdom. Just as Bradshaw seems to mourn the emphasis on the sacrificial death at the expense of the living nourishing flesh and blood, so I hope to have described a living and transforming community committed to a present hope rather than a distant future one.

In this chapter I will begin to explore some of the elements of the Eucharist with which people's experience intersects. It will not be an exhaustive study of the origin of the ritual, rather illustrating a broad idea. To set the scene for this I will explain a little

of what I understand by tradition; tradition being the mechanism by which the layers of meaning are sedimented in the ritual. I will then look at a few, although undoubtedly not all, of the elements of the ritual that are in action in the ritual. Each element of the ritual has layers of meaning some of which are easily accessible and others that are individual and personal. In the previous chapter I discussed some of the elements of diversity which are problematic and yet exciting. These combine to shape and determine the way in which each element of the Eucharist is received and interpreted. There is always the possibility that a ritual will be empty of meaning by which I mean one where the layers of meaning have been lost and are inaccessible, the actions are performed with no expectation that they are meaningful. The ritual is therefore mere practical action and devoid of creative possibility. This is not the same as re-interpreting or changing the meaning of a ritual so that it hardly bears any resemblance to its origins. With the diversity of possible responses in a mixed congregation there is plenty of room for misinterpretation and this is a risk which must exist but without this flexibility there is no possibility of re-interpretation and deeper understanding.

Some reflections on the meaning of 'tradition'.

It is in the rooting of our liturgy in tradition that we endeavour not to stray into an un-Christian form of ritual, one which believes more in the ritual itself than in the message of salvation. In her conclusion on ritual reification Catherine Bell charts the modern move to be more interested in 'ritual' as an entity in its own right rather than one with a religious basis. She states that

At various times in church deliberations over liturgical matters, the recent tendency has been to consult outside secular scholars. For modern ritualists devising ecological liturgies, crafting new age harmonies, or drumming up a fire in the belly, the taken-for-granted authority to do these things and the accompanying conviction about their efficacy lie in the abstraction 'ritual' that scholars have done so much to construct. (Bell 1997, 264)

David Stancliffe in his contribution to the book Living the Eucharist (2001) already points to the work done in showing what he calls the 'deep structures' of the liturgy. Although he begins speaking of the 'Liturgical archaeologists' who 'attempt to unearth the pure form of the original rite of the undivided Church' from its 'later mediaeval accretions with which popular piety and clerical devotion have overlaid the original' he concludes here that 'the Eucharistic rite of most of the western churches now bear a remarkable similarity', as if this was progress. For some it may be important to examine the 'accretions'. However, to reject them and to chip them away from an ideal of a pure skeleton form would have the consequence of removing the authority of tradition to 'accrete' in the modern day. We may reject the past additions, interpretations and emphases but the mere fact that they were meaningful in their time surely legitimises our generation's activities of ritual creativity. The past rites, word and action, are precious because they were once living themselves, although they may be effectively dead to us now. To value tradition does not necessarily mean a rigid adherence to the actual forms of tradition but rather to the principle of expression being adaptable in new ears and contexts. As Vernon White says 'The whole point of trawling the past is not to recover an illusory fixed meaning, and then try to come to terms with it, but to see that its full meaning never was fixed but open to its future.' (White 2002, 84)

In this thesis I am exploring the idea that intersection points have a special role in the conveying of meaning in a ritual. In examining the historical development of Eucharistic ritual it is the intersection of themes and concerns in each period of history with the theology of the day that needs attention. I do not intend to trace in detail historical developments but rather touch on common themes and practice in this area. If we are to look at intersection points from the point of view of people and community we also need to pay heed to the way in which the Eucharist itself developed as a Christian ritual and the sedimentation of meaning this has created. There is no point at which we can turn to the Eucharist and say definitively ‘This is what it means’, no point in history that we can turn to with nostalgia and yearn for a more ‘authentic’ time. This nostalgia is a trait of human being and can often be projected from very personal memory to an idealisation of an institution or community. As Averil Cameron says in her contribution to Living the Eucharist ‘Tradition is a wonderful and comforting and necessary thing. But we can’t take it for granted, and we shouldn’t confuse it with nostalgia for the good old days of the past.’ (Cameron 2001, 129)

This does not mean that there have not been significant pressures to find this definitive shape and wording of both liturgy and scripture. One significant point in the recent life of the Anglican Church has been the revision of the liturgy within the last 40yrs, specifically the side-lining of the Authorized Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer as the weekly basic form of services. One such argument against a fundamental shift of focus is set out in the rather dramatically titled book Ritual Murder edited by Brian Morris. As the cover notes explain the Ritual is the historic liturgy of the Church of England and the Murder is the activity of revisers who seek to replace this with ‘alternative’ versions (Morris 1980). In his introduction to this collection of

essays which are drawn from a wide variety of disciplines, he argues that ‘In its present state of flux the English language is simply not capable of rendering the great truths of the Christian faith in words and rhythms that are both contemporary and profound.’ (Morris 1980, 8) I would want to question if ever there was a time when the English language was not in a state of flux, and indeed to go further in arguing that it is my contention that it can be that very state of flux which renders most clearly the fundamental mystery of the Eucharist. I would like to make the observation too, that although it is the language being specifically mourned here, there is a suggestion that it is not even necessarily the words themselves but the poetry, the rhythm and as such something non-verbal in operation which cannot be faithfully rendered in contemporary English. Morris’s statement above is in direct contradiction to my own argument in this thesis, that it is in the creative re-interpretation of the words that the mystery of Divine and Human relations is rendered.

I wonder if, despite many members of my congregation not having English as a first language, not even understanding the actual words used, there is also something about it being in the common language, the language (and on some occasions the regional accent) of the community they find themselves in (and I do mean find themselves, as many asylum seekers have no choice about where they live in the country until they have been given permission to stay) that contributes to the sense of belonging to the community in the ritual?

It is the central truths of the Christian faith which need preserving not the means by which they are communicated. Even these central truths are open not only to re-interpretation but to deeper understanding. At all times I am sure that even the prayers

and words as set down in the BCP and Authorized Version were being interpreted and used in a variety of ways in the diversity of contexts in which they were used. No matter how hard a hierarchical view of the imposition of meaning on certain rituals is pressed, the day to day practice is robust enough to find its own creative means to adapt in a way that liberates the group and individuals.

The role of the Eucharist in history.

If the BCP and Authorized version are definitive sources to understand the fundamental truths, it would be right to ask if this in itself was a novel concept or whether even in scripture and the practice of the earliest church such a fossilized approach was taken or whether ritual and liturgy, text and practice was more creative? It is in this light that I look to studies which have attempted to explore this.

Taking as his model for the early Eucharist the concept of ‘banquet’, Dennis E. Smith in the book [From Symposium to Eucharist](#) tracks the cultural, practical and theoretical influences on the Eucharist in the very early church. This study takes very seriously the milieu in which the early church developed. It acknowledges that the development of the Eucharist does not follow a simple straight line from the ‘earliest Christian meals, perhaps even the last meal of Jesus, to the fourth-century Eucharist.’ (D. E. Smith 2003, 286). The development is much more complex, not least because of the diverse influences from Greek philosophy to the Jewish tradition. With the dispersal of the Christian faith, for example by St Paul in his travels and writing, meant that the development of a communal meal, whether Eucharist in shape or Agape, was influenced in different ways in different places. Smith concludes that ‘The earliest evidence

testifies to significant local variations in early Christian communal meal practices.’ (D. E. Smith 2003, 286). Any study of the current context and practice of a Eucharist ritual, although the ritual community itself may not understand itself in terms of its history explicitly, must likewise be careful not to simply read its past through the lens of its current preoccupation and draw conclusions about authority from this perspective. It is however by acknowledging the mutability of a ritual, recognising its transformation by context and other pressures, that validity for current creative interpretation can be claimed. In this way, tradition, far from binding us to the past, can liberate us to step forward with confidence with a ritual, liturgy and theology which does not fracture itself from the past but stands in continuity with the vibrant community of faith whose path in time it takes forward. It is not just true then to say as Smith does that ‘if we take full account of the richness of the earliest Christian meal tradition, we can find in it models for renewal Christian theology and liturgy today towards a greater focus on community.’ (D. E. Smith 2003, 287). Thus we have in some form an archaeological project which allows us to find fresh answers in our rich past. It gives authority to local Christian communities to speak with their own voice and to draw from their own experience to speak of God in this place and this time.

It is in the engagement of memory both as a community and as an individual that any meaning can be comprehended. In his chapter looking at St Paul and the early church with which he was familiar, Smith shows that even this communal memory was by no means unified. There is, he says, no reason to suggest that the various communities in their varied context did not have some form of meal as part of their identity and communal coming together. However after showing a communal meal practice at Antioch, it is shown that there was something similar but not the same being

practised in Jerusalem, ‘otherwise the issue when the guests from Jerusalem arrived it would not have been which table but why have a community table at all.’ (D. E. Smith 2003, 176)

One point in Anglican history at which there was another attempt to discover or recover a more authentic form of Christian theology was with the Oxford Movement. This is the second example given by Cameron of the forming of the supposed sacrosanct ‘tradition’.

