

## The Bible in the Liturgy

Over recent decades, Scripture has become newly prominent in the polities of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. The documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) frequently quote or reference Scripture, and the Council directly concerned itself with the relation of Scripture to other recognized sources of authority. *Dei Verbum*, its brief but profound Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, makes clear that Scripture is not to be viewed as a parallel source of authority to tradition, with which it might be in tension or even competition. Rather, the tradition of the Church is nothing other than Scripture's lived exegesis by the Church. Scripture and tradition, in the words of the Constitution, 'together form a single sacred deposit of the word of God'.<sup>1</sup>

As Roman Catholics have engaged with Scripture, those in some global regions of that Church have critically reflected on the challenges that it presents to their Church, such as why the proportion of women church leaders in Rome was so much higher in St Paul's day than it is in their own.<sup>2</sup> Within the Anglican Communion, there is a similarly heightened awareness of the ecclesiological and moral implications of Scripture, also by no means unproblematical. Sharply contrasting views, both between, and sometimes within, Churches of the Communion, about aspects of human sexuality and their pastoral and ministerial implications, have threatened to break the Communion apart, and have to some extent already done so. While the disputes in this area have complex institutional, financial and cultural dynamics, scriptural interpretation is a presenting issue, as encapsulated in the terse 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution 1.10.d that 'homosexual practice [is] incompatible with Scripture'.

Given this renewed prominence of Scripture, the publication of an edited volume comprising contributions by Roman Catholic and Anglican academics, liturgical scholars and clergy on its place in the liturgy is timely.<sup>3</sup> Its title repeats, without acknowledgement, the words of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to the Sovereign of the United Kingdom at his or her coronation as the Moderator presents a Bible: 'Receive this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom; this is the royal law; these are the lively Oracles of God.' These words suggest that Scripture is of equal value to the eucharistic elements which the Sovereign also receives in the course of the coronation liturgy. As well as identifying important connections between Scripture and the liturgy, the volume gestures towards several key issues that require further reflection.

The first nine of the book's thirteen chapters are grouped under four categories for understanding the different ways in which Scripture features in the liturgy. These are derived from Paul Bradshaw, who, with good reason, views Scripture as the 'sacramental expression of Christ's presence in the assembly'.<sup>4</sup> The categories are kerygma (proclamation), anamnesis (memorialization), paraclesis (pastoral sanctification) and

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<sup>1</sup> *Dei verbum* 10, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), vol. 2, p. 975.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Lively Oracles of God: Perspectives on the Bible and Liturgy*, ed. Gordon Jeanes and Bridget Nichols, Alcuin Club Collections 97 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022). Subsequently *LOG*.

<sup>4</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, 'The Use of the Bible in Liturgy: Some Historical Perspectives', *Studia Liturgica* 22 (1992), pp. 35–52 (35).

doxology (praise).<sup>5</sup> First, then, how is Scripture experienced in worship as proclaimed? In the most engaging of three chapters on this topic, Cally Hammond advances a series of important points related to scriptural materiality and performance, justly presenting Scripture as a holy object. Although both the Old Testament and the Gospels are grounded in oral traditions, the subsequent writing down and later canonization of Scripture make theological differences. The spoken word, through which Christ is present at a point in time, comes to be grounded in physical volumes through which Christ is present at all times, not only when the text of those volumes is being read and heard. Hammond briefly compares Scripture with the eucharistic elements: just as the bread and wine that are offered are placed in vessels that, in some sense, ‘contain’ Christ’s presence, so both spoken words and the ink on a page bear the proclamation, and therefore the presence, of Christ.<sup>6</sup> If this presence in and through the printed and bound book of Scripture is taken seriously, then Scripture is sacramental: an enduring outward and visible sign and means of Christ’s presence in the world. The theology grounding this notion is, it might be added, strikingly unfolded by Henri de Lubac. In the neglected fifth and final chapter of his study of the much-maligned Alexandrian exegete, Origen, the French Jesuit shows how Scripture is one of the ‘incorporations’ or embodiments of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

