



3 June 2012  
Trinity Sunday  
Choral Evensong  
Ezekiel 36 vv. 22–36  
John 20 vv. 19–23

## **That thy way be known upon earth**

By The Rev'd Canon Joanna Udal

Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for Anglican Communion Affairs

Great crowds have been gathered in central London today. Outside Lambeth Palace the embankment has been thronged with people many rows deep, straining for views of the river Thames in the hope of catching sight of the Queen's Jubilee pageant. Throughout this festive period, the Lambeth Palace Library has been holding a special exhibition, entitled "Royal Devotion – Monarchy and the Book of Common Prayer". There may not have been quite so many visitors as for the river pageant, but the display has attracted a steady flow of people to see the 400-year old library founded by Archbishop Richard Bancroft when he decided to bequeath to his successors the substantial collection he had assembled during his time as Archbishop of Canterbury. I imagine the bursar of Magdalene College will be counting his blessings that the present Archbishop does not intend to bring all his to Cambridge at the end of the year!

*Royal Devotion* brings together exhibits from the library's treasures collected by successive Archbishops which tell the story of public and private religious devotion. They trace the development of the Book of Common Prayer. And they illustrate the centrality of prayer through the ages to many aspects of our public life. One of the cases is devoted to the spreading of the Prayer Book around the world. Its contents include a 19<sup>th</sup> Century translation into Mandarin, a compendium of a translation into the Hindoostanee language from fifty years earlier, and some of the first Prayer Book texts translated into Welsh and Irish Gaelic in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

When Thomas Cranmer was first drawing up the Book of Common Prayer, he was clear that it must be in a language "understood of the people". He was also explicit that it was not intended for other nations. Other peoples, he argued, "should not be condemned" for having their own customs. It was only appropriate to prescribe for one's own people. In fact, the 1549 Prayer Book devised in English would likely have proved as incomprehensible to the Welsh as the Latin Prayer Book had been! Nevertheless, there are early records of English Prayer Books being printed in Dublin for use in Ireland. Perhaps the lack of early translation into the Irish vernacular contributed to the Reformation taking less root there?

The form of Christianity, both catholic and reformed, which was then evolving in England needed the right set of conditions to be able to flourish. This included an order of ministry based on the vision of the early church, but adapted to local conditions. And it presupposed preaching in the language of the people. This became the distinctive English model which was then transplanted across the Atlantic to North America, and then all over the world.

References to the heathen, like in the King James rendition of our First Lesson tonight, can be pretty jarring to our modern ears. But the Prophet Ezekiel declares it to be God's purpose, "that the heathen shall know that I am God." It became an early feature of English expeditions across the Atlantic in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century that the party were accompanied by chaplains, so as to provide pastoral care and invoke God's blessing on the journey. Such expeditions were also often seeking, as they saw it, "the recovery of the promised land from the heathen". Chaplains accompanied the search for the North West Passage, and Francis Drake's

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circumnavigation of the earth. But the focus was not only on journeying westward. A new interest developed in the East, and from 1603, chaplains began to be placed on East India Company ships. Around the same time, the Levant Company began to open up British Trade to the Middle East, and this resulted in the first Anglican presence in present day Syria – in the Port of Aleppo. While doing some research before the present crisis erupted, I discovered that the first chaplain to be appointed to serve there was a certain John Udal, likely related to some of my forebears. He was appointed in 1599 but died before he could take up his appointment.

While the primary concern for such postings was the pastoral care of the employees or settlers, over time, a more explicit evangelistic purpose was recognised. Such as the Virginia Company's charter referring to the "propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness," This propagation, the charter hoped, would help to bring "human civility" to the territories of the New World.

Such civility was found to be conspicuously lacking in England as the country lurched towards the Civil War. Yet a vision continued to be held of the church's outreach abroad. William Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury in the time of Charles I, and was later executed as opposition to the King intensified. He envisioned a Church of England presence in every known part of the world. This was intended to include "all the courts of Christendom, and the chief cities of the Turks", so that the English Church might be "as diffused and catholic as the Church of Rome!" The reality was inevitably more sparse. When Thomas Bray visited Maryland in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, he was shocked at the clergy shortage he found, and their state of poverty. As a result he founded the Society for the Promoting of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) with a role to promote spiritual provision on North America. It was not until 1710 that the Society clarified its primary concern to be the propagation of the gospel to foreign parts – and that "the conversion of the heathen" was to become the primary task.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, momentum gathered apace. Instead of the chaplains' primary focus on the colonial settlements and the company employees for whose pastoral care they had been appointed, a new enthusiasm was developing for mission to indigenous peoples. This vision was especially brought to birth by the evangelical revival, as well as through the Oxford Movement and the liturgical renewal which it engendered. One remarkable pioneer was Henry Martyn, who as a Cambridge mathematician had earned the accolade of Senior Wrangler. Earlier thoughts of training for the bar were overtaken when he encountered the preaching of Charles Simeon, and he was inspired to offer himself for missionary service in India. He accepted a position as chaplain to the East India Company, but even from the start, his primary concern was to be able to conduct worship among local people using the vernacular. Once in India, he started local schools. And he took on the task of linguistic scholarship, revising translations in Hindustani and translating the New Testament into Urdu and Persian.