It is well known that the Oxford Movement and their followers were much drawn to the eastern church. One should ask why this was. It represented for them the purer tradition of the first councils without later Roman accretions.

However this was not straightforward within itself as

It was argued by John of Damascus himself that there was also an *unwritten* tradition, complementary to and *coexisting* with the words of the Scriptures and the Fathers. (Cameron 2001, 132)

In these examples of the appeal to councils and groups in the Church, as in the example Cameron gives of her own experience of being on the Cathedrals Fabric Commission, it is clear that authority to define tradition, to include and exclude and to take decisions is given to a certain body of people at a certain point and place in time. Who gives this authority is also contentious, as by the way Cameron outlines these great events it could be argued that authority was taken by the powerful rather than given to

them. It is in the locating of this authority to define tradition that we look to modern contexts of ritual creativity and interpretation. Do the great meetings, such as General Synod and the Lambeth conference, reflect the local little traditions? Are these great events given authority by the little tradition or do they expect the local expressions to conform to their decisions? In these days of increasing secular tension between local democracy and global affairs, of subsidiarity and world economics are these tensions expressed similarly in the local and national church?

The theology of disclosure does not do what positive theology does. It described the uniqueness of this sense of God and the impact it has on our own self-understanding. It also explains the difficulty we have in sustaining this revealed sense of the Divine, showing that we tend always to pull back to a natural comprehension of the world as the final context of being and truth. (Sokolowski 1994, 52)

If we have a difficulty sustaining this revealed sense of the Divine, it may be through the mechanism of ritual that we are able to manage and sustain a regular albeit not a continual sense of the Divine. Being transformed even by glimpses of a revealed sense of the Divine, no matter how ritualised, must surely impact upon the ‘natural comprehension’ we have of the world.

The role of priest as symbol and actor

A detailed analysis of the ritual speech and action at this point is given by Sokolowski from the Roman Catholic perspective. Looking at the difference in meaning given by practice and the rubric at the point of using Jesus' words from the Last Supper on giving the bread and wine to the disciples, Sokolowski's analysis comes from the point of view of the use of tense to indicate a past action and a current action. The question is whether the priest is enacting or quoting and what difference this distinction may make in meaning. After having noted the current ritual practice of the priest to look at the congregation when repeating the words he turns to the intention of the rubric.

However, the rubrics do not indicate that the celebrant should look at the congregation when he says these words. The rubrics state that he³ should bow slightly (*parum se inclinat*) before saying the words. When he says the words he is to look at the host (or chalice) and repeat what Christ said to his apostles at the last Supper. When he bows in this way, it becomes clear that the priest is not depicting but quoting, since it is unlikely that Christ bowed in this manner when he addressed his disciples. Indeed, the 'slight bow' that the rubrics call for can be considered a kind of gestural quotation mark. What is being said during the bow is said quotationally. The quotation is broken off when the priest closes the bow and elevates the bread or the chalice, showing them to the congregation, and then genuflects in adoration. The elevation and genuflection, bodily gestures, are actions done by the priest himself. He is no longer quoting when he performs them. They are a return to the present and no longer a quotation drawing on another context. They are directed towards the Christ who is present here and now. (Sokolowski 1994, 87)

³ In this case the Roman Catholic Church has only male priests.

There are many ways in which the ritual indicates that this is no ordinary quotation. In Rappaport's words,

. . . in all liturgical rituals and most clearly in all religious rituals, there is transmitted an indexical message that cannot be transmitted in any other way and, far from being trivial, it is one without which canonical messages are without force, or may even seem nonsensical. (Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* 1999, 58)

The meaning is transmitted through forms of memory, which once again have varying depths of importance. Rappaport identifies three orders of memory: low order which transmits the basic distinctions between things, middle order which indicates the similarities between things and the high order which is metaphorical (Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* 1999, 70). It is in the metaphorical sense that Christ is being quoted in the Eucharist. He is not being quoted in a historical sense but in a present and embodied sense.

In the Eucharist, the one who is quoted, Christ, acts through the quotation in a way in which the person in ordinary quotation does not. In ordinary quotation, what the quoted person did remains fixed in the time and place that it was done. (Sokolowski 1994, 89)

A critique of the embodied role of a priest is given in the book Ritual Murder (Morris 1980), this time by Fraser Steel (Steel 1980). Arguing from a strongly un-

nostalgic view point of the liturgy, having come later to it and so not attached to BCP as a form always used. There is a critique worth considering of the role of the priest. In his fresh perspective of the innovations in liturgy at that time he found,

Rooted in the Series 3 Eucharist, with its scope for free intercessions and its variety of options for both text and posture, there is a tendency to convert the priest not so much into a 'president' as into a master of ceremonies, directing the congregation with more or less tact and discretion, as his own tastes may devise. It is less common than it used to be to find oneself in a communion service where the personality of the priest is only incidental. If series three has been welcomed by many clergy, I am not certain it has always been from the most disinterested of motives. Perhaps it is a prejudice to prefer an ordering of worship settled and strong enough to absorb the incidental distractions of time, place and personality, . . . (Steel 1980, 118)

He develops further his distaste for the modern intellectual climate and its effect on the clergy. Remember that he speaks at a time when the controversy over the book Honest to God (Robinson 1963) was still relatively fresh and the developments of situational ethics in Christian theology seen as a fundamental threat to Christian morality (Steel 1980, 120). His main criticism it seems is that the clergy were adopting the headlines of these ideas without being thoroughly grounded in their origins (in Steel's eyes those of humanist atheism). Thus, the results would be a corrupting of the truths of the Christian faith and a diminution of the liturgy. Unsurprisingly (as a priest who as a woman it would have been unlikely that I could have been ordained without the church realising the need for some of these ideas) it is just these movements in

learning and understanding which I believe strengthen traditional ritual, and I may go as far as to say that it is precisely these ‘incidental distractions of time, place and personality’ which I believe are the strength and basis of a living ritual. They are the intersection points where boundaries are opened. I would also have to ask if the clergy need to fully understand everything they are saying or doing for those words and actions to be meaningful. I suspect that if there is no thought or intentionality to them then the ritual may seem formulaic but it would be surprising if a priest celebrated communion without any understanding of what they were doing.

Despite giving attention to the educational and social background of the clergy of the time - ‘the educated middle class’ - (Steel 1980, 119) he does not seem to apply the same critique to the clergy and church leaders who developed the very liturgy he is mourning. Would it not be naive to think that these great men were immune to the moods and influences of their day?

Language and text

In his dystopian conclusion Steel suggests we face an Orwellian approach to language, text and ritual. He suggests that

George Orwell, in his exposition of the Newspeak imposed by the authorities of 1984, pointed out that its function was to re-order the language so as to render certain notions unsayable, and finally unthinkable. My fear is that the reduced language of the new liturgies will have, inadvertently, something of the same effect if their use is allowed to become general – a range of spiritual insight embodied in a language stronger and more versatile than ours will become gradually less accessible. (Steel 1980, 122)

This conclusion follows directly from his analysis of certain linguistic changes in the liturgy, including the insertion of an apostrophe in the Magnificat line ‘in ev’ry generation’ which elicits his comment ‘From which slim volume of Edwardian verse did that apostrophe spring to strike the revisers with the force of novelty?’ (Steel 1980, 122). Apart from the derisive tone in place of a critique, in a church such as that in Byker where as I have shown the congregation may not have the English language (let alone share the same alphabet as in the case of our Iranian Farsi speaking members and our Pakistani Urdu speaking members) what insight could Steel bring to the use of language in our service given this evidence? Whilst I agree there are some pressures, as there always have been, to imagine God as inaccessible and remote, even in modern times to be moved to a strong sense that human language and culture can never express the mystery, this does not necessarily mean that there is a conscious attempt to render certain notions unsayable as in Orwell's vision of society. Unless there is a deep suspicion that a ruling elite are trying to hide something intentionally, and with a will to dominate and retain power, such spiritual insights into the ineffability of the Divine are valuable to church tradition as a whole. May it not be said that it is the effort to say something, however imprecise or limited, or even comprehensible, and to say it together that lies at the heart of the ritual? As a personal reflection during my time researching this topic I spent some time in a small French village and worshiped in the Roman Catholic parish whilst there. Although I have a basic grasp of French (from passing my O’level to having a house built there) and despite the fact that I am Anglican and the parish is Catholic, I felt able to worship with this community, not because I understood everything being said or that I was saying, not that I held the same meanings even when we shared the same words, but that we all came with an openness of heart. We gather with an intention to participate in the ritual.

