

The Bedell/Boyle Lecture 1998

WORD AND SPIRIT

The Bible and Liturgy

The Right Reverend Harold Miller
Bishop of Down and Dromore

Response

Fr. Padraig Mc Carthy

NATIONAL BIBLE SOCIETY OF IRELAND

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INTRODUCTION

The Bedell/Boyle Lecture Series

The National Bible Society of Ireland has inaugurated an annual lecture series known as the Bedell/Boyle Lecture. It is intended that the series will provide an opportunity to promote the Bible and the effective use of the Holy Scriptures. Each year a speaker of stature will be asked to lecture on a topic relating some aspect of the Bible to current developments. It is hoped to publish each Lecture.

The Lecture series is named in honour of William Bedell (1571-1642) Bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh, because of his commitment to the translation of the Bible into Irish. Linked with Bedell's Irish Bible, published for the first time in 1685, is Hon. Robert Boyle (1626-1691) who ensured the publication of Bedell's Bible. Boyle was very committed to Bible distribution and he was a distinguished scientist known for Boyle's Law. Thus key elements of modern Bible Society work — translation, publication and distribution — were foreshadowed by these two men.

In 1998 Lecture was given by the Right Rev. Harold Miller on 27th October 1998 in All Hallows College, Dublin. Bishop Harold Miller has had a varied ministry over the past 23 years. He has been a curate in Carrickfergus, a theological college lecturer in Nottingham, a university chaplain in Belfast and a parish priest in Cork. At present he is Bishop of Down and Dromore. He has a particular interest in liturgy, and is a member of the Liturgical Advisory Committee of the Church of Ireland. Bishop Harold has also been involved in six International Anglican Liturgical Consultations, and is a member of Societies Liturgica, the ecumenical society for the study of liturgy.

The Response was given by the Rev. Pdraig McCarthy. Fr. McCarthy is a priest in the Archdiocese of Dublin and has worked in parishes and in the biblical apostolate for many years. He is a former member of the National Board of the National Bible Society of Ireland.

We are pleased to publish the complete text of the Lecture and the Response and believe that this will aid our reflection and response to the living Word of God in the Holy Scriptures.

Judith Wilkinson

THE BEDELL-BOYLE LECTURE 1997.

WORD AND SPIRIT The Bible and Liturgy

When the National Bible Society of Ireland invited me to give the Bedell/Boyle Lecture for 1998, I have to admit to having experienced a certain degree of trepidation. I do not consider myself a Biblical scholar — simply an often inadequate practitioner in both preaching and life, and I wondered if my subject might only have relevance and interest for Roman Catholics and Anglicans. However, as I thought about it, the title became clear: *The Bible and Liturgy*. Another title, *Word and Spirit* (coming from a phrase used at Lambeth 1998 that our worship should be ‘full of the Word and full of the Spirit’) was added to spice it up a bit, but my title is nevertheless *The Bible and Liturgy*.

Let me lay some simple foundations. As someone in the evangelical tradition, I have a great love for the Word of God. I believe it to be that which calls everything else into being — even creation itself (‘By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made’). I believe it to be active not only in creation but also in salvation (‘The Gospel is the power of God to all who believe, to the Jew first and also the Greek’ Romans 1:16) and I believe it to be powerful in the Spirit’s work of sanctification (‘The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword: piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart’, Hebrews 4:12). I also believe that we need to be careful about any tendency to put the living word of God, Jesus Christ himself, in opposition to the scriptures (‘God’s word written’ as the 39 Articles puts it). The Vatican II *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* puts it like this: (in Chapter 3 on ‘The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture’):

‘Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation’.

But the issue for me today is not really the whole question of the authority of the scriptures, but rather the question of the role of the scriptures in our liturgies. The issue might be focused in a series of questions:

- (a) What is the importance we place on the Scriptures? How do we show that importance liturgically?
- (b) What do we believe is the function of the Scriptures in our liturgies?
- (c) How do we use the Scriptures to form the worship of the church?
- (d) What have we to learn ecumenically in these matters?
- (e) How do we (or do we not) experience the Scriptures as creative and reforming in our liturgies?

On the last of these, I have to confess that most of my experience, reading and thinking is from an Anglican perspective. But it is not possible for anyone interested in liturgy to ignore the vast contribution of the Roman Catholic Church, and in the course of my lifetime I have had a good deal of experience of the other churches in the Reformed tradition and their forms of worship. So let me try to answer some of the questions I have set:

(a) What is the importance we place on the Scriptures, and how do we show it liturgically?

