



ALL SOULS EUCHARIST: PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

BANGOR CATHEDRAL: NOVEMBER 2011

NOTES FOR YOUR REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARIST

As a reminder, the areas that we asked you to reflect on for the St Teilo's diaries in June and September 2011 are listed below. These may be helpful, but please do not feel that you have to follow these:

the physical experiences (including posture)
the sensory experiences (sight, sound, smell, touch, even taste)
the emotional experiences (feeling)
the sentient or intellectual experiences

As before, you may wish to extend this to aspects of the spiritual, but we would not wish you to move into areas where you prefer not to record your responses. There may be other matters practical and contextual which you want to record.

Where appropriate, it would also be helpful to know how the experience of All Souls in Bangor Cathedral compares with that of the St Teilo's week(s), if you were present?

This reflection will be treated as a confidential document. However, we would wish, where appropriate, to make use of your responses either in general comments about the research findings or in specific comments which would always remain anonymous. We will happily supply you with a photocopy if you wish to have a record of your thoughts.

Responses may be emailed to s.harper@bangor.ac.uk

REFLECTION

ALL SOULS EUCHARIST
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2 NOVEMBER 2011



THE
EXPERIENCE
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The difference in context with St Teilo's was very striking at Bangor.

Bangor was a very linear experience – the building itself; the way we moved and were positioned; the structure of the service itself – this particularly because the use of vernacular texts and expectation of congregational participation in them made everything more chronological – one thing after another.

At St Teilo's I experienced the liturgy as more of a capsule – a whole. The different elements – singers, altar party, laity, were in one sense all doing their own thing in their own groups. Yet all the elements came together in the way that the disparate rhythms of African drumming all make an amazing whole when put together.
Felt more a gap in time – a place open to *kairos*.

The act of facing east was powerful – but much more so at St Teilo's where the priest too faced East. There was a powerful direction and focus towards what was beyond the assembled community – towards the Other. The priest was the head of an arrow. This was changed in emphasis at Bangor where the priest facing the people gave it a more social feel.

The difference in the grouping of singers was striking too. At Bangor I felt quite distant from the others as I could see no-one except John beating time. At St Teilo's, when grouped around the lectern there was a feeling of being 'one lung'.

Posture – kneeling facing east was good. In fact more comfortable and practical than the times we were seated on a chair. I felt more alert, more focused.

Sensory – At Bangor I was able to see everything unimpeded up at the altar – but what in fact engaged me was the tiles in front of me, especially rabbits and birds!
I was very aware of being disconcerted by layers of shadows on the music which we hadn't had while practicing. At St Teilo's I found myself gazing a lot at the wall paintings.

Sound-wise – The obvious difference was hearing more words and understanding them. I got hung up on one particular translation which was unfamiliar which sent me off on a mental trail.

Touch – The Peace was a contrast to the Pax Board – and again gave a quite different signal. Having physical contact with others focused the more social aspect, whereas the Pax Board emphasised the peace coming directly from Christ.

Communion was a contrast with St Teilo's with the actual sharing. The liquid sweetness of wine gave a sudden bright spot of colour.

I found the use of leaflets (and tuning fork!) at Bangor a distraction after being unencumbered at St Teilo's. It became a preoccupation having the right leaflet in the right place and following it so you could say the next lot of words.

Overall I guess I found the use of senses more focused on specifics at Bangor – St Teilo's was more a 'sensory experience' in a broader sense.

Bangor had an overall feeling of greyness (figuratively) – St Teilo's more variegated, like a kaleidoscope with shifting patterns of colour.

The things which have stayed with me as things to ponder:-

The huge impact of text in the vernacular and congregational participation. Meaning becomes 'framed', limited. The use of a sacred language and secret passages acts more in a symbolic way. I wonder how much this has impacted more widely in worship (and life in general)?

The shift from symbolic action to formality e.g. Pax Board to Peace.

Issues around *Kairos*, *Chronos*, Space, Infinity, *Temenos*....

All these feel like shifts from a more embodied, symbolic experience to a more 'literal', 'formal' (in a narrow sense), mental one.