The drama takes place *now* and in our time. It is historical, in the sense that it points back to the cross, which looks backwards to the last Supper and forwards to the resurrection life. But it is also contemporary, in that the Eucharist is about our life being redeemed, the suffering and pain of our time being pointed to the future in mercy and judgement. (Stevenson 2002, 52)

The ritual enactment of the Eucharist does not necessarily make explicit all truths every time for every participant, but may stress certain concerns at certain times. This does not make the meaning of the Eucharist ritual contingent or situated but actually shows the depth of meaning, the many layers which are accessible in the one ritual. In the context of St Silas, Byker, the concerns are many and varied. However despite the diversity the ritual speaks clearly and gives life to the gathered church. It also speaks to the gathered church of the transformation, resurrection, of the world around which is expected and for which each member should work.

Some common themes which I would draw out as being important in the meaning of the Eucharist in this context are those of liberation, hope, safety, mercy, pardon, and valuing human being. These seem to be themes that are as vital to the white western working class context of the parish as much as for the asylum seekers and others who have not had their roots in the communal memory of the place. They do not replace other meanings, nor do they exclude them. As Stephenson himself says

For the words of the liturgy – like all ritual forms – have the capacity to restructure the way we see reality –which, at the Eucharist, starts with how we relate to each other (forgiveness), listen to the story (the word), share concerns (intercession) and eat and drink together (communion). Our ‘reader – response’ to the texts of the rite in the context in which we encounter them is the best proof of how multi-layered the Eucharist actually is. (Stevenson 2002, 22)

Action

I would suggest that it is not just the texts which have this capacity. Especially in the context of a diversity of languages and indeed in some respects a diversity of literacy levels, it is the actions which also speak. Sometimes these actions are not necessarily those such as prescribed ritual actions of performance but also the location of the authority to perform these actions.

To give an example of what I mean I would like to reflect briefly on a recent case, that of the swine flu precautions (2009) and the thoughts that led to certain discussions in our context. As a whole there has been a great value placed on the inclusion of a great number of people to participate in some formal way in the service. When it came to the decision not to administer the chalice at communion, but to distribute pre-intincted wafers it became clear that even this change needed to be in keeping with the fundamental meanings of the Eucharist. It was not possible to merely speak of inclusivity if one of the central points of the ritual spoke of exclusivity by finding its default position in the clergy as the ‘actors’. Even for convenience and practicality's sake this could not be the case. To reflect the understanding of the congregation itself there needed to be a visible sign of the unity of the sacrifice being

ritual remembered. Thus it could not have been otherwise than there being both priest and lay person distributing the consecrated bread and wine. One comment that was at the forefront of this understanding of the meaning of our context was from a church council meeting some time ago. The members of the church council were asked about inviting new members to read the bible lessons on a Sunday and whether they could suggest people who may be happy to contribute to the service in this way. At this time the church council was made up solely of members of the church who had been long term members and residents of the area. It was one of these members who made the significant comment. When one of the young men in the congregation who was an asylum seeker was suggested people agreed it would be good to ask him. When I pointed out that he may be hesitant to accept not least because his grasp of English was still developing and he may not feel confident using it in such a public way the lay member suggested that if he would feel more comfortable reading in his own language that would be alright, especially as the congregation have the readings in English on a sheet every week anyway! Looking back to the arguments in the book Ritual Murder and the controversies that have ensued from various translations of the bible, here was in its most straightforward form the heart of what the service was about. This was not particularly an understanding that had been taught explicitly, quite the opposite in many ways as I have found it virtually impossible to run any 'formal' education sessions. It was one of those rare moments when someone is able to express a deeper truth in a very clear and practical way. What was more was that the suggestion was accepted, and although the member in question still did not feel able to read the lesson in public the principle, already existent in the communal spirit of the church, had been expressed.

It is also interesting to reflect that other members have been asked to read lessons and give the intercessory prayers and it has been offered to them that they can do this in their own language, but so far all have wanted to speak in English. I suspect there is also some signal given here from them that their membership of the church is also about their integration into British society, that they are not isolationist but in themselves see the church as a means of membership of the culture in which they have found themselves.

Memory

The layers of meaning and the way in which they intersect and expand meaning are always part of the creative process of self-understanding both as individuals and as a community. This is not a creation from nothing or afresh but continuity, a continuing of memory and reinterpretation of givens. Paul Ricoeur, who explores the relationship between claims about historical 'truth' and the way in which texts recording historical events are shaped and formed by memory and re-interpretation, states that

In the light of this discussion, a presumption is created *for* or perhaps (in all senses of the word) in *favour* of continuity, rather than for radical dismissals - and -rebeginnings, in the course of history. I 'recognize myself' in the great texts of my culture. I want to make this affirmation of what Simone Weil called 'the Hebrew source' and the 'Greek source', which I would not wish to dissociate from each other in my own cultural memory. These are 'classic texts' in the sense Gadamer gives to this term, a sense he characterizes by the power such texts

have to journey beyond their context of origin while acquiring new configurations of meaning. (Ricoeur 2003, 67)

Such texts have the power to 'journey' in such a way as they are not merely descriptive but interpretive in nature. They describe history in a way which is part of the process of understanding ourselves with history rather than describing events of which we can have no access to understanding. These too are the texts which a community such as the Christian community in Byker can read to themselves and recognise themselves in, even though they recall a remote historical time. The ritual of the Eucharist marks the points when such texts are being used indicating a prominence and importance beyond the mere historical truth or otherwise. For example the Gospel procession as described below,

The Gospel book is carried in style to the place where the Gospel is to be proclaimed, and honoured with lights and incense because we are greeting the living Word made flesh, and we expect that encounter to be life changing. (Stancliffe 2001, 100)

The Gospel can be life changing .At any given moment in time, when our hearing of it intersects with our receptiveness and willingness for it becoming part of our own personal narrative such that time itself is no longer the determinative thread of our lives, the Divine can break through and transform. Ricoeur, as Vernon White describes in Identity, is himself interested in 'time' as a key problematic which he

pursues further than Heidegger's 'Dasein' (being there). White summarizes Ricoeur's approach:

His project to fully understand our personal identity goes beyond the resources of immediate self-awareness: crucially he wants us to understand ourselves, as we have seen, through the process of narrative in which we see ourselves as accountable through a whole ordered process of time, change and relationships (White 2002, 76)

In their analysis of 'generation Y' for Savage, Collins-Mayo, Mayo and Cray music is one of the means by which memory is accessed and meaning made,

Music provided a bridge between young people's actual and ideal self in three ways:

- Through connecting with the interviewees' memory of past events in their lives;
- Through enhancing their enjoyment of the present;
- Through offering them a way of interpreting dilemmas and choices in their lives. (Savage, et al. 2006, 81)

The medium, the young peoples' music and the ritual of the Eucharist, may seem on the face of things to be very different but the role played by both in connecting the Divine or, in Generation Y's case, the ideal self, looks very similar.

Christ, context and liberation

A central theme of the Eucharist it almost seems over simplistic to state, is that of Christ. The approach of Kaufman towards a symbolic interpretation of Christ is not one of the past criticized by the likes of Freud and Nietzsche in which it is regarded as a 'trap that is destructive of important human possibilities and thus of human reality' but rather one in which,

. . . all recognise that they are 'members one of another' (Rom.12:5) with no discrimination among groups, classes, races, or genders- that can focus our attention and our lives on the commitments we today must make and the loyalties we must maintain if we are to align ourselves with those comic and historical forces pressing us toward a more humane world. (Kaufman 1996, 121)

It is these sentiments which I found already in the community in Byker, put into practical use on a Sunday, not in any grand way but in the simple humanity of the congregation and the practical support they gave to one another. To give an example, I became aware early on that there were members of the congregation who were helping asylum seekers navigate their way through the bureaucracy and paper work necessary to claim asylum in Britain and to manage day to day life. This was not a specific action in the ritual but gave a layer of meaning to the ritual through this context of concern for the vulnerable other. It may be a characteristic of a community which in itself can have no pretence of security, which understands in its own lived history and memory, human fragility in the face of societal pressures. In a community where there is not necessarily much in terms of material wealth and security, this has been one way in which the community has something to give, rather than to receive. In a community where economic circumstances have placed many people in a trap of benefit dependency, a Christian theology of self-giving and charity may be seen as counter intuitive and yet finds its expressions in simple and materially cost-free ways.

Time and eternity

Picking up again the themes from Roman Catholic thought in Sokolowski, the Eucharist ‘activates the dimensions of time in a still deeper way’, in a way that opens up the possibility of the worshipping church being able to access other dimensions at the intersection points of difference and diversity, not just a remote time and place. For Sokolowski it is an intersection of an eternal and temporal realm that is important but I would think that the action of the Eucharist could just as well open other channels of revelation or disclosure.