In Christian liturgy, Scripture is proclaimed by many different church members, whereas eucharistic presidency is reserved for those few who are ordained or comparably commissioned. The practice of sharing the role of reader widely is not simply a product of twentieth-century liturgical revision. Any reader of the sermons of Augustine—which were, of course, written down during or after the event and were never delivered as a prepared text—will know that reader, or lector, was a formal office into which suitable people were commissioned. The bishop of Hippo attached high status to it, repeatedly stressing the need for audibility, punctuation and theological comprehension, notably in his *De doctrina christiana*.<sup>8</sup> Today, if we take Scripture’s importance seriously, we need to recognize that the role of reader is equal to that of eucharistic presider. Also worthy of attention are those who hear Scripture. While Scripture is being read or processed, worshippers may sit, stand, turn, bow or make the sign of the cross, each of which have different theological significances and indicate the close spiritual identification of worshippers with Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

Bodily and manual acts, it might be added, have a long pedigree, being described and interpreted in medieval allegorical exegeses of the Eucharist, in which every element was associated with some aspect of the birth, life, ministry, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and with the dramatic engagement of worshippers with these. Unsurprisingly, such acts have received little attention from liturgical scholars, who have frequently been more engaged by what takes place at the altar. The commentary that has been most extensively appropriated, if unconsciously, in the modern turn to participatory

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, the categories as provided by Bradshaw are slightly different: the didactic or educational, which is associated with exhortation and with the internalization of the word of God, such as in reading and preaching; the kerygmatic or anamnestic together, which constitute the repetitive core of the liturgy; the paracletic or pastoral, which admits of informality and flexibility; and the doxological, which is concerned with glorification.

<sup>6</sup> Cally Hammond, “‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’”, in *LOG*, pp. 1–14 (4).

<sup>7</sup> Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash with Juvenal Merriell (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), pp. 385–426.

<sup>8</sup> Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity* 3.1-4, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), pp. 169–72.

<sup>9</sup> Hammond, “‘Today’”, in *LOG*, p. 6.

liturgy has been that of William Durand (c.1230–96). For example, the Frankish bishop describes the hearers of the Gospel signing themselves with the cross three times, on their forehead, mouth and breast, as the deacon announces the reading. He associates these signings with, respectively, being unashamed to confess Christ; boldly proclaiming Christ and speaking the words of the Gospel; and being willing to suffer for Christ and being struck by the words of the Gospel in the heart as well as through the mind.<sup>10</sup>

By means of anamnesis, the events to which Scripture refers are made newly present in the mind. Anne McGowan and David Kennedy offer informative chapters on Lent and Easter, and on Advent, Christmas and Candlemas. These in effect take the classic Anglican notion that the eucharistic prayer grounds anamnesis and apply this to the seasonal liturgical reading of Scripture. By hearing narratives and reflecting on their associated doctrines, worshippers are drawn into the history and events with which a liturgical season is associated. There follows a thought-provoking contribution from Normand Bonneau in defence of ‘ordinary time’, that is, the numbered Sundays that follow Pentecost or Trinity Sunday and run right through to the end of November. In the Revised Common Lectionary, these are characterized by the reading of successive passages from the same New Testament book over a period of weeks, rather than by readings from different books each Sunday that in combination supply a common doctrinal theme. Bonneau persuasively endorses this arrangement, arguing that selecting readings simply in order that Scripture may be proclaimed (successional reading) is at least as valid as their selection for the purpose of making or encouraging didactic points (typological reading). These successive Sundays, while evoking the ‘ongoing, undetermined, and uninterrupted weekly succession of time’, nevertheless culminate in the feast of Christ the King.<sup>11</sup> They thereby move worshippers towards the ‘eschatological fullness of the kingdom of God’ as revealed in Christ in glory.