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The physical experiences (including posture)

The physical sensation came to me as soon as the procession from the Assembly area to the High Alter commenced. As the introit was sung to plainsong, this kind of singing seemed to set the general pace of the procession. Whilst in the stalls I naturally felt physically more geneffective. The focus of the service was centred more around the sanctuary than the quire as per normal.

The sensory experiences (sight, sound, smell, touch, even taste)

My first vision was that of a greater sense of space in comparison to my experience of St Teilo's back in September and June. The acoustics of the plainsong were to me very apparent once the choir started singing along with our own physical distance from the choir at different points of the liturgy. As incense was being used this was the predominant smell and even taste.

The emotional experiences (feeling)

My emotional sense came about as soon as the choir started to sing the introit, although evoking my experience at St Teilo's the sound to me was more ethereal due to how it was being carried throughout the Cathedral. (It brought to me a lump in the throat)

The sentient or intellectual experiences

The service was a very interesting alternative to the normal form of Evening Office. It highlighted the different experience one would gain from a glimpse of pre-reformation liturgical music to more modern settings of Choral Evensong. Very enriching to be able to engage with the liturgy in different ways.

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What moved me was the simplicity of the chant in comparison to the 'busy' accompanied music we are used to in Church. I also felt very exposed - in a positive way - facing East and being in such proximity to the altar. It felt almost like a physical connection with God, and that openness surprised me. Although Agnes was in front of me, when we were facing East, I barely noticed that she was there during the service.

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Some initial reflections, at times sounding like a stream of consciousness....

Physical

Hard on my right knee. I should be sticking my stomach in....

Sensory

Love the incense! Distracted by the smoke when it catches the light; it looks like a ghost or a soul floating up. Very appropriate!

Feeling like I was singing in a vacuum when it was our side's turn. I couldn't hear Rosie or Sally sing at all, so did my best to remain confident that it was indeed my turn to sing, and to follow JH's hand. Loved the Kyrie!

Awareness of the gentleman to my left. I heard him sing the Agnus Dei with us.

Emotional

Moved by certain words but not at all by others; "Requiem eternam" evoke certain moments of sadness

The epistle: "I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed."

How can one not think of Handel's *Messiah*?

The collect I feel, now that I look back over it, should have struck some chords, but somehow didn't.

In fact, as I look over the words of the service in English, I realize that I wasn't really taken in by them, in the same way that I was by the sung chant. There are two things going on here I think: the words have become familiar to me through singing them on previous occasions (Verdi, Mozart, Britten, Fauré, Duruflé, etc.) Also, singing them gives them an added dimension, since we sing with the heart.

Sentient or intellectual

Annoyance: is my handwriting so poor? If not, why can't my family name be read correctly? It shouldn't be difficult to read. On the other hand, I know it is being referred to, and I guess God does too. It's a shame the rest of the community doesn't.

The way priests are mentioned was exercising me. Surely it is a tautology to say, “The Rev X, Priest.” If however, that is the correct way, then I’ve put his name down incorrectly. You live and learn!

Amidst all these thoughts I was trying to concentrate on all the names, and to give them the same attention as I would to names I recognize. I started thinking about how we tend to remember all the recently departed, and forget all those who have gone long before us.

I also thought about the whole question of whose names you put down on a list. Here again, there is a decision to be made. Do we put down the names of all those whom we know about, or those who are dear to us? Surely, the former is the Christian thing to do, as everyone deserves to be prayed about.

Not crossing myself as I usually do: feel quite strongly that you should do what feels right, and what feels right is often what the majority are doing. If the norm is not to cross yourself, why go to the trouble of bringing attention to yourself?

Spiritual

Of all the feasts in the Church, the celebration of All Saints and All Souls are among my favourite, even though they can be tear-jerking affairs. Last year, I went home to St George’s and when the bede roll was read out, I found myself struggling to keep the tears out of my eyes, as I either knew everyone mentioned, or knew of them: “That elderly lady used to give me sweets when I was little! That must be Sonya’s father, etc.” I found myself thinking. These people were real, and therefore the service took on a completely different meaning. This is the reason why I initially chose to go back to Paris for All Souls, because even though grieving is painful, I wonder if isn’t a necessary part of our existence and therefore an essential moment of the Church calendar. Christmas, Easter are occasions for rejoicing but both need to be contrasted against more sombre periods of penitence and sadness in order for us to feel the full effect of the joys of the incarnation and the resurrection.