I think three stories will help to let us ‘in’ on that particular area.

The first one is from the United Reformed tradition in England, and the other two are Anglican.

- (i) When I was chaplain at St John's Theological College in Nottingham, we had a famous visiting preacher who was very much in the reformed tradition, and a member of the United Reformed Church. He duly preached at our regular weekly College Eucharist, and at coffee after dinner, discussing the subject of worship, said the following to me:

'After all, what is worship other than preaching? All you need is a good sermon, with a couple of short hymns and a prayer'.

- (ii) A story from a book by Donald Coggan (former Archbishop of Canterbury), called *The Sacrament of the Word*, (Fount, 1987, London). He tells of how, as Archbishop of York, he had to go to a town in the Province of York which had, as its main glory, an ancient church. The incumbent had raised a large sum of money to re-fashion the church and he was to be the preacher at the Eucharist when it was re-hallowed. He writes:

"There could be no doubt that the Church of England was a sacramental church, nor where it was that her children should kneel to be fed. The architect, the craftsmen, the silversmiths, all had given of their best. There was one focus, you could not miss it.

"This is very fine, Vicar", (he continues) "You have done magnificently. Now — you have asked me to preach. Where do I preach from? "They will bring you a little stand, Archbishop, when the time comes'. And they did. A poor, paltry thing it was, liable to collapse if by chance I leaned upon it, the sort of temporary contraption from which any man might have scorned to give out the notices of the week. This was to be the thing from which the everlasting Gospel was to be proclaimed. As soon as the sermon was over, it was taken away into oblivion. And good riddance too!"

- (iii) An experience I had at the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation in Dublin in 1995 of a rite from the church of St Gregory of Nissa, San Francisco. As you would expect, it was different. It was a rite of the journey. We moved around the building, starting at 'the table of the word'. The Bible was carried in (part too of the Presbyterian tradition), placed with ceremony on the table of the word, which was beautifully decorated; the table was censed, the word was read, with particular reverence, of course, given to the Gospel. After preaching and personal sharing of what the readings had said to us, the Bible was carried around the members of the congregation so that they might kiss it, touch it or bow before it, as a symbol of a commitment to be people of the Word.

The question I began with is: 'What is the importance we place on the Scriptures and how do we show it? Let me suggest some ideas partly emerging from those stories:

(i) ***Where do we place the Bible?***

How do we treat it? Is it a thing of beauty? Is there a sense of occasion when it is read? Does the pulpit/lectern/ambo suggest the word is among or above the people? Does it suggest the unity and centrality of the proclamation of the Word, or divide it up? Is there an actual Bible on it, or a Book of Readings?

These are questions to do with liturgical space, and how we lay it out so that it proclaims theologically what we actually believe. The place of the Word is there to draw constant attention to the importance of the Word.

ii) How do we seek out ministers of the Word?

(I mean those who read the Word in the liturgy). It seems to me that we fall between two extremes on this one. In many churches only the ordained minister reads the scriptures except on special occasions. In others, anybody and everybody reads the scriptures, including young children, and often with little preparation. The Roman Catholic Church is well ahead in this area, in training up readers. One of the best books I have ever read on the subject (apart from Bible Society materials, of course), is by a man called John Wijngaards. (Mayhew McCrimmon 1981) called *Reading God's Word to Others*. I can't resist quoting his Foreword, for it puts into perspective what we need to remember:

'In order to be a good reader, we need to know certain facts.
And we need to learn some practical rules and techniques...
However, we would be seriously mistaken if we believe that the practicalities are the most important thing we need to learn. They are not.
What we need most of all is basic insight,
a conviction,
an attitude
that will make our reading genuine from within.
There is a difference
between a well-trained draftsman and an artist,
between a slick salesman and a witness,...
...only life can communicate life....'

(iii) **Preaching:** A whole lecture could well be devoted to preaching alone, and the ways in which preaching either conveys something of the importance of the Word of God or the opposite. I don't think I'm a humourless person, but I have to say that I am really tired of the endless jokes made by clergy against themselves about preaching. They have been shooting themselves in the foot. Nothing is a greater privilege to me than preaching the Word of God. Nothing gets the adrenaline going more. No moment is more holy than the moment of kneeling down in recognition that I am only an instrument of the Holy Spirit, before daring to enter the pulpit. Although I think the premise of the letter is wrong, these words by 'Armagh Catholic, Craigavon' in the *Irish News* on Monday 12 October, rang some bells with me. The letter was on the issue of declining vocations:

'As a result of (the) all-too-frequent celebration of the Eucharist, the priest is denied any opportunity of making a sermon of any duration or importance,
...This too-frequent celebration of the Eucharist by reducing the times devoted to other forms of ministry could very well be a contributing factor in the decline of vocations.
Priests who nourish the laity on the Scriptures...
Will not be in short supply nor will laity to support them'.