Chapters follow that address two paracletic, or pastoral, types of liturgical service, namely marriage and funerals. Being the two liturgical instances in which churches frequently encounter unchurched society, they are instructive for understanding the impacts on liturgy of the changed pastoral desiderata that have accompanied the decline in social Christianity in most Western countries. Catherine Reid shows how, in England over a period of several centuries, marriage became progressively separated from eucharistic celebration or reception, with the consequence that the prominence in the marriage service of Scripture significantly increased. Predictably, the sense of marriage as a divinely ordained sacrament, as suggested by Genesis 2.23-24, has diminished, to be replaced in *Common Worship* by the identification of marriage as a divine gift, that is, as one that potentially exists alongside other gifts of equal value.<sup>12</sup> In a chapter that is both historically astute and pastorally insightful, Lizette Larson-Miller examines how the large shifts in popular theological understanding that have accompanied social and cultural changes have influenced the choice of scriptural readings at funerals. Images of bodily destruction, especially Job 19.25-27, and meditation on sins and divine forgiveness for them, were displaced by evocations of the departed being taken up into heaven in a similar movement

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<sup>10</sup> William Durand, *Rationale, Book Four: On the Mass and Each Action Pertaining to It*, 4.24.28, trans. Timothy M. Thibodeau (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 207–8. For the extensive early modern and nineteenth-century dissemination of Durand’s *Rationale*, see Stephen Mark Holmes, *Sacred Signs in Reformation Scotland: Interpreting Worship, 1488–1590* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 45–8.

<sup>11</sup> Normand Bonneau, ‘Sunday, the week, and ordinary time: a return *ad fontes*’, in *LOG*, pp. 96–114 (111).

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Reid, ‘The role of the Bible in Anglican marriage rites’, in *LOG*, pp. 115–31.

of death and resurrection to that of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Yet the primary theological focus is now frequently the comfort of the bereaved, or readings are chosen that communicate diverse theological messages based on the wishes of different family members.

Just one chapter, by Bridget Nichols, addresses the category of doxology. In practice, this gives an overview of the physical treatment of Scripture in worship, the use of Scripture in liturgical texts and hymnody and the theological themes that it is used to communicate. The final four chapters address a variety of themes. Significantly, Armand Léon van Ommen, who considers disability and other pastoral issues, pleads for a 'liturgy that limps' in place of 'eulogistic evasion', citing Old Testament passages in which liturgical triumphalism is divinely condemned. In contrast with this, lament is, for van Ommen, inclusive.<sup>14</sup> There follows a chapter by Christopher Irvine on how worship may reflect ecological priorities, then two further chapters that are fairly diffuse.

The categories of kerygma, anamnesis, paraclesis and doxology reflect common understandings of what takes place in the liturgy. Christ and his life are proclaimed and made newly present with spiritually sanctifying effects on worshippers, who give thanks. Yet if the liturgy is nothing other than the proclamation and making present of Christ through Scripture and sacrament, with worshippers being sanctified by hearing Scripture and receiving the sacrament and giving praise for these, it would seem at least as legitimate to interpret the liturgy through the same set of categories as those by which Scripture is interpreted. These are well known through the exhaustive exposition of de Lubac and comprise the literal, the allegorical (doctrinal), the tropological (moral) and the eschatological. Bradshaw himself identifies their importance in the interpretation of the liturgy.<sup>15</sup> Liturgy, like Scripture, presents elements of Christ's life, death and resurrection, and the wider salvation history that is centred on them, in literal form, both through readings and in many other scriptural references within the prayers and exchanges that constitute the worship. The doctrinal significance of these is elucidated in preaching, credal statements and ritual action, including the sacramental celebration. Again, within preaching, as well as via manual acts such as kneeling or bowing, personal moral responses are elicited. The final end that God wills for humans, the Church and the world is, like doctrine, also signified in texts, credal statements and preaching, as well as in the orientation of many church buildings towards the dawning light of the new day, just as believers in Christ yearn to be illuminated by the risen light of truth and ultimately to be one with that light.

John Baldovin indeed discusses the four senses of Scripture in his chapter, rightly acknowledging that, within liturgical settings, their identification and interrelation are influenced by the lectionary. Yet while acknowledging these four, Baldovin suggests that, in addition, a fifth 'liturgical hermeneutic' be added that is additional to the scriptural hermeneutic provided by the four senses.<sup>16</sup> However, if the liturgy provides the setting within which scriptural reading and exposition according to the different senses may occur, it seems unclear why it also needs to function as a distinct interpretive principle. Medieval exegetes of the liturgy were attentive to each of the four senses, in a tradition established by

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<sup>13</sup> Lizette Larson-Miller, 'Scripture shaping funerals or cultural funerals shaping Scripture?', in *LOG*, pp. 132–49.