Wednesday’s Requiem was therefore always going to be very much an act of worship for me, rather than a performance of lovely music. The consequence of this is that I neglected to feel nervous about the singing, maybe at the expense of getting every single note right! I’m sorry if I made mistakes, but for me it was so much more important to me to sing prayerfully, for my own spiritual nourishment, in the hope that in so doing I would manage to convey some of my devotion to the rest of the congregation.

We've often mentioned in our discussion groups at St Fagan's that if you're singing, you're too busy concentrating to have the time and space to pray, and how those who are in the congregation are in some way fortunate, as they can afford to be reflective. We've always discussed this in terms of a dichotomy, one or the other, prayerful and in the congregation, dutiful and in the choir. However, I was wondering how it is possible to be both, and if being prayerful in the choir means you make mistakes, is that so bad? Isn't the intention behind the singing just as, if not more important than the accuracy of the notes? At the King James Bible Evening for example, there were moments of bad tuning on the part of the choir when they sang the Wesley anthem, which I know well; but it was beautiful nevertheless, because they were all singing with such earnestness. In fact it was rather touching.

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I was really pleased we used the postures from St Teilo's – the posture differences are really highlighted when you are in choir formation in a way that isn't the case when you sit in the nave and are already facing east – the conscious turning east at specific moments felt very powerful as we were turning away from our seats (and our comfort?) towards God.

I was also pleased that we sang whilst kneeling this time – this felt much more 'right'.

I wasn't really sure why we changed formation to sing the offertory.

I'm still having a bit of an issue with the sharing of the Peace – I don't really like it being pre-choreographed, and I felt that I would have liked to share the peace with others too – especially those on either side of me. It felt quite wrong only to exchange the peace forwards and not sideways too – this was made more so when the clergy shared the peace with some of us. This whole experience so far has made me think a lot about this issue, although I'm not sure I've made any progress with it!

It was lovely to have the preface sung – something that doesn't happen much where I'm from. I also really liked that form of the acclamation- much more positive and hopeful than the 'English' version.

The first hymn (We pray to you, O Lord, for all the dead) didn't feel as out of place as I was expecting. It's great to see that you can sing hymns unaccompanied, even when you're in a cathedral! That the congregation also sang up was great – It makes me think we should have the confidence to do this more often!

I found the final hymn (with organ) difficult to sing after the chants, and in some ways it felt a bit odd. However I felt very moved towards the end of it – the 'alleluia' at the end of each verse is so lovely to sing, and being able to look around at the other singers whilst singing it was very special.

It was a privilege to be able to have our own special names added to the list that was read – made me feel less of an outsider at the service, and more a part of the community (although obviously it was only temporary).

It was so useful to see the blending of the ancient and the modern elements actually working. I think that as Michael was so effusive in his praise may have meant it worked better than he had expected too!

Obviously this was a very different experience to the Jesus Mass at St Teilo's: the language, the intent of the service, the presence of a local assembly, and the slightly different line up in the singers. Having learnt so much about the importance of taking responsibility of one's own participation from the experience in Cardiff helped me during this service. (It's also had a big impact on my experience in church at home, and in my own private devotions.) The blending of the corporate act of worship, and one's own personal experience within that is such an interesting concept – I think I'm still learning and making connections between Cardiff, Salisbury and modern worship.

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This was the first time I felt I had to kneel properly for an extended period of time. While I had knelt in Cardiff and in Salisbury, in Cardiff it was very much a choice, as an observer, and in Salisbury I used a kneeler and was able to sit back on my heels when I got tired. On this occasion, since I had an official part to play in the choir, I felt obliged to kneel properly, and stay still, in a way which meant my discomforts became much more obvious to me, since this time I felt they were imposed in some sense. In addition, I had planned to use a kneeler and had left one out for that purpose, but between the rehearsal and the service it had been tidied away, and so the unexpected nature of the physical pain of kneeling on the stone floor contributed.

The sensory experiences (sight, sound, smell, touch, even taste)

Kneeling with my head down during the list of the names of the dead, I found listening to the slow steady intonation of names quite meditative. When the reader changed, however, I expected that to be the end, and from that point I was impatient, always wondering when it would finish.

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