Such a vision was not always shared by the East India Company, nor was it popular with the colonial powers of the day who were fearful of instability. It's recorded that in some instances, the political rulers were so paranoid about insurrection that the Magnificat was not allowed to be sung during Evensong, in case anyone got ideas of putting down the mighty from their seat! In some cases the established powers had reason to be worried. For missionaries sought to protect the native peoples from exploitation and from any negative influences of the European settlers.

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One case in point was over the issue of slavery. No section of the church could claim a clean slate on this issue. But missionaries' first-hand experience of abuses and injustice contributed to initiatives for change. One example was the Codrington estate in Barbados given to the Society for the Protection of the Gospel, known today as USPG. Despite local opposition, the mission society worked to achieve improved conditions and pastoral care for workers on the estate. Meanwhile, a movement began to grow focussed on the complete abolition of the slave trade. The prophetic witness of William Wilberforce can be regarded as one of the major "fruits" of the evangelical revival. This tireless campaigner for the abolition of slavery, and member of this college, became one of the co-founders of the Church Mission Society – a voluntary society for mission and transformation with the express evangelical purpose of sending missionaries to reach the unreached peoples of the earth. But even then, it was not always so easy to recruit missionaries – English clergy were often all too reluctant to leave these green and pleasant shores!

Those who did offer themselves for overseas service often had to balance the conflicting interests of an established colonial congregation with those of the developing local mission. In consequence, it was seen as highly desirable to work towards indigenous leadership at the earliest opportunity. A new mission congregation would generally begin by using the Book of Common Prayer, making use of suitable translations as soon as these became available. And hymns which started off as standard Victorian repertoire, once translated, soon came to be "incarnated" into local culture. Once familiar rhythms and intervals would evolve into variants often barely recognisable. One example is O Happy Day which I've heard sung translated into various Sudanese languages, in each of which it has taken on a life of its own and come to sound like a quite different piece altogether!

Achieving indigenous leadership often proved more difficult. Sometimes congregations or even other missionaries created a backlash against the proposed ceding of responsibilities. In the Niger Delta, Samuel Crowther was a fine example of courage and forbearance against such resistance and holds the distinction of being the first African Anglican to be consecrated a bishop. Nevertheless, many people failed to recognise the need for a church to have freedom to grow and develop in its own local soil. One of the side effects of such a luke-warm attitude towards local leadership was the rise over time of the African Independent Churches, often holding tightly to most aspects of church tradition, but with their own indigenous leaders.

In some countries, the church had no such luxury of choice. In Sudan, not long after independence, an assertion of a combination of national identity and Islam resulted in the Missionary Act. This expelled foreign missionaries and caused the church to raise up leaders of its own if it was to survive. The challenge of a hostile environment towards the church also resulted in strong ecumenical co-operation, with the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches coming together with others to form the Sudan Council of Churches. This strong axis of co-operation continues to be essential to the churches' mission, as the threat of major conflict continues between Sudan and the newly created nation of South Sudan.

If the church is to be faithful to its calling, it will always have a concern and a vision beyond itself and its own communities. When Pope Gregory saw English slave children in the market place in Rome and was informed that they were "Angles", he is reported to have replied, "Not Angles but Angels!" And this resulted in his sending Augustine to evangelize the English. In the context of conflict such as Sudan, it's especially difficult to see beyond the needs of your own particular community. Yet in both Sudan and South Sudan, the church is seeking to be faithful to supporting the needs of those beyond itself. Ever since the Darfur conflict began

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to escalate, in a region which is almost entirely Muslim, the Sudanese church has sought ways in which it can help some of the many people internally displaced from their villages. These might only be small ways, like giving a home to a displaced family in the school compound of the local church. But there are also more strategic interventions, like the leadership offered by the Sudanese Archbishop, Daniel Deng, in negotiations to address long-standing inter-tribal conflict in the region of Jonglei in South Sudan. The church has a unique contribution to make in offering a vision of belonging together in Christ which transcends ethnic loyalties. Archbishop Daniel was recently charged with leading a national initiative in this area. But that was possible because of the churches' on-going involvement working for peace among the different groups and offering a life-giving alternative of healing and forgiveness.

When Jesus appeared among his disciples after his resurrection, his presence among them was a presence of peace and of forgiveness. "Jesus stood in their midst, and saith unto them 'Peace be unto you.'" As he breathed on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, he sent out his disciples to bring that same peace and forgiveness to others. The church continues to be sent out beyond itself, *"that thy way be known upon earth"*. If it remained focussed on its own interests it would wither and die. But in the life giving power of the spirit, the mission of the Father in sending the Son is continued in God's people amid the challenges and conflicts of our own day.

The ministry of the prophet Ezekiel was likewise concerned beyond the interests of the house of Israel to the sanctifying of God's name on earth. "The heathen shall know that I am the Lord, when I am sanctified in you before their eyes"... "And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden."

May our church be faithful to its calling in Christ to be an agent of healing and reconciliation in our times. May we be open to play our part in the sanctifying of God's name on earth, sharing God's abundant gifts of peace and forgiveness, *"that thy way be known upon earth"*.