In calling up these remote limits of time, the Eucharist displaces us into contexts that are even more foreign to our own than are the irretrievably past contexts of Calvary, the Last Supper, the Passover, and the Exodus. These, although far from us in time, took place in the flow of time in which we exist, but the contexts of the end and the beginning of time have little in common with the settings in which we live. (Sokolowski 1994, 210)

The struggles in our present context with diversity and difference, as examined in the previous chapter, may find some resolution in a ritual which displaces everyone into a sacramental time where we are all foreign and strangers. There is an equality of experience which does not deny or ignore difference but places all in the same context. Smith, tracing the Eucharistic pattern through the model of a banquet, talks of this equality in the very ideology of the early communal meal such that

The meal was an occasion when the outside world was to be set aside and a new community of equals to be established. Indeed, significant components of meal ideology, most especially the etiquette or social obligation at the meal, required

that equality be present. Without the aura of equality, it could not be a proper meal. (D. E. Smith 2003, 283)

Thus combining these two ideas, that of a displacement of ourselves into another context in time and the roots of the Eucharist in an ideology of meal equality, the ritual that has survived provides an excellent way for human beings to be opened to growth and knowledge in the intersections of experiences, histories and understandings. In creating a human society, a communal experience, the Eucharist is in itself an intersection point from which a new future and new directions can be taken. This is renewed each time the Eucharist takes place. It is not determinative of a future nor falsely re-enacting an inaccessible past, but rather in a way that sounds rather like the theology of David Ford, as described by White;

This sort of event (i.e. the Eucharist) repeats non-identically pivotal events of the past in a way which 'pays a debt' to the past but also appropriates it for future possibilities: 'in gratitude the past is repeated in such a way that it is fruitful in a new way for the present and the future'. As with Pannenberg, this is not meant to foreclose the future by reading off from the events recalled a strict paradigm for the future. It is a creative engagement with the past and with the dynamism of it, rather than a privileged access to some window on a completed metanarrative. (White 2002, 81)

It must be remembered however that the past being recalled is not an easy one. It is one of betrayal and death before it is one of resurrection and eternity. Also each re-enactment of the Eucharist is not necessarily an easy one; the tradition of the church (in all denominations) has offered examples of the Eucharist being a source of tension and exclusion, of violence and controversy. It is with these layers of meaning that each worshipper intersects, with their own personal narrative and experience which too may be troubled and problematic. To illuminate layers of meaning and to encourage 'a

creative engagement with the past' as suggested above, for some may be dangerous. In the final chapter I will examine in greater detail the psychological implication of symbols and rituals, giving examples of the potential for violent reactions when a symbol/sacrament/ritual has projected onto it someone's insecurity to advance a creative engagement and is deeply threatening. It may be a process of creative engagement over time, but a momentary intersection point itself could become a flash point.

It is in the sedimentation of meaning that has been laid down over the years of ritual practice in the church that inevitably at any one moment some themes will remain latent whilst others will be dynamic and present. The ritual itself draws forward certain meanings and illuminates beliefs which may be implied but not fully articulated. An example of this is given by Murphy in his description of the very opening entrance ritual of the Roman Mass (and the Anglican one too)

Beginning *behind* the people's backs acknowledges that the group awareness of the belief that 'I am in the midst of them' is at a low level. The ritual accepts this and attempts to raise the level of consciousness through direct enactment of the belief structure in a visible and audible form. (Murphy S. J. 1979, 321)

Murphy's study is a straightforward analysis of the mass with many underlying assumptions about the state of understanding of the congregation, such as their being secretly embarrassed by their sinfulness, such that by the 'facilitating ritual' they may therefore 'feel less embarrassed to be before the sanctuary' (Murphy S. J. 1979, 325) There is a clear emphasis on the separation between heaven and earth and an inaccessibility except through the ritual. I wonder how much this exclusion also permeates the very effectiveness of the ritual, in that the ritual makes the possibility of

approach to the Divine possible rather than expressing the belief that such access is already so. In this way the ritual is not so much marking and paying attention to a deeper truth than in itself making it so. One may say ritual is being operative rather than representative. In Murphy's structure confession becomes a prerequisite of entry to the sanctuary rather than a response to the forgiving love which has opened access to the sanctuary. Throughout the piece by Murphy it is an internal human feeling, subconscious in which the ritual is effective. This is most clearly evident in his approach to the opening prayer, where he says

It is not always possible while saying them to coordinate left and right hemispheric activity so as to be able to envision that one has entered into the Divine throne room and that God is listening to the words and thoughts being addressed to Him by the person praying. (Murphy S. J. 1979, 326)

Chapter Five: The ritual importance of diversity and intersection points.

Ritual takes place in a *place*, with a *form* and with *actors* each element of which contributes, from their complex backgrounds, some material to the meaning of the ritual itself. All these factors combine in a dynamic interplay of the personal with the layers of meaning in the setting and the actions of the ritual. The points at which they ‘intersect’ can convey more than the sum of their individual meanings suggests. Meaning is found, created and interpreted at these intersection points. This is always a fluid and active process. Human *being* is an active player. It is in the capacity of humans to imagine, to create novelty with the information presented to them, that enables culture to be diverse and fluid and for ritual to be a means by which not only is culture transmitted but something beyond the everyday and ordinary can be glimpsed. It is at the intersection points where reality can fracture in its collision with otherness and through which the Divine can be approached. De Certeau describes this in the cultural arena,

Above all (and this is a corollary, but an important one), the phenomenological and praxiological analysis of cultural trajectories must allow to be grasped at once a composition of places and innovation that modifies by dint of moving and cutting across them. (de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural* 1974 trans 1997, 148)

Intersection points can be seen thus as a constant interweaving of many meanings, contexts and experiences. These shape and are shaped by one another. By studying the Christian Eucharist as a ritual I am asserting that it cannot be seen as a static concept, but rather one that has been shaped and developed over time.

In this study I am balancing between anthropologist and also a participant member of the group being studied. Thus whenever considering intersection points, especially in one's own context and setting, we need to consider what is assumed to be normative and what is seen as 'other' or different, be it within a personal narrative or a received tradition. It is with this consideration in mind that my work on diversity and the power relationship of integration and assimilation can begin. Is it possible to claim that we can glimpse the universal in the points at which diversity intersects? Indeed does the Eucharist demand that we should challenge the very idea of universals as a concept in itself? Are the points at which we intersect, in performing a ritual for example, points of commonality or merely transient instances of being in the same time and place as one another, performing an act which on the surface seems to unite but for which each individual draws unique meaning? People from a variety of backgrounds may come together to perform a ritual but what concepts and insights can be observed from this which deepen our knowledge of human being? We must always be questioning the criteria against which we are judging our conclusions.

Anamnesis as intersection point

Anamnesis is the moment of remembering in the Eucharist, the instruction to "do this in remembrance of me". It is the specific instruction which shapes the whole ritual, the whole Eucharist is recalling Jesus and the Divine redemptive action in the world. In this thesis I have examined briefly some of the factors which I see at work in the 'intersection points' of the Eucharist in the context of Byker. I have briefly endeavoured to draw some of the salient historical themes from the point of view of the development of the church tradition. I have also attempted to describe in detail the shape and form that a Sunday service now takes in Byker. I have also developed

thoughts about the modern day context and influence, especially those of diversity and difference. Each element of the ritual has layers of meaning some of which are prominent, some are hidden, some of which come to the fore at different times and some of which appear dead historical vestiges. Each individual has a story they bring to the moment in which they meet others. It is a moment with a past and a future. The place where they meet also has a past and a future. The instruction to do this in remembrance is an instruction to do something in the present which recalls the past which has a direct bearing on the future. Looking to the future by faithfully (and by this I do not mean accurately) repeating the past is done through a spirit of hope. This motif in Christian theology, that of hope, is an important motivation in this approach to ritual. There needs to be a hope of a transcended future. For example this is a fundamental mark of the theology of Jurgen Moltmann in his works such as Theology of Hope (Moltmann 1969). In this way a theology of hope would mean we are always on the way but never quite arrived, it is a theology always pointing forwards. In this case intersection points are important because at each point the direction of travel, the vision of the hoped for destination, the object of hope, may be transformed. The moment can be transformative, it may illuminate something of the past and point to or change something in the future. It is the intersection of meaning taking place within the community of memory and with individual memory which is creative. This for Christians is at its most structured and refined in the liturgy and within the worship of the Church. As Charles Elliott underlines,

. . . it is that worship, with its memory-centred processes of reading the Scriptures, celebrating the sacraments and praising God for what he has shown himself to be and for what he has done in individual and collective histories, that the atoning work of Christ is appropriated. (Elliott 1995, 237)

In a similar sense in her description and exploration of anamnesis and the Eucharist Julie Gittoes summaries the meeting for the Eucharist as follows,

Each time the church gathers to celebrate the Eucharist God is met in our remembrance. We are connected with praise and thanksgiving to the past; we receive spiritual nourishment through encounter with Christ in the present; we are equipped for future service. (Gittoes 2008, 151)

For her this gives the shape of the mission of the church as a whole. I would add that as an intersection point on an onward journey of becoming, the Eucharist forms the pattern for the living expression of this mission, a vision of the kingdom which is always 'on the way' but never completed. As Gittoes concludes,

To uncover God's wisdom in eucharistic *anamnesis* is also to recognise something of its indefinitely profound meaning, to realise that it cannot be owned and limited and that the process of non-identical repetition allows the fullness of Christ to be embodied in and for the world, in the hope of eschatological fulfilment. (Gittoes 2008, 152)

The key words I wish to point out in this conclusion are that we are to recognise *something* of its *indefinitely* profound meaning and that it cannot be *owned* and *limited*. These words illuminate my contention that the Eucharist is part of a sacramental process of becoming and that we are to be wary of the power relationships which urge ownership and limitation of meaning. Any analysis or study of the Eucharist is in danger of attempting a final definitive description of the meaning of the ritual which risks limiting the possibility of further and greater depth of understanding.