Prepared preaching; preaching with the aim of connecting the Bible and life; enthusiastic preaching, preaching with content, preaching with a desire to move our wills so that we become like Jesus, preaching inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God is the key to nurturing a people of the Book and the Spirit.

That leads me on to question (b):

(b) What do we believe is the function of the Scriptures in our liturgies?

Scripture functions in a variety of different ways in the liturgies of the Church. Let me mention several ways, some of which may be almost subconscious in our worshipping.

(i) Scripture reveals to us ‘the whole counsel of God’.

In most of our churches and (I think it would be true to say) in all our denominations worldwide, there is a recognition of the importance of reading the Word of God consistently, thoroughly, in a pattern, in Old and New Testaments, in such a way that we engage with aspects of scripture which we wouldn't necessarily choose to engage with, and have a rounded picture of the nature of God and his work in salvation. There have been several aspects of reading scripture in church which have militated against this:

(a) The use of scripture simply as a foundation for preaching.

We need to re-affirm that the reading of the scriptures apart from preaching has power to convey the Word of God. And the choosing of texts by a preacher on an ad hoc basis is not an adequate foundation for the people of God to get to know and hear together the full revelation of the scriptures.

(b) The use of only Epistles and Gospels in the Eucharist.

This is, of course, now changed to a wider ‘fare’, including Old Testament Reading, Psalm, New Testament Reading and Gospel. The tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland in eucharists before the late 1960s of only reading the New Testament (in Epistles and Gospels) is inadequate.

(c) ‘Blind spots’ in lectionaries. A lectionary is always a selected group of readings, but there are a variety of ways in which such readings for worship can be selected (given that it would be practically impossible to read the whole scriptures through at Sunday worship). In the ‘lectio continua’, much beloved of Cranmer, and embraced again as part of the Revised Common Lectionary (with its roots in the Roman Lectionary), we need to beware of the parts we choose to omit. Cranmer himself had a blind-spot which led to his omitting the Apocalypse; while Luther omitted James, his ‘epistle of straw’; but our present RCL can (e.g.) be inclined to omit passages which do not fit easily with modern feminist thinking, or which may be considered difficult to follow. In the Church of Ireland, we restricted ourselves for many years by using a Thematic Lectionary, based on the Joint Liturgical Group’s work in these islands, but that ‘channelled’ scripture in such a way that we had decided what it was going to say before it said it. One of the functions of the reading of the scriptures is to proclaim the whole counsel of God, insofar as possible.

(ii) Scripture re-tells the story in which we find our identity.

Lectionaries and Calendars are closely inter-twined in liturgical thinking. And, whereas the RCL functions on a ‘lectio continua’ basis for the ‘ordinary’ seasons of the year, our Christian community life is also moulded by the re-telling of the Christian Story between Advent and Pentecost. Here we re-tell and re-live the same story, often with the same readings, at the same time each year. We hear the proclamation of all that is central to our salvation, and we do not simply declare it, but also enter into it. We find ourselves in Bethlehem worshipping with the Magi, at the River Jordan recognising that we too have entered the baptismal water, in the Temple receiving him as our Saviour, in the desert preparing for our ministries, at the Last Supper, in Gethsamene, and so forth, and re-filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. This is more than simply memory. It is anamnesis. We were there when they crucified our Lord. The past and present meet, the feet are washed now and we become not just a people who read the Book, but a people of the Book.

(iii) Scripture gives us God's words which become our words in praise and prayer.

There is, it seems to me, a categorical difference between singing hymns and choruses which are our present-day response — or indeed the response of a past generation — to the Word of God, and actually singing the Scriptures. In most of our traditions this importance of singing the Word is theoretically recognised, but done in such a way that it is sadly often rendered powerless. Presbyterians sing metrical psalms; the Roman Catholic Church sings responsorial psalms; the Church of Ireland uses Anglican chant to sing psalms and canticles and so forth. Singing the Word has a particular impact — if it is done in an engaging participatory way. A song often etches itself on the memory. For example, if I say to a Presbyterian

'I of salvation take the cup'.

or an Anglican

'O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands',

they will immediately know the next line.