<sup>14</sup> Armand Léon van Ommen, 'Limping with the living God: reimagining centre and periphery in the liturgy', in *LOG*, pp. 170–85.

<sup>15</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark/Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998–); see Bradshaw, 'The Use', pp. 44–6, 50–2.

<sup>16</sup> John Baldovin, "'How are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?'" in *LOG*, pp. 15–32 (27–8).

the *Liber officialis* of the Frankish bishop Amalar of Metz (c.775–850) and culminating in the previously cited *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* of another Frankish bishop, William Durand, interpreting different elements of the liturgy according to the four senses.<sup>17</sup> To cite an example of each from Durand’s *Rationale*, the entrance of the bishop or priest, and their procession to the altar, allegorically represent Christ’s coming into the world ‘from a secret dwelling place in the heavens; or that He came forth from a secret chamber, namely from the uterus of the Virgin Mary’.<sup>18</sup> The sprinkling of the worshippers morally signifies their purification and their strengthening by the water of baptism. The blessing of the worshippers presents to them their eschatological destiny: that they shall ‘go to the celestial fatherland’, where they will ‘always be giving thanks’. The ringing of a bell at the consecration of the bread and the wine audibly evokes the sounding of trumpets by the Levites at the moment when sacrifices were offered in the Jerusalem Temple.

Despite liturgical revision, many modern liturgical rites are marred by a catastrophic loss of psalmody. Thomas O’Loughlin refers to ‘a few verses from a psalm’ as being all that remained by the later medieval period.<sup>19</sup> Yet this brief assessment describes neither the theological significance of psalmody nor its earlier prominence in the Eucharist. Psalmody was sung or said at several points: the introit, gradual, alleluia or tract, offertory and communion. A succession of theologians including Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine and supremely Cassiodorus, have viewed psalmody as the speech of Christ and thus as almost on a par with the Gospels. Christ’s psalmic voice prepared the way for his gospel voice. For Cassiodorus, Christ appears at the very opening of the Psalms, as the man who has ‘not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor followed the path of sinners’. The statesman, scholar and monastic founder perceptively writes:

nothing was to be put before our Head the Lord Saviour, of whom the psalmist intended wholly to speak, for undoubtedly He is the Beginning of all things . . . Since all that is to be said refers to Him, He is rightly set at the head of the sacred work . . . All that the book has to offer refers to the instruction offered by the blessed Man.<sup>20</sup>

This is why it was a verse from the Psalms, rather than from any other biblical book, that the alleluia was traditionally used to frame. In England, the compilers of *Common Worship* inexplicably decided to use for this purpose not psalm verses but a selection of verses from the Gospels themselves. The opportunity to restore the cumulative liturgical unfolding of the revelation of Christ in Scripture from Old Testament law or prophecy through New Testament epistolary theology to Christ’s voice as Word to Christ’s voice in the person of Jesus was thereby lost.

The voice of Christ is heard by his Church pre-eminently in the liturgy. Although communal readers are no longer likely to be the only members of their worshipping communities who possess the ability to read, the liturgical importance of their role is in no

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<sup>17</sup> Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy* 3, trans. Eric Knibbs, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), vol. 2, pp. 2–265.

<sup>18</sup> Durand, *Rationale* 6.1, 4.1, 57.6, 41.53, 91, 80, 482, 358.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas O’Loughlin, ‘The Bible in the context of the Eucharist’, in *LOG*, pp. 33–54 (38).

<sup>20</sup> Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms* 1.1, trans. P. G. Walsh, 3 vols. (New York: Paulist, 1990–1), vol. 1, p. 45.

way diminished. The community is constituted just as much by the word of Christ as by his eucharistic body. At any point in time the eucharistic host is somewhere being consecrated and received. Similarly, thanks to the Revised Common Lectionary, which is globally used by several denominations, at any point in time the same portions of Scripture are being read and received by hearers.

*David Grumett*

Senior Lecturer in Theology and Ethics, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh,  
UK

*david.grumett@ed.ac.uk*