

Michael Northcott  
"Transfiguring Worship" : Sermon Notes

Sunday 14th Feb 2010  
Psalm 99 Ex 34:29-35; 2 Cor 3:12-4:2; Luke 9: 28-36(37-43)

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Seeing God. Adam n Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden.

Abraham visited by Angels

Jacob wrestled w Panuel

Moses stood in the presence and saw God's back. And the light of God gave him sunburn!

Mary and Joseph, donkey, and possibly cattle are first to see Jesus.

Seeing God is the reversal of the Fall of Adam and Eve

Visibility of God in one sense departs at Ascension.

But Paul has vision of God. So does Peter. Many hear voice of God, see angels, or Christ or sign of Christ.

Disciples came to realise Jesus was God.

At some point after his Resurrection and Ascension the disiples came to worship Christ as Lord and God.

For early Christians Eucharistic worship becomes the place where God is made visible and Christians week by week see through a glass not so darkly

In Orthodox ecclesiology Church at eucharist in each town or city is natural restroration of human senses since Fall. God walks again with humans in cities of Corinth Antioch Rome Consrantinople instead of Garden of Eden. And hence 'the Eucharist makes the church'.

And visible signs of this restored visibility remain to this day despite iconoclastic controversy. Ravenna, Ch of St Clemente Rome, Catacombs. Some are copies of more ancient art, some 2c and 3c survivals.

But why is seeing so important?

Snowy mountain and blue sky..Yesterday skiing on Glas Maol.

Seeing transcendent in nature is the modern sublime.

But hearing also important. Transfiguration. Sight and sound. And hence Peter told not to memorialise it in a visible monument. Memory becomes the vessell instead through which revelation is passed on and only later is it made visible in words on a papyrus.

Word and Sacrament

And as transfiguring worship in word and sacrament grew in power in Christendom elements of paradise were restored. Slaves were freed. Merchants were morally

restrained. The sick were cared for and sometimes healed by herbs and love. And even war was subjected to charity and a code of honour.

But in late Middle Ages wealth and technological power grew. And as the cities and the monasteries grew in wealth so the transfiguring visibility of God was refocused on paten and chalice and priestly power.

But the reaction of the Reformation was over focused on Word.

Images icons candles chalices stoles surplices - even eucharist itself - was banished - or almost banished - in many reformed traditions.

Hence Glasgow Catholic school boy on visit to a Kirk shocked at empty white washed interior asks "when was you robbed"

Anglicanism sought to preserve ancient pattern of sight and sound, word and sacrament.

Reredos n candles chalice n paten bread and wine remain for me essential part of my own spiritual life as an Anglican.

Eucharistic worship - word and sacrament - is meant to change us, transfigure us, body mind and soul.

But Robert Bruce in Sermons on Sacraments says "What happens to unfaithful who receive Eucharist. Nothing bad. Nothing at all."

Reformers wanted to rescue church from fetishised religion and sacred. But they did not put the sacred back into the whole fabric of life of the people of God. Instead they evacuated life in reformed Europe of sacred patterns and images and ultimately of words.

In one sense the secular was born in the Medieval World when the sacred was disappearing from the growing mercantilism of medieval towns and cities. And refocusing the sacred exclusively on the Mass, on pilgrimages and on penitential giving did not restore transfiguration to the world.

But the Reformation did not recover the visible infusion of life with the sacred.

And so today few in Calvinist Scotland or Switzerland associate Christianity with the origins of democracy freedom and technological progress

Our responsibility as Christians in a godless society is to continue to make Christ visible - in word and sacrament, in sanctuary, in service to society.

To do this in the midst of growing antichristian sentiment - and restrictions on our freedoms by the State - we need all the more to embrace the visible Christ as Lord of our lives, as Lord of the cosmos and as saviour - the one who comes to restore paradise so that men and women once again can walk and talk with a God who is present among them.