We are also reminded, in the singing of the psalms, of a whole gamut of human emotions poured out before God, often in stark and almost offensive language, which no hymn-writer would ever dare to mention, let alone put into words. And of course, the scriptures are recited in response, prayed in prayers and quoted in exhortations in our worship.

(iv) Scripture gives us the basis for the actions we perform.

This means that sacraments are not opposed to the Word, but rather, inhabited by the Word. Let me use the two sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist to illustrate (though the same could be said of other ordinances, actions or lesser 'sacraments' which are performed in our different churches). In Baptism we do not simply use water, we rehearse our scriptural basis for the sacramental use of water each time. We might make mention in our great thanksgiving of the water of creation, the water of the flood, the waters of the Red Sea, the water of Jordan, etc, etc, because it is the scriptural revelation which gives us our mandate to perform this action with this particular element.

At the Eucharist, it is the same. Our actions are the actions of the accounts of the Last Supper, our thanksgiving rehearses our *Heilsgeschichte*, and the words of institution which we repeat are the very words the biblical tradition has passed on to us.

We have looked at

(a) The importance we place on the Scriptures and how that is shown
and

(b) the function of the Scriptures in our liturgies.

Now thirdly, a briefer look at

(c) How we use the Scriptures to form the worship of the Church.

(i) ***'Lex orandi, lex credendi'***. In my lecture so far, I have not mentioned the Methodists. So here, I gladly acknowledge the work of that wonderful Methodist theologian and liturgist, Geoffrey Wainwright, and especially his marvellous Systematic Theology of worship called *Doxology*. He begins chapter 7 of his book by explaining this Latin tag which literally means 'law of praying, law of believing/ and has its roots in an earlier tag by the lay Monk, Prosper of Aquitaine. Wainwright explains the tag in a dynamic two directional (or circular?) way:

'The Latin tag *lex orandi, lex credendi*, may be construed in two ways. The more usual way makes the rule of prayer a norm for belief: what is prayed indicates what may and must be believed. But from the grammatical point of view it is equally possible to reverse the subject and predicate and so take the tag as meaning that the rule of faith is the norm for prayer: what must be believed governs what may and should be prayed'.

I see it in this dynamic way. *De facto* what we sing, read, say and do in prayer and worship is our liturgical foundation (for good or otherwise) as Christian believers. We imbibe our faith as it were by osmosis from it. Equally what we come to believe informs the way in which we worship and pray.

(ii) ***We should be concerned about any proposed single pristine form of 'biblical worship'.***

At many times in my life, I have met people who genuinely believed that their particular denomination or group had found '*the* biblical way to worship'. This was a strong strand within (e.g.) the Christian Brethren in Northern Ireland, with regard to the forms of ministry they used, the way in which the Breaking of Bread was done (weekly, in the round, no priest, open worship, 'believers' only and at 11am!), and indeed was one of the weaknesses of Charismatic Renewal (which saw some parts of the scriptures on worship — which had previously been neglected — as though they were lit in neon lights). In both cases, an element or two of Biblical teaching were rediscovered, exalted to a higher plane, universalised and considered to be of the *esse* rather than the *bene-esse*. But such myopia is not limited to smaller denominations. Naturally, we all feel that our way is the most biblical, or we would presumably take another; rather there are biblical principles, and an excellent biblical agenda for the critical elements of worship in Acts 2:42. As those who come from a variety of traditions we need to be corrected and informed by each other's insights into the same scriptures.

The last two questions which I raised, I will reverse, because we are at this stage getting close to a hint of an answer to question (d).

(d) What have we to learn ecumenically in these matters?

Well, I think we have a great deal. One of the joys of my life has been to discover that which unites believers across all denominational divides. The experience is one of knowing that the dividing wall of partition has been broken down. This does not mean that we agree on everything (any more than the early Gentiles or Jews did), or see everything the same way (any more than males and females do), or have the same experiences (any more than slaves and free did). But it means that, in our myriad experiences of the God who is revealed in the scriptures, as we respond to him in worship, we have a great deal to teach one another. Let me illustrate.