Thomas Keating in his book The Mystery of Christ suggests that ‘The Kairos is the moment in which eternity and our temporal lives intersect.’ (Keating 1997, 9). One such moment is the ‘anamnesis’ in the Eucharist. If so in which way, re-discovering, re-emphasising, re-claiming? As an intersection point between the eternal and temporal worlds Keating sees the consciousness of Christ being present throughout history.

When Jesus through his resurrection and ascension entered his trans-historical life, the liturgy became the extension of his humanity in time. (Keating 1997, 3)

Although I would argue that it is not just in the liturgy but in Christian living that Jesus’ humanity exists in time, I would accept that the liturgy is a particularly significant moment of recognition of this. Intersection points present a moment of tension, illuminating difference between people and as such can be flash points of conflict. What else must be present in the creation of a context which enables intersection points to be the creative and positive Kairos moment? An example will be given later of a negative experience of this but what I believe is important is an attitude of openness. Without openness imagination cannot flourish. Being open requires a certain amount of security, to be able to move from where you are means feeling you are secure and not under threat. Openness is a form of vulnerability that does not feel inclined to defend where you stand but sees an open road ahead. This is true as much for a community as for an individual. The anamnesis itself ‘do this in remembrance of me’ is also an instruction not only addressed to the individual but at the community, the multi-faceted Church and the faithful throughout history and into the future. Just as the ‘Jesus’ we are remembering is a complex character so are those doing the remembering.

Valuing difference means allowing what may seem entirely contradictory positions to meet together without favouring one over the other. Lack of expectation to conform may mean that these intersection points are open enough to permit communication and transformation. Recognising the legitimacy of ‘otherness’ cannot condone unacceptable behaviour however. It will mean a vulnerability to the possibility that the openness is not mutual. In the Eucharist its foundational theology is one of the consequences of that lack of mutuality. Christ himself was open to being vulnerable which cost him his mortal life which opened the creative opportunity of resurrection and life everlasting transformed.

Church as place

Churches as buildings and communities of people not only have the individual lives of their members as their narrative but also the memory of the community which is past. Church buildings are thick with memory, by this I mean that somehow they hold and represent all that has been throughout their history. This I believe is what the poet Philip Larkin is attempting to express in his poem Church Going (Larkin 1977). In this poem Larkin describes his impulse to stop at old churches and look inside, and in the last verse his attempt to explain this in terms of the human desire to understand more deeply the condition of human being,

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,

Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many lie dead around. (Larkin 1977, 29)

The poem as a whole however does not offer a great deal of hope for the future of the Church as sacred space. It has been reduced to historical curiosity except for a vestigial feeling that something else is to be discovered, although this is not seen as religious in nature but an aspect of human nature wanting to understand itself better. This vision of a church as somewhere to grow serious because it is associated with the dead, a matter of human kind facing its own mortality, describes more a memory of nostalgia than a living communal memory. Thus as Peter Atkins shows in his book Memory and Liturgy

Nostalgia disregards the context of memory and therefore could be said to be a projection of memory rather than memory itself. Nostalgia selects the parts of the memory that suit the emotional needs of people and projects that selection into the present as if the ideal perfect context could be established. Corporate memory on the other hand remembers the context of the remembered event and is realistic about the present context. (Atkins c2004, 76)

The ideal perfect context could also be argued as the focus of nostalgia in that it has already happened and cannot be recreated. It would be a striving for a perfect past which is unrealistic as it does not take the past context seriously, set within in a present context which is also not taken seriously and so can never produce that perfection. One could legitimately argue too that it is not possible to be nostalgic in the everyday sense about something you have not personally known or experienced. Therefore

remembering Jesus is not a memory of a specific person but one of a symbol representing certain ideas.

In many contexts Churches no longer contain a congregation who hold the communal memory of the area because they have lived through it. Churches have a residual memory of past events and people often in the concrete forms of tombs and memorials. In the context of Byker people pass through our community, whether looking for work or because they are seeking asylum, many move on when their circumstances change. The church as once being a context of cradle to grave can no longer be taken as normative. It has rather become a point at which individual stories intersect with the larger narrative. It still describes the arc of human life, not in a continuous stream through a stable composition of its membership but as a way- point in life. People may well be lifelong members of ‘church’ but that is not necessarily the same ‘church’ or congregation. Thus the rituals performed must balance between universal expression and local expression.

Model of ministry

What model of ministry is explicit in thinking about intersection points? A top down hierarchy where the priest is some sort of keeper of the mystery enacting and making visible would not allow a possibility of an encounter in the meeting points. It would be highly regulated, prescribed and not open. The priest does however have a place as a representative of the sedimentation of memory of church tradition whilst only being an equal part of the re-enactment/remembering of the Eucharist. Of course priesthood itself is a symbol and comes thick with its own history. In Anglican terms

there are shades of interpretation of the meaning of priesthood, and for different denominations there are various intensities of meanings, for example the heavily sacramental Roman Catholic Church. In the context of the diversity of the congregation in Byker it should also be remembered that for some of the congregation a Christian priest is a concept not found in their Muslim background (although probably not entirely alien).

My understanding would be that the priest is set apart, not set above, by the church to embody the tradition in a way that enables each coming together of the church to be not only a remembering but also a hopeful pointing to the future. A priest agitates and illuminates the possibilities created in diversity. One practical example to illustrate the relation between priest and congregation came when the church was instructed to take precautions with regards to the transmission of swine flu via the chalice. This was where I recognised something which was important to me as a priest presiding at the Eucharist each week. We have regularly two priests on a Sunday and could have very easily simply arranged the distribution of communion by the priests alone. Our usual practice is that the priest who has presided distributes the consecrated bread, and the other priest and a lay person from the congregation distribute the consecrated wine from the two chalices. When we were asked to either not use the chalice at all or to intinct/dip the wafers we chose to intinct the wafers and could have easily then just had the two priests administering the communion. However it became obvious to me that this would not be satisfactory which in the light of this study made me consider why this was. I realised that unspoken in the insistence that a lay person also distribute the communion was my belief that the Eucharist is not an act on the part of the priest but an act of the community, in communion, and to embody this in the act of distribution meant not to

withdraw this to the clerical but to show that we are together in the Eucharist both lay and ordained and neither can be separated from the other. The Eucharist is the offering of Christ to the world and the churches offering to one another. Thus we continued to have the arrangement that a single chalice we used was carried by a lay person and instead of the lay person offering the chalice to the communicant the priest and lay person stood next to each other and for each individual the priest turned to the chalice to intinct the wafer and communicate the person that way. Thus the symbolic offering of the sacrament by both ordained and lay person representing the church was maintained. The intrinsic binding of lay and ordained was preserved.

Memory as form

To say that the priest both embodies a communal memory and illuminates new meanings we need to look at the concept of memory itself which I have extensively used above. A key concept when understanding memory is that of narrative. My understanding is that in the case of the liturgy we have the narrative as the community restating who it is. The community/the church as the body of Christ doing this ‘in remembrance of me’ restates who Christ is in this place, this time. It speaks to itself and to others answering the questions raised by the context through the lens of universal understandings of the Divine. Throughout there is always the impediment of the location and power of authority; to consider who controls meaning and its transmission is a delicate process. A large piece of this study is a narrative of a moment in a community which once written becomes a recorded form of memory of that community, which will never do justice to the complexity of the moment. Once again it is Elliott who describes the church as a ‘community of memory’ within which the authority for

re-interpretation is not a formal practice but rather it is the very nature of a living community of memory, such that the memory types he outlines do not function by themselves but rather,

Each has to be interpreted, at the very least in relating the memory to the actuality of the rememberers. At one level this is the task of the Church professionals, whether pastors, theologians or Bishops. At a less formal level, it is a process that goes on almost unconsciously in the community of believers as its members respond (or fail to respond) to particular interpretations of the community's remembering – what in medieval times was called the *receptio*. In this way the community tests the formal interpretations of the professionals and, in the long run and differentially between Churches with different understandings and structures of authority, re-forms the content of those interpretations. (Elliott 1995, 223)

Memory is an activity which engages with human imagination. As a person of faith myself I wish to make it clear that I do not believe that human *being* simply imagines the Divine or that the Divine is an object of historical memory, rather the Divine is part of the very essence of imagination.

