IN NEWNESS OF LIFE
Eucharistic Living

Stephen Platten

'Chairete', *he called in his deep voice, the beautiful Greek greeting,* 'chairete, kyrioi … *be happy*'.

The goats poured among the olives, uttering stammering cries to each other, the leader's bell clonking rhythmically. The chaffinches tinkled excitedly. A robin puffed out his chest like a tangerine among the myrtles and gave a trickle of song. The island was drenched with dew, radiant with early morning sun, full of stirring life. Be happy. How could one be anything else in such a season?[1]

GERALD DURRELL'S *My Family and Other Animals* has been an international favourite since its publication in 1956. This brief quotation suggests why the book touches people's hearts: alongside the humour and Durrell's perceptive reflections about his family and his childhood on Corfu, it is ultimately a celebration of life. It is not an overtly religious book, but much of the narrative captures the same sense of excitement and celebration.

The extract above begins with the Greek word *chairete*. Durrell translates it as 'Be happy'. These same words are encountered in the New Testament. In Philippians 4:4, Paul exhorts his readers in almost precisely the same words. '*Chairet, en kyrio*', he writes: 'rejoice in the Lord'. Durrell's exhortation, from the lips of Yani the Greek shepherd, are less portentous. He simply means 'rejoice, or "be happy", sir!' *Kyrios*, in modern Greek, has come to have a less exalted feel; it has become a term of politeness, almost a part of social etiquette. But anyone knowing the New Testament could hardly fail to respond to the echo of past meanings. Durrell clearly intends a profound sense of

[1] Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004), 75.

The Way, 50/3 (July 2011), 7–22

happiness and thanksgiving that says something about an attitude to life and indeed an attitude to the whole of creation.

Intriguingly, the echoes between modernity and antiquity, between the contemporary culture of the Mediterranean and that of New Testament times, between Yani the shepherd and the life of Jesus, do not end here. For, along with *kalimera*, 'good day', and *yasas*, 'hello', perhaps the most frequently used word in modern Greece, and so in Corfu, is the word *eucharisto*. It simply means 'thanks' and, although it is pronounced quite differently from the word *eucharist*, it is precisely the same word. So, it would not be pressing the meaning too far to say that Greek people (whether they consciously realise it or not) live 'a eucharistic life'. That same resonant word, which stands at the very heart of the Christian community, is on the lips of Greek men, women and children, morning, noon and night. It is one of the keynotes of their culture.

Living the Kingdom

Of course, this is only a start. These are just echoes and resonances. It would be unfair to Durrell to turn his magical book, by sleight of hand, into a Christian classic. Nonetheless, it has set us on the way. For these Greek words take us into the very centre of Christian life down the ages and into the present day. What might they mean for the Christian Church? Both rejoicing and thanksgiving point us to the fundamental Christian description of reality: *all is gift*.

The title for this essay is taken from the Church of England's 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. In the general confession from the Order for Holy Communion, we are called to acknowledge our sins and to repent. Repentance means a radical turning again, and the confession very positively moves on to make us say: 'And grant that we may hereafter serve and please thee *in newness of life*, to the honour and glory of thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord'. Newness of life means a pattern of living fashioned after the manner of the Lord and Saviour himself. It is a life rooted in the revolutionary teaching and ministry of Jesus.

The challenge of Jesus' teaching to his own age lay in his radical acceptance of everyone he met, and also in his similarly refreshing acceptance of the whole of life as 'gift'. Again and again Jesus turns the values and attitudes of the world upside down. This is clear in his response to people. Sinners and outcasts are welcomed unconditionally.

Jesus eats with Zacchaeus the tax collector; he refuses to condemn an adulterous woman—'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her' (John 8:7). His healings often begin with an unconditional forgiveness of sins.

Not only does Jesus proclaim these values, which describe the Kingdom, through his responses and actions; they are also made clear in his teaching, and most obviously in his parables. Luke captures this most vividly in his Gospel. The Good Samaritan acts compassionately almost by instinct; the tax collector beats his breast in penitence whereas the Pharisee seems to claim righteousness as his own. The father in the parable of the Prodigal Son embraces his returning, wayward son; he remembers his son as 'gift' and receives him back in the same manner. Matthew's account of the labourer in the vineyard indicates that justice and reward are just the beginning. In the Kingdom or reign of God, all that we receive is gift and calls out of us our gratitude.

In a christological analysis, this essence of Jesus' teaching and ministry was captured well by James Mackey. The parables, Mackey argues, encapsulate this life of acceptance, giving and ultimately sacrifice. In these unique stories Jesus describes what he also lives. Prayer and the eucharist, Mackey believes, are the ritual and service which stand at the heart of the way of Jesus; and the parables offer a pattern of living. He writes:

> If the experience itself could find words to summarize its impact in a short space, it would say something like this. That life is grace to us, our own lives and the lives of all those we encounter, that all things great and small are gift, the treasure we can at any moment discover, the banquet to which we are all equally invited. That delay must not mar this discovery, nor decline the invitation, for such ingratitude instantly un-graces us; it means too that life is more than bread, more than accumulated possessions; that to realise the true value of someone or something and to discover treasure are one and the same imperative act. That the true value of all that exists is discovered in the unique way in which one values a gift; that we should therefore not crush by grasping, or tear by trying to pull away. The gift has its roots in the giver; like a flower with roots hidden that breaks ground to brighten the common day …. [2]

[2] James Mackey, *Jesus the Man and the Myth* (London: SCM, 1979), 159.