- I am eternally grateful for the insights of Catholics that the word must not only be spoken but vitally acted out in worship (e.g. — in the celebrations of Holy Week and Easter).
- I am eternally grateful for the insights of Presbyterians that sermons must take the text seriously and explain what it says rather than what we want it to say.
- I am eternally grateful to Charismatics who remind me that the Word is not only proclaimed, but applied to our lives by gifts such as prophesy, discernment, tongues and interpretation.

And so, to our last question:

(e) How do we experience the Scriptures as creative and reforming in our liturgies?

That, it seems to me, is one of the questions, which is appropriate for an organisation like the Bible Society to ask. And, more than that, a question which sets the agenda for the work of the Bible Society in future years, as it has done in the past. Let me suggest areas which may 'focus' the question.

(i) The public use of the Scriptures.

In 1989, the Church of England brought out a new 'form' of service, which is increasingly being embraced throughout the Anglican Communion, and which will be recognised in its structure and theological movement by those (e.g.) from a Calvinist background. It was called *The Service of the Word*. Here was an essentially non-eucharistic form of service, which was flexible, adaptable and modern, and which was focussed around a pattern or 'shape'. The shape (in the form later distributed by the Church of Ireland Liturgical Advisory Committee) is this:

- The Preparation
- The Ministry of the Word
- The Response
- The Dismissal

In this form everything either leads to or emerges from the *Ministry of the Word*, which lies at the heart of the Service. Before the *Ministry of the Word*, we prepare ourselves in quiet, in penitence, in worship, in the Collect, etc. After it we respond in creed, in singing, in intercession, in offering of money etc., and as we go out into the world, when (as it says on the back of one church noticeboard in the Diocese of Down and Dromore) 'the worship is over, the service begins!'

With the Ministry of the Word at the heart of worship in this way, it is crucial that it engages fully with the congregation and the congregation with it. And this may well mean proclaiming the word in different, new and challenging ways. I have already mentioned training those who read the Bible in church, and the Bible Society has, from time to time, produced courses and books to help. But I am struck by one or two quotations in the introduction to this service (found in a book called *Patterns for Worship*):

'Consider some of the reasons why reading the Word of God fails to have the effect it ought to have.

1. The readings are treated as if they were boring. This may sometimes be due to the version used, the length of the reading, or the way in which it is read as if it were a duty to be done, and not part of the worship.
2. Partial or unhelpful meanings are imposed on the readings, for example by bad introductions. The readings should be introduced in such a way as to help people to listen together, to reflect on their particular situation in the light of the Word. For this reason we do not think books of 'standard' introductions should be produced'.

It continues:

'Changes in presentation might mean the actual involvement of the congregation, in interjections and responses (or stamping of feet as in the synagogue when the story of Haman is read!). The Congregation can be involved in both drama and dialogue readings. It might mean changing the visual presentation, removing distractions by putting all lights out apart from a spotlight on the reader, or signalling of the fact

that a story is being read by using a Jackanory armchair, or that a proclamation (for example Amos?) is being made by using a soapbox'.

The Bible Society can provide materials and ideas for the public reading of scripture — and of course there are so many versions of the scriptures available (including *The Message* and *The Dramatized Bible*) which can bring the word of God to life. We also need to think of how we introduce and conclude readings, of the use of music alongside readings and of symbol to illustrate the reading of scripture, such as the use of candles in the Holy Week Tenebrae. The Bible readings can also be very powerfully 'linked' to each other by short introductions or conclusions; reinforced by the right hymn, canticle or chorus in preparation or response; and 'earthed' in experience by a relevant word of testimony.

(ii) But there are also resources which the Bible Society can make available which 'link' the word proclaimed in the Sunday liturgy to its application during the week. Let me give three illustrations.

- (a) Bible Reading Notes
- (b) Sunday School and Children's materials
- (c) House Groups materials

One of the benefits we have today is the *Revised Common Lectionary*, which means that (if we follow it) many of the readings used in the different churches are the same — not least the Gospel readings, following the Year of Matthew, the Year of Mark and the Year of Luke. I gather that Scripture Union has been examining the ways in which this can be used in this regard to Sunday School materials. It would be wonderful to think of the children, in their age-oriented 'Ministry of the Word' actually using the same (or one of the same) readings, thus reinforcing and linking in what is happening in church to what happens in Sunday School. But the same could be done in Bible Reading notes, and in House Group materials.