Person and community as actors

A ritual enables a variety of meanings and even doubt. It contains actors who bring a variety of cultural and personal narratives to the experience. Is ritual therefore a means by which diversity can be celebrated? Is ritual a specific way in which difference can be faced and embraced as an ultimate good? Is it an intersection point that goes beyond the simple sum of its constituent parts? The action of intersecting opens up new possibilities that transform the direction and shape of each narrative that has intersected with diverse influences. The trajectory of each person's narrative is necessarily different from that which it would have taken. The individual human being has experienced

something which changes the form and direction of their narrative in a way that was only possible through the intersection in the ritual. Following from work done by Humphrey and Laidlaw, Carlo Severi suggests that

Ritual is not to be seen as the static illustration of a traditional 'truth,' but as the result of a number of particular inferences, of individual acts of interpretation, involving doubt, disbelief and uncertainty. The acts performed during a rite regularly appear to demand a commitment from the actor, even when the actor does not understand them. For this reason, these acts become the screen upon which a number of different, even contradictory meanings, may be projected. (Severi 2005, 223)

In the case of the Eucharist it seems unlikely that there could be mutually exclusive contradictory meanings which could co-exist over a prolonged period of time. Each time the ritual is enacted, due to the intersection of so many variable factors, a fuller meaning develops. This shapes the disparate meanings such that they must share some common understanding for it to make sense when repeated. Remembering that the ritual of the Eucharist takes place within a community who are exploring meaning there is also dialogue between the actors. There are aspects of the Eucharist which are about mutual action, such as greeting and sharing the bread and wine, which would suggest a shared meaning even if the depths of that meaning may not be elucidated. Although there may be individual acts of interpretation each actor has travelled towards this intersection point, they intend meeting at this ritual and intend some meaning to come from it.

Novelty and creativity

If, as Severi suggests above, a rite is seen as a screen onto which a variety of meanings can be projected then this would suggest that the rite itself need not be manifestly different or change. The attempt to begin a new and unconnected story every time there is a gathering for the Eucharist would be profoundly disturbing and exhausting. Recently there has been a movement in the Church of England that new forms of worship are necessary to reach the 'de-churched' or the 'un-churched'. This is outlined in the work Mission-shaped Church which has been the springboard for innovations collectively known as Fresh Expressions of Church (Mission and Public Affairs Council (Church of England) 2009). There is an assumption that novelty is necessary for creativity. However I would argue that where if an act is performed in a very prescribed context it is not necessarily the case that it will not be easily accessible to a variety of people. The desire for the new would deny the importance of the intersection of the present in the Divine project which includes the past and the future. Following from White when the present is as 'eternal' as possible the identity of the self can incorporate the unresolved without disintegrating. By contrast the self-same act can be performed in an open way onto which all the actors can project their meanings and through common action effect individual meaning. (White 2002, 86)

In a congregation such as St Silas, Byker, I would argue that it is not that everyone does exactly the same things, actions such as crossing themselves, standing, sitting, genuflecting, or any of the other very specific ritual actions, but that most actions are done by someone at sometime. To participate in a meaningful way in the Eucharist one does not need to access every action or symbol but there is space and openness for most people to access something during the service. Obviously this is a function of the leadership, both lay and ordained in the church, which is confident

enough in its own role and place that the possibility of alternative meaning and approach is not a threat but is seen as a richness of itself. For an intersection point to be a moment of liberation and not a moment of tension and conflict requires strength and a confidence which is both unthreatening and unthreatened. There have been times when there has been tension and conflict. I am thinking in particular of an occasion when a very enthusiastic member of the congregation wanted to shape the service much in the image of charismatic worship he had experienced elsewhere. This was troublesome not because fundamentally within the congregation or among the priests there was a resistance to change and innovation, but that the nature of the change being requested was towards a much more rigid and closed form of ritual, albeit an overtly spontaneous one, which did not respect the other forms of rite which were present. Rather than an inclusive and open approach where the more charismatic form of rite would enrich the worship by intersecting with the more formal and traditional actions, it was expected to replace and become a sole rite itself. It could be argued that the motivation was more a desire for ritual dominance than ritual development.

Conformity and change

A ritual act in the Eucharist is an intersection point which opens up the possibility that the narratives that intersect can be transformed and may become points at which a vision of the hope of redemption may be glimpsed. The transformation of the actors may not produce the same effect in each case. Each actor themselves is a complex structure of past experience, emotions and psychology. In his book Memory and Salvation, Charles Elliott uses the analytic example of a male Christian response to the symbol of the Virgin Mary and how that response can be shaped by childhood

experience, good or bad early nurturing. This produces a devotion to Mary potentially ranging from one where ‘Mary can very readily become for him the good object he was denied in childhood - and that implies that he will resist strongly (perhaps even pathologically) any attempt by less Marian groups in the Church to reduce the significance of the Virgin in religious life . . .’. (Elliott 1995, 231) to a more deep seated hatred of the real woman which would wish her total destruction. Thus any community made up of individuals with their own intersecting narratives has the potential for great conflict. If there is an underlying impulse towards conformity and a powerful resistance to change there can be little hope that any intersection with difference will be creative or instructive. If there is openness then even if there is no actual change there will always remain that possibility.

Intersection points are moments of potential, of dynamic change and sometimes conflict. They are not a means to absolutely remove or resolve conflict but in fact use the possibility of conflict in diversity as a positive force. Intersection points in ritual context allow differences to meet and form meaning without a need to resolve or conform. There is space within an intersection point, one of those brief moments of Divine openness, for serial meanings to co-exist. An intersection point can only happen on a journey, a narrative journey in which we all participate. It is just so in life, that our own personal narratives weave and intersect with others in a constant state of flux.

Pre-Determined result.

If the ritual intersects with a specific setting and context it is possible that the very specificity of the context will pre-determine the outcome and closes the ritual into a singular interpretation. It may seem too obvious to state that setting the ritual in the

context of a Church building rather than, for example, in a Mosque there is a certain set of meanings which are precluded. Thus there could be an expectation of a certain sort of spiritual experience encoded in the very place in which the experience is to take place. It would be more clearly prescribed that what one might encounter is an experience of Christ rather than of other forms of spirituality and faith. The community itself would describe and interpret its experiences generally within the codes and images pre-existent in the ritual. I am not here arguing that it is not possible to have a religious experience outside the context, only that the interpretive part of the experience will be heavily laden with expectations.

In their contribution to the book Memory in context: context in Memory Berkerian and Conway review studies done in the field of memory where people have been tested in their accuracy of memory against various settings and in various moods, both of which have been shown to influence retention. They recall

Over a century ago Galton (1883) suggested that the recollection of everyday events could be facilitated if individuals recalled memories in the same environment (context) in which events had originally been experienced. (Bekerian and Conway 1988, 305).

Whilst it is certainly not possible that the events recalled in the Eucharist can be remembered in this exact way, some points from their study are pertinent:

...what are crucial in identifying everyday contexts are the expectations people hold about who is involved, what the likely sequence of events might be, and the rules governing social interaction. (Bekerian and Conway 1988, 310)

This would translate into needing confidence in the structure of the liturgy to follow a recognisable pattern and that there is recognisably an appropriate building for this to take place in. I would certainly not go as far as to argue that a Church is the only place in which Eucharistic actions can take place; the actions take on additional layers of meaning when set in a recognised sacred space. The layers of meaning are significantly different if a Eucharist takes place at a hospital bedside or in a home (or in a disused and derelict lean-to shed next to a pub where I have celebrated the Eucharist in the past). Each context illuminates and intersects with these layers of meaning and people's response to them to enrich the liturgy rather than to diminish it. Especially in a context (context in the sense of the composition of the congregation) where people are new to the ritual or language or culture, a predictable structure in a recognisable space set aside for doing something different to everyday things speaks to an additional security and confidence when other factors in people's lives are chaotic and random. Especially in circumstances where so much is unfamiliar I return again to ask what expectations of detail and depth of knowledge are required for someone to worship at the Eucharist? There is enough that is familiar, in that the context points to this being a religious sort of action, chairs set in a particular way unlike other situations, an altar, certain people dressed in a different way (robes etc.) that without the content of the message being detailed the expectation of a religious meaning is clear. Thus 'Cognitive preparation may also help reduce some uncertainty in the environment. We know what to expect from a wide range of situations.' (Bekerian and Conway 1988, 314).

Society

In returning to the question “how can those who were not present 2000 years ago be expected to ‘do this in remembrance of me’?” it is useful to use an analysis of everyday concepts and the way it lays a background of meanings encoded in the culture. The role of the church as a community of memory in which all layers are present for us to intersect with follows from Berkerian and Conway's conclusion that

In this way, the knowledge resides with the society as well as the individual. This shared knowledge allows uniformity within the culture, and frees the individual from the prerequisites of personal experience in order to have such knowledge. (Bekerian and Conway 1988, 314).

