



St Fagans: June 20-24 2011 – For members of the interdisciplinary research group

We are very much looking forward to welcoming you to St Fagans in the week beginning 20 June. All seven members of the core research team with two members of the interdisciplinary research group will be present for the whole week; and four more of you will join us on Wednesday evening. We are particularly pleased to be able to welcome Prof Linda Woodhead, who is director of the whole AHRC-ESRC Religion and Society research programme, and who has been so supportive of this project.

The context of the enactments

This will be our third exploration of the Lady Mass: we undertook the Christmas form in Bronxville in January, and the Easter form at Salisbury Cathedral in May. In addition seven of us sang Vespers, Compline and *Salve* in Bangor Cathedral earlier this week.

During the week we will celebrate three Masses in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and three services comprising Vespers, Compline and *Salve*. Mass will (unsurprisingly) be celebrated by an all-male team: Vespers will be sung by women as nuns. Apart from issues of gender and aural tessitura, most people will have the opportunity of being both in the chancel conducting a liturgy, and in the nave experiencing a liturgy conducted in the chancel.

The circumstances of each day will vary: a first iteration, a filmed iteration, and then an observed iteration. In addition we expect to be moving the participants on in their engagement, and exploring some modest variants in the conduct of the services (e.g. use of the organ, and Vespers with and without a male chaplain).

Methodologies

At the centre of the research is the question implicit in the project title: what was the experience of worship in late medieval cathedral and parish church? Specifically, through enactment of selected liturgies in selected churches, what can we discern about people, spaces, rituals, texts and objects (both separately and interactively) that we cannot achieve through any other research process?

At the meeting of some of the research group last September, we discussed a wide range of approaches and methods. The research team chewed over the questions of methodology. What seems paramount is to take advantage of the spectrum of approaches that is available within the group of participants, the research team and the research group. When we write this up, we can achieve a diversity of readings of a common body of core material – in contrast to those collective studies which apply a particular methodology to a variety of materials or topics.

My hope is that in addition to specific insights emerging from each methodology, there can be opportunities for methodological interaction – where a finding from one methodology or approach informs another through the link of a common core of research material.

So, in approaching observation of the rituals, dialogue with the participants, and your own reflections and responses, I hope you will come from your own research standpoint with the specific research questions that seem to you most pertinent.

The process of observation, dialogue and reflection

The core research team, some of the interdisciplinary research group, and a significant number of academics and postgraduate students with interests in the field will be present for the whole week: other members of the research group will join us later. That will create three layers of internal and external observation and response:

- (a) those who are engaged in the research activity as participants for the whole week;
- (b) those who are observers of the research activity for the whole week; and
- (c) those who come in towards the end of the week, and see the culmination of the activity, and share in the concluding dialogue and responses.

Our intention on Thursday evening and Friday morning is to divide the participants into small groups in which each member of the research team/research group can conduct their own dialogue with different categories of participants, exploring their own research questions. With 20-30 minutes with each small group, it ought to be possible to garner a range of responses from different experiences of the worship in and out of the chancel.

When the filmed versions of Mass and Vespers have been edited, there will be an opportunity for comparison with the Salisbury Lady Mass and further reflection. There will also be the outcomes of the diaries which we are asking each participant to complete on a daily basis, and any reflections they might offer after the week.

The enactments in June will raise additional questions and challenges to take up in September/October. We also intend to follow up with further practice-led work in Bangor Cathedral when the medieval organ is there between December 2011 and March 2012.

jmh
10 June 2011