Conclusion

It may seem odd to conclude where we started. But this lecture has not been so much the arguing of a case, as the laying out of some principles and ideas with which, I imagine, we can all agree. The problem we have in most of our churches is not disagreement on principles on the issue of The Bible and liturgy, but rather the question of how we make these things live in our ordinary Sunday worship context. We find ourselves with the eternally life-changing truths of Scripture being presented in our assemblies as though they were of little consequence. A recent survey reported on the religious news headlines suggested that when asked the question 'Do you feel you are in touch with God when you worship?', two-thirds of churchgoers said 'No' in terms of their weekly Sunday worship experience. But you and I know that when we worship both in spirit and in truth, the Holy Spirit of God can inhabit our worship in ways which are comforting, unsettling, energising and even frightening, because the Spirit is the one who makes the Word a light, a flame and a piercing sword changing the lives of individuals, churches and nations. If we can welcome this work of the Spirit and free him to do such a will in our worship we will be blessed indeed.

Response

Fr Padraig Mc Carthy

As we gather in the College of All Hallows, approaching the festival of All Hallows, let us listen to the Word of God from the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12 (New Revised Standard Version):

*You have come to Mount Zion
and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,
and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,
and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,
and to God the judge of all,
and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,
and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,
and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Amen!

That sounds very good, and it should encourage us. But we want to renew another aspect of our experience of Bible and Liturgy.

Here's a second reading. It's from "Teaching a Stone to Talk", by Annie Dillard:

"Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a package tour of the Absolute?"

"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?"

"The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offence, or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return."

Along with the confidence with which Jesus inspires us to approach the Father, we want to recover something of a sense of the wonder and awe — might I say the "awe-fullness!" — of what it is to hear the Word of the living God, to worship the living God. It is something to do joyfully, knowing that Jesus says "Fear not!" It is never something to do lightly or casually. When we gather for our liturgy and when we hear the Word of God, we want to go out marvelling that we have been touched by the living God.

To make a response to what a bishop says may not always be without danger! It may seem to imply that the bishop has not actually said all that there is to be said on the issue. It could even imply that there may even be an alternative approach to the subject which may not be in accord with what the bishop has said!

However, I venture to offer my response, encouraged by two factors:

1. Bishop Harold undertook this lecture in the full knowledge that he would have to listen to a response; and
2. Being of a slightly more venerable age than the bishop, there is a possibility that he may show some deference due to my age, and allow for my idiosyncrasies!

I remember very clearly the first time that the reading of the Word of God in the liturgy struck home with me. It was in the early 50s. We had come home from Mass one Sunday morning. The gospel reading was Jesus telling of the consequences we face if we call our brother a fool. Two of my brothers (there were seven children) started an argument, and one of them called the other a fool. My mother heard the remark, and immediately quoted what we had heard at Mass. The one who made the remark replied "Very funny!", implying that what happened in the church didn't have any relevance to the situation. I remember my mother's words very well. She said, "It's not funny at all!"

I don't remember what the argument was about; I do remember being struck at someone applying the words we had heard very directly to everyday living.

Before attending to the points made in the lecture, I would like to comment on one word. It was used by the bishop just after the start of his talk, when he described himself as "someone in the evangelical tradition". I know that the word "evangelical" is commonly used to indicate a certain approach to faith, church, and scripture. However, I want to reclaim the word in its original meaning, that of having to do with the Good News. To be evangelical is an integral part of being a Christian. To have heard the Good News, to be transformed by the Good News, and to be a messenger of the Good News are inseparable from being a disciple of Jesus Christ. One cannot be a disciple of Jesus without being evangelical. I too am in the evangelical tradition.

Now to the topic of the Bible and Liturgy.

The Bible and the liturgy have an intensely symbiotic relationship. Each has drawn, and continues to draw, life and power from the other.

It would seem that the earliest Christian liturgies of the Lord's Supper influenced the way that we have received the New Testament. We have, for example, the four different accounts of what Jesus said and did at the last supper, reflecting the way different communities responded to the call of Jesus to "do this in memory of me". These also seem to have influenced the descriptions of Jesus giving thanks and breaking the bread for the multitudes, and for the disciples at Emmaus. And, of course, the Scriptures helped form both the church and the liturgy. The earliest Christian liturgies had no liturgical book other than the Scriptures they received from the people of Israel, and the accounts of Jesus and of Christian living which they received from various sources, and which became what we now call the New Testament. The gospels grew, in part at least, from the accounts used in the earliest Christian celebrations and commemorations of Jesus in the gatherings on the Lord's Day, and, when it developed, from the celebration of the Resurrection at Easter.