This is not to suggest that the participants in a ritual are passive but rather that they are engaged at the point they encounter the ritual and do not need a narrative in their own lives as a lens through which they interpret the experience. As I am equating ‘society’ with the church here I am aware I am also not intending to speak as if this itself were a static concept but rather one built and re-interpreted by its members over time; a process which we are also engaged in today as much as at any time in the past.

Permeable and malleable liturgy and intersection points.

Boundaries in ritual must be permeable and malleable, by which I mean that interpretations and narratives may be read *through* them and human beings are able to penetrate their meanings, and that there needs to be a balance between tight ritual, rigorously, strictly followed and a flexibility which allows development of interpretation and creative change.

The shape of the liturgy is equally important as people need to feel comfortable within it. Anxiety created by a general sense of ‘making it up as you go along’ is a barrier to creative engagement. It will be too open to manipulation by those who have ownership and power within the context. It is a delicate balance between a shape which is malleable, which can be used by the creative congregation members to express their vision of the Divine and a structure which is restrictive and defined. If the Eucharist is a definitive ritual for a Christian community then the shape will in the broadest sense embody the central religious themes of the Christian Community. These themes are developed and revealed in all aspects of Christian life. They find expression in ritual and within ritual they can also contribute insights which are transferable to everyday life. In the shape of the Eucharist central themes of reconciliation, (between the Divine and humanity, and humanity to one another), hope and transformation (resurrection) must be expressed. These need not necessarily be expressed in the same way in all contexts and times. Sometimes they will be expressed in language, sometimes in actions, sometimes musically, sometimes visually, physically, aurally, and orally. All the senses and all their concomitant memories are engaged. For those leading the ritual it is necessary to think about the points that are important to retain and which can change. This has always been the case. Even the early commentaries on Eucharistic practice (such as Cyril of Jerusalem's) are reflections on already extant ritual practice. They are in their best sense reflections on experience and interpretation of human creativity in its expressions of the Divine truths of the context. Good liturgy/ritual thus teeters between order and chaos. Order and chaos in itself may be seen as dynamic intersection points in the liturgy.

Shadowing all this discussion of the Eucharist as a ritual action must be the question: what signifies something as a ritual act? Does the performance of selected actions with dignity indicate this even if the explicit meaning is not easily accessible or apparent? The mode of paying attention is indicated by the action taking place somewhere special and in a special way. This has already been referred to in some ways in the setting for memory section above. It may be an everyday action which is done in a heightened dramatic way. According to Jonathan Z. Smith something is indicated as sacred by 'having attention focused on it in a highly marked way' (J. Z. Smith 1987, 104). A careful balance between informality and formality is required to create what could be described as accessible ritual. Informality must be careful not to be seen to dumb down or to patronise people.

My view is that there is an essential value in human dignity, which is not about language, culture, education, ability, age, or anything else which one may think to consider and account for. This derives from a Christian understanding of creation by the Divine, and observation of the nature of human relationships which, when at their best, show a goodness beyond a rational sum of the parts. The recognition of the humanity of the 'other' forms the basis of all relationships and is a mirroring of the Divine encounter with the human 'being'.

With a movement towards appropriate liturgy inspired by people such as Ann Morisy (Morisy 2004) there is a temptation for some liturgy to be constructed in a way that assumes no prior knowledge, which treats people as if they were empty ritual vessels, however with the capacity to be ritual creatures. It follows a belief that to bring new people into church what is enacted must be as near to 'normal' life as possible to be

accessible. Arguments about the use of elaborate religious language also assume a lack of ability on the part of people to understand, to learn or to grow. They are passive receptors of ritual experts, even when the experts are on the surface trying to remove all mystery from the ritual.

It would seem to imply that there is a natural conflict between a sense that people know what they are doing and so exclude others and the sense of confidence that people know what they are doing so you can fit in. If the people taking part do not understand why they are doing it but are merely doing it because ‘that is what you do’ will the ritual be empty of meaning? It may function merely as a set of prescribed actions and may seem therefore to be an empty ritual as opposed to meaning, rich ritual which is not going to be creative or open to the encounter with the Divine. It is just going through the motions, quite literally, for both the congregation and priest (in the instance of the Eucharist). There needs to be some material for the interpretive and imaginative part of human nature to interplay with. That is not to say it is important for everyone or even anyone to understand fully all the possible meanings of a ritual. Meanings must exist as something accessible to all even though those meanings may be obscure, conflicting or unique to individuals. Once again it is important for the ritual to be permeable/transparent liturgy. I would want to pose the question ‘how much does someone need to buy into the totality of a belief system in order for it to ‘effective’? If a belief system is already assented to for creative intersection points in the rituals which seek to express that belief, there needs to be room for inspiration and creativity. Maybe it is the potential for belief that is a prerequisite for a ritual? This is an idea developed in Martin Stringer’s work On the Perception of Worship where he takes Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of an ‘economy of logic’ to ask ‘Is it not possible for individuals to use only as

much 'belief' as is necessary for their particular purpose?' (Stringer 1999, 178) An attitude of belief is necessary, not a quantity or quality of belief.

I would argue that liturgy that is just going through the motions is unlikely to be life giving. The concepts contained within it will be static. For some it is human psychology which is the agent in this. In his analysis of some of the key concepts contained within the ritual of the church, Charles Elliott uses psychological theories of 'archetypes' such as developed by Jung. He picks out in particular

the symbols that resonate at a more profound level than the cognitive or the doctrinal; that have, so to say, their own validity that transcends the formulations of theological orthodoxy. Some of these may be triggered by actual physical symbols – fire, water, wine, incense, white attire, the Virgin (note) Mary – but others depend on quite sophisticated and even abstract ideas that may be represented visually but which have a substance beyond that representation. The wounded healer, the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat, apocalyptic symbols of glory and transcendence, the wayward son, Mother Church, are six significantly different examples spanning obviously Jungian archetypes such as Mother and Healer to more Freudian ideas of super-ego and id. (Elliott 1995, 222)

It is possible to attend to the context and respect the diversity of the congregation without bending like a reed in the wind so that nothing remains stable. This however is a communal activity. There have been significant studies developing theories of modern spirituality which are very individualistic. One example of this is the work done by Paul Heelas in his book The New Age Movement. (Heelas 1996)

In contrast a communal activity in a ritual is a means of marking attention and intensification. If for no other reason than there are a multitude of agents involved the

ritual becomes a meaning-laden activity. All the factors, language, positions adopted, actions taken etc. intensify the impression that this activity has meaning. The individuals are therefore encouraged into interpretation and using imagination in their engagement with the potential meanings. Actions which are out of the ordinary such as bowing, genuflecting and making the sign of the cross are indicators that this is a significant time, a Kairos moment, outside the mundane. Once again, if ritual is a means of paying attention, these formal and intentional actions are indicators of this.

When set in a context of liturgy does the ordered formality mean that its meaning can be controlled? In my argument there should be an openness to the meaning being out of the ritual practitioner's control, however, as a person set aside by the Church, the priest does have a role discerning and making visible the meanings being created so that the community can assent or otherwise to them. For example a Eucharist could be considered a Eucharist without reference to Jesus. However Jesus is a complex concept and for Christians Jesus is also a personal encounter and as such the priest is enabling, within the ritual, the potential for such an encounter. The actions and formality do not necessarily describe or determine the nature of the encounter. The Eucharist is an interpretive community within which one can be transformed by the encounter. I would argue that precisely because the actions are prescribed (note within the rubrics of the church there is a lot of flexibility and little proscription) the actions are non-threatening. If each individual was expected to invent a new ritual each time, to be the sole origin of their own Eucharist, the imagination would be used in this sense rather than the interpretive sense and would still require some reference upon which to base its creativity. A space for intimacy without intrusion is created by there being certain forms and patterns in the ritual. Within such actions there can be a variety of versions and responses which can fall at either spectrum of the acceptable limits. Liturgy needs to contain enough space to allow people to exist at these edges without breaking them.

Considering the liturgy as a whole it must be important to consider the rhythm and flow of the ritual and the way that certain actions can disrupt or interfere with the flow.

Rhythm and flow

In considering the nature of the flow and rhythm of the Eucharist I will reflect on one specific decision and my thoughts about this in relation to the intersection of the everyday and the Divine ritual. In the Eucharist in Byker the notices (announcements about the coming week, etc.) are given towards the end of the service. I had begun, and would prefer, to give the notices at the beginning. I had hoped that the notices could be given before the entry of the altar party so that the congregation may also be able to pray for whatever had been announced for the following weeks during the service, and that we could indicate a period of quiet prayerfulness before the start of the main service. However it soon became clear to me that due to the nature of our congregation this was not practical. Not only were people not quiet before the service but very many arrived at the last moment or indeed during the beginning of the service. If everyone was therefore to be able to hear the announcements they needed to be moved to later in the service. The options available were just before the actual Eucharist, after the 'Word' part of the service or at the very end of the service, either before the blessings and dismissal or even after this. As I understand the announcements to be an important part of the parish life and so not separate from the worship itself, it felt inappropriate to place them completely outside the liturgy, but to place them in the middle felt too disruptive of the rhythm of the liturgy. Therefore placing them after the post-communion prayer and just before the final blessings and dismissal has worked very well. Everyone is there and should be paying attention. The notices are less likely to be forgotten before leaving the church, and they serve as not only a practical means of communication but in some sense also connect with the final words of Dismissal,

sending people into everyday life connected to the love of God. The final words are “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord” with my emphasis always being to stress the word *serve*.