In all of this, it's good to keep in mind the significance of "remembering" in the Jewish tradition. It's something like when we say "Remember me to your parents". It's not just asking a person to remember me when meeting his or her parents, but empowering the person to make you present to them.

Anamnesis is where we do not just remember something of long ago, but in some wonderful way actually come into the presence of the event and it becomes present to us, so that we experience the blessings of what we commemorate. We do not just hear a word; we come into the presence of the event. The Hebrew word "Dabar", for "word", carries the sense of both the spoken word and the event to which it refers. The sprinkled blood of Jesus was a "word" in the Biblical sense. When Isaac had spoken his words of blessing over Jacob who was impersonating Esau, he could not "take back" the words he had spoken. When Jesus told his disciples "Let your first words be : Peace to this house", he spoke of the experience of the words "coming back to you" if they were rejected.

The experience of the Word of God, and the experience of the liturgy, are so closely intertwined that they are inseparable. As the General Introduction to the Roman Lectionary says:

"The many riches contained in the one word of God are admirably brought out in the different kinds of liturgical celebrations. ... The liturgical celebration, based primarily on the word of God and sustained by it, becomes a new event and enriches the word itself with new meaning and power. The more profound our understanding of the liturgical celebration, the higher our appreciation of God's word. Whatever we say of the one, we can in turn say of the other, because each recalls the mystery of Christ and each in its own way causes that mystery to be ever present." (Paragraphs 3 & 5)

And so to some of the points made by the bishop. I hope you will not be disappointed if I do not disagree with him, but rather reinforce what he had to say!

The first question he addressed was:

What is the importance we place on the Scriptures, and how do we show it liturgically?

When I think of the love lavished on our illuminated manuscripts like the Book of Kells, done by hand, I ask myself: Is it not possible, with all our modern technology, to produce a really beautiful book, at least of the Gospels, for all the churches in Ireland today? Surely we have a sufficient market to make it worthwhile, if we could agree on it? Would it not be a magnificent symbol of the reverence we share for the Word of God in scripture, and for the Word of God incarnate? Think with what joy and reverence a reader would approach to proclaim the word from such a book! Disposable leaflets and booklets have a place, but not for proclaiming to the People of God!

May I mention some of the ways we have in our church to bring out the importance of proclaiming the word:

Before the reading of the gospel passage we pray: *"Almighty God, cleanse my heart and my lips that I may worthily proclaim your gospel"*. As we announce the reading, we make the sign of the cross on the book, and on forehead, lips, and heart, a wordless prayer that the Word will penetrate mind and heart, and be always on our lips. At the end of the gospel reading, we kiss the book, praying *"May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins"*. In addition to these, on solemn celebrations we have a procession to enthrone the book of the Word, and we incense the book as a sign of reverence for the presence of the living Lord speaking to us.

The second Vatican Council speaks of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Then the Council reminds us that, just as when anyone baptises it is really Christ who baptises, so also *"Christ is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the church"*. (Constitution on the Liturgy, Paragraph 7)

The church to which I belong has a long tradition of great reverence for the reserved Eucharist. I would also like to think we would develop some kind of "Shrine of the Book" in our churches, where those who come to visit could see displayed the readings of the day, and borrow and use one of a selection of different Bibles during their visit.

Caesarius of Aries, who died in 543, said in a sermon: (Sermon 78:2)

I have a question for you, brothers and sisters. Which do you think more important — the word of God or the body of Christ?

If you want to answer correctly, you must tell me that the word of God is no less important than the body of Christ. How careful we are, when the body of Christ is distributed to us, not to let any bit of it fall to the ground from our hand?

But we should be just as careful not to let slip from our hearts the word of God that is addressed to us. He will be no less guilty who listens negligently to the word of God than he who by his negligence allows the Lord's body to fall on the ground.

On the matter of preaching, I remember visiting a parish in Providence, Rhode Island many years ago, and was presiding celebrant at a weekday Eucharist. On enquiring beforehand what the congregation would expect in the celebration, I was told that they would be disappointed if there were no homily. This to me is one of the keys to preaching: that the hunger of the people would draw out the very best.

Another image which I like: A professor of homiletics said something like this: "The job of the preacher is to let the Word set him on fire; and then to let the congregation watch him burn!"

The second question the bishop addressed was:

What do we believe is the function of the Scriptures in our liturgies?

He said that Scripture reveals to us the whole counsel of God. This, overall, I believe is true. For good or ill, however, many people experience Scripture only in liturgy. Within the restrictions of liturgy, where we obviously cannot read the whole Bible at every celebration, we may be in danger of putting the whole weight on the liturgy. No matter what our pattern of readings or calendar, we cannot expect liturgy to do everything. Nor, in liturgy, can we explain the whole of Scripture, or even the whole of one passage. But we can provide, by the example of how we approach the Word, the tools and approaches people can use, so that they themselves will be able to approach the Scriptures with more confidence. A lack of confidence, I believe, is one of the obstacles people feel most deeply when challenged to take up the Scriptures and read.

Bishop Harold said that Scripture re-tells the story in which we find our identity.

This is important. Without the living Word, we lose our identity as Christians. Scripture is the written memory of the People of God. In celebrating the Word, we learn the language of how that people experienced and remembered God-events, and so we find ways to recognise and tell the God-events of today. In celebrating liturgy, we are formed by a creative word from chaos to a new creation in Christ.

Bishop Harold mentioned the practice of singing the Scriptures themselves. One vivid memory I have of liturgy is of being in the Pro-Cathedral in Marlboro Street in Dublin on Good Friday for the singing of the Passion, and the majesty of the chant interwoven with polyphonic responses. That was when our liturgy was in Latin.

One of the more recent experiences is of the singing of the Easter gospel, composed by Margaret Daly-Denton. For me this too has a majesty which would make it well worth using. She has set each of the four Easter gospels to music, published by the Liturgy Institute. I have the account of St Luke here on a Veritas tape, and in a few minutes time, I would like to finish by playing this.

The next question addressed in the lecture was:

How do we use Scripture to form worship?

The second Vatican Council says: "*In order to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that sweet and living love for sacred scripture to which the venerable tradition of Eastern and Western rites give testimony.*" (Parag. 24) Without that love for Scripture, we have no hope whatever of renewing our liturgies.

Apart from the liturgy itself, there is another influence on our worship which perhaps we may overlook: the buildings in which we gather as the church to worship. While traditions may differ in this, I believe there can also be a richness of scriptural background too valuable to ignore. I was quite amazed, when I looked around our own parish church in Rathdrum in Co Wicklow to produce a leaflet to welcome visitors, at how much of scripture there is in the fabric of the building.

On the question:

What we have to learn ecumenically in these matters?

Perhaps the greatest handicap is a lack of experience of the normal worship of other Christian communions. A certain number attend special services for the week of prayer for Christian Unity; a lot fewer get to experience the normal Sunday liturgy of another church. This is a matter on which I would like to see significant development. Although people are free to do something like this without any organisation, perhaps during Advent and Lent, local areas could make some such arrangements among themselves to provide encouragement.

The final question in the paper was:

How do we experience the Scriptures as creative and reforming in our liturgies?

As the paper remarked, the readings are sometimes treated as if they were boring; and sometimes partial or unhelpful meanings are imposed.

Dialogue and dramatised readings can certainly be a help here, but they need to be well prepared. Symbols, music, etc. can also help. There are many resources for Biblical education for children and adults.

The people who proclaim the word, however, are the most important factor here, whether singly or as a team. This is the case also whether they are ordained ministers or not. If they themselves have not been invaded by the Word, it is difficult for them to convey the heart of the message. Perhaps we need to think in terms of basic re-evangelisation of those who minister in our liturgies.

I'm sure many of you have heard the story of the famous Shakespearean actor who gave a public recital, which included a very professional presentation of the 23rd Psalm, to great acclaim. And how a totally unprofessional member of the audience asked permission to present the same psalm; this time to even greater acclaim. The actor, on enquiring how this could be, was told: "Well, you see, you obviously know the psalm. He obviously knows the shepherd."

When scripture truly permeates our liturgical awareness, and when worship truly permeates our hearing of the Word, and when both the Word and the Worship permeate our lives, then we will know a true sharing in the heavenly liturgies described in the Book of Revelation.

But perhaps we must wait for the New Jerusalem for that!

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, I would like to finish by playing a recording of the Easter gospel according to St Luke, set to music by Margaret Daly-Denton, and sung here on a Veritas tape by Fr Tom Egan. I have sung it myself on one occasion, to the amazement of some of the congregation!

However, in this different setting, I felt it would be more effective to play this recording to recreate the atmosphere. I do not use recordings during liturgy, but I hope that, on this occasion, our active listening will be for us a true hearing of the Word; and in that listening, may it be true Worship of the risen Lord present among us.