How malleable are rituals? How much scope is there for re-interpretation and change? In her piece on Jewish Women’s rituals Susan S. Sared explores the ways in which modern Jewish women have reconstructed, reclaimed and re-interpreted their traditional rituals. She analyses not only the way in which rituals can lose their meaning, but also suggests that rituals can change in meaning in a new context. Ritual is so often thought of as stable and immutable that this is a useful study, demonstrating the creativity of the ritual enactor of community. One specific example given is that of a marriage ritual,

Young couples getting married today may permit their grandmothers to smear henna on their hands (a traditional fertility ritual), they may even enjoy the ritual as a way of strengthening ethnic identity, but this smearing is no longer seen as an absolute prerequisite for the future fertility of the couple and the well-being of the community. (Sered 2005, 213)

In another example of the change in meaning of a ritual, or rather the replacing of one ritual with the meaning of another, is in the argument put forward by Smith where he suggests that in St Paul’s early church experience

Up to this point, the ‘people of God’ to whom one belonged was the people of Israel, a status indicated by the boundary markers of circumcision and some level of adherence to laws of purity. As long as the community was primarily drawn from a Jewish (and proselyte) constituency these could be assumed. But when Gentiles began to claim community membership as Gentiles, then something new was happening. (D. E. Smith 2003, 184-5)

It is, Smith claims, in the communal meal that this membership is signified, especially as in the meal practice the dietary rules of the Jewish community were not being practised. It is therefore St Paul who noticed it and gave it a theological framework. 'In doing so he drew on the rich resources of Greco-Roman banquet ideology.' (D. E. Smith 2003, 185)

At the opening of the service a dialogue begins between the priest and the congregation in such a way as, 'The Lord be with you', 'And also with you'. This is a reciprocal and not a hierarchical dialogue, setting up the relationship and affirming the meaning of each actor in the ritual. I often actually do respond to myself at the points of dialogue, aware that I am not speaking as myself in the first place but as the ritual actor ordained by the church. I am aware this is deeply problematic and yet illustrates my point about intersection points in every individual instance. I am at one and the same time the locus of an intersection point between Divine speech and human. I am at once the embodiment of the Church, the means by which the Divine is expressed on earth and a human receiver of this communication. I carry within myself both the layers of meaning sedimented over the centuries by the ritual position of the priest in the church and also my own personal narrative, emotional response and subjective views.

I am struck by the similarity in this reasoning to that of Carlos Severi when he is examining Shamanistic use of language.

However, from the moment the singer starts to mention a chanter about to begin to recite his chant, from the point of view of the definition of the enunciator (well before the beginning of the narration of the shamanistic journey), an entirely new situation is established: the enunciators have become two, one being the 'parallel' image of the other. There is the one who is *said to be there* (in the landscape described by the chant, preparing his travel to the underworld), and there is the one saying that he is *here* (in the hut, under the hammock where the ill person lies), chanting. (Severi 2005, 229)

There is one important difference here between the shaman and the priest in that it is in the ritual speech itself that the shaman becomes the ritual actor afresh each time (Severi 2005, 231), whereas the priest is ritually transformed once at ordination, which for some priests is a permanent ontological change. As this is permanent, it is held as true in all situations not just those explicitly ritual or priestly. In the speech at the beginning of a Eucharist it is a public confirmation and an ascent to this ritual role which is taking place. As it is the priest who instigates this speech the rite is immediately located in the ritual realm which she represents.

Also looking at the possible collision of what is said with what is believed, I turn to the priest's invitation to the congregation to say or sing the Sanctus and Benedictus. The invitation is most commonly given with a phrase which is dense with theological meaning but which it is not clear the majority of the congregation would comprehend or be able to describe. The phrase asks people to 'join with angels and archangels'. Although it can be argued that there is a growing public interest in a folk- type belief in 'angels' it seems impossible to know what meanings (if any) the congregation give to such a statement. The Sanctus itself is a recitation of a piece of scripture, however from a book of the Christian scripture which is concerned with a realm of being which is theologically problematic in itself. The Book of the Revelation to John is a looking ahead to times to come in the spiritual life of creation. Even giving the Gospels a

generous allowance as a historical record, the Book of the Revelation to John does not purport to be this but a prophetic end-times discourse. One of the main problems in using pieces of scripture like this is that there are also a variety of beliefs about the nature of the authority of scripture itself. Claiming only one of the spectrum of interpretive approaches to scripture, let alone trying to make ultimate claims about its use in ritual based on this closes down the intersection point which I believe is an essential part of the way in which scripture engages with human being.

Authority

If the authority of scripture is problematic then so is the whole concept of authority. To open up the ritual to be accessible to intersecting with a multitude and diversity of meanings and people requires a certain degree of surrendering of authority, both personal and power related. To surrender authority means to recognise that one has authority. In a context such as a marginalised urban community, the surrendering of authority as a principle may seem counter intuitive, especially as so much work is done to empower the community in opposition to the traditional owners of power and authority. However it is the surrendering of authority which constructs the intersection points where repression and oppression can be challenged and transformed. It may seem trite to state, but an individual or a group is not liberated by oppressing others. True liberation is only possible when all parties in a relationship are open. In the book God and the Excluded Joerg Rieger develops a critique of theology and the discourse of the church which offers a possible approach to theology which could be applied likewise to the creation of liturgy. As a principle to remember we could apply this.

But there is also a parallel to the openness of the human self to God promoted by the turn to the self, realizing that humanity is not complete in itself. Lacan insists, however, that humanity cannot stand to leave this place open. What is put in place of the void, according to Lacan, are products of human repression. If this is true, both the turn to the Other and the turn to the self need to connect with the repressed others. (Rieger 2001, 153)

If a ritual is to recognise the potential voids in meaning it may create and to guard against filling those voids with repressive products, then it must be performed in an overall context of openness to the otherness of its actors. It is in the points of intersection of ritual that this openness is at its most creative and yet has the potential, as Rieger warns us, to be destructive. Each participant in the ritual brings their own personal narrative with its master signifiers and its own blind spots. It is in the participation of a mutual ritual that what is unrecognised may come to the fore. Rather than an intellectual exercise and analysis, it is in the lived experience of a ritual that I would argue we can see Rieger's analysis in practice. Hence,

Theology turning to others is able to give a sharper, more challenging and perceptive reading of liberal theology than the other theological modes since the other is in the position of the unconscious truth in the discourse of the modern self and knows things that the self prefers not to know. Yet if the self is put in a position where it has to listen more to its own truth in relation to the theological turn to others, theology might finally be able to enter a new age, opening up the limits of contemporary theological reflection. (Rieger 2001, 155-6)

Once again it's an emphasis on a self-understanding, to hearing our own truths and positions that leads to an openness to others. In biblical terms it is a reminder of the instruction to 'love your neighbour as yourself' which begins with an understanding of both through the eyes of the other.

Ritual and meaning

Ritual is the medium through which the complexity of multiple layers of meaning can be engaged with by human creativity and imagination. It is within the form and structure of a ritual that meaning can be found, and through which an encounter with the greater meaning of the Divine can be approached. The Eucharist can be more fully understood as Divine action into the world, a Kairos moment of connection and transformation, when there is an openness to diversity and layers of meaning. It is by engaging human being as an active and not a passive narrative that the Divine can be glimpsed. The ritual must have shape and texture, it must be consistent but not identical with its historical origins, and it must engage human beings fully, both physically and culturally. Attempts to restrict, prescribe or proscribe in too authoritarian a way will limit the potential for there to be refreshment and transformation experienced in the intersection points of human narratives with the Divine.

Ritual is the setting for the intentional intersecting of human experience with these layers of meaning. The Eucharist is the ritual intended by the Divine, and instructed by the Divine expression in human form (Jesus) in which access to Divine reality is at its thinnest point. Thus the intersection points, both moments in time and layers of meaning, have the potential to transform human life. In the detailed description in chapter two I have endeavoured to recount in a purposefully reflexive and anecdotal way one specific example of this practice. It has deployed the technique of personal observation rather than quantitative analysis or even interrogational approaches which is also a layer of meaning, bringing my own history and specificity to a study of a formal ritual. It is intentionally an insider's view, a practitioner's reflexive process, part of an intentional speaking from where I am as a means to not only describe a ritual but to subject it to a rigorous examination. The intentions and understanding of the practitioner

intersects in the formality and given structure of the ritual with the received and lived experience of those participating. Neither practitioner nor participant has full understanding but the sedimented layers of meaning in a ritual such as the Eucharist enable creative interplay and Divine encounter.

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