In these few sentences Mackey captures something of what is meant in the New Testament by the Kingdom or reign of God. It is a way of living, uniquely revealed in the life, ministry and teaching, and in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a way of living which is nothing less than participation with Christ and the Holy Spirit in the life of God. It is what Paul describes elsewhere in the New Testament as 'the new creation' (II Corinthians 5:16–17). The reign of God, with the set of responses seen in Jesus, has its own patterning power for all humanity in all ages. This takes us to the heart of the gospel as lived in Jesus. Indeed it has been claimed that: 'It is this patterning power of the kingdom that gives the Church its distinctive character'.[3]

The pattern of the Kingdom, then, is encapsulated in a way of living that receives life and indeed all experience as *gift*. Unexpectedly, perhaps, we find ourselves back almost where we began. Yani, the shepherd, called out: '*chairete, kyrioi …*'. *Chairete* is itself derived from the word *chara*, which means 'joy', and this word is closely related to *charis* which is the New Testament word that we translate as 'grace'. The word *charis* is rich in resonances; it means graciousness, attractiveness, gracious care, or simply gift.

Although he may not have realised it, the attitude to life captured in much of Durrell's book exemplifies the essence of the Christian way. In doing so, it helps us to understand still more vividly what this might mean in our own contemporary world. For the Christian this is what life is like within the 'patterning power of the kingdom'. The pattern is established in Christ, but it is recognisable in Christian lives of every age. Durrell's recapturing of his youthful innocence focuses it perfectly. At root, it is a pattern fashioned by both *chara*, 'joy' and *charis*, 'grace' or 'gift'. All this triggers within the human heart a spirit of thanksgiving: of *eucharist*. That spirit can itself transform lives. The rite that, above all, manifests it is, of course, the eucharist itself.

The Eucharist and Thanksgiving

One of the most vivid celebrations of the eucharist in the world is to be found at Taizé in Burgundy in south-eastern France. The community there witnesses to the life of God's Kingdom in its commitment to

[3] Second Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church* (London: SPCK/CTS, 1994), n.20. Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19930906_life-in-christ_en.html.

Prayer at Taizé

peace and justice. The eucharist issues from that same commitment and also nourishes it. The scene is still more remarkable because of the ecumenical nature of the religious community. From across the world, Orthodox and Reformed Christians, Roman Catholics and Anglicans, Lutherans and Mennonites from all nations and countless ethnic groups receive communion together. The predominance of young people also enriches the picture of Christian community. The action of the eucharist both makes God's *Church* present in the gathering around the altar and also assures all of God's presence there in Jesus Christ.

Fifty years ago, the Anglican Benedictine monk Gregory Dix helped us understand the nature of the eucharist better. Although thought about the eucharist is more sophisticated now, it was Dix who showed the importance of the action and form of the sacrament. This has helped us see that the eucharist is not a static rite, but rather the unfolding drama of the sacrament itself establishes God's presence, bringing us into intimate communion with each other and with God. The proclamation of God's word, the different actions within the liturgy of the eucharist itself, and the sending out all form one integrated whole. At the centre of this stands the great prayer of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is thus not only a synonym for 'eucharist', it is also there in the solemn central prayer said or sung by the president of the rite. This prayer is variously known as the *prayer of consecration*, the

anaphora or the *canon* of the eucharist. Each of these independently is inadequate as a title for the prayer. *Prayer of consecration* can be confusing since the entire sacrament is now seen as one integrated piece of 'eucharistic time'; time is transfigured as we experience 'communion *in sacris*'. Thus to look for a specific moment of consecration is misleading. *Canon* too can be misleading; it means 'measuring rod' or 'measuring line'. It is a mark of authenticity. Once again it can point too sharply to a specific moment when the bread and wine are believed to be consecrated. *Anaphora*, a Greek term, comes from the root verb meaning 'to offer'. It has frequently been used to refer to the whole liturgy, and so is richer in its resonances, but even here the strict emphasis on offering focuses on just one element within a far richer whole. To speak of the great *prayer of thanksgiving*, however, weaves all of these strands together. It reminds us, too, of the meaning of the entire liturgy, and of the way in which the eucharist encapsulates a life patterned by the Kingdom or reign of God. Eucharistic living transforms lives so that all our experience may then be received as *gift*, as *graced* by God in Jesus Christ.

A life patterned by the Kingdom or reign of God

Throughout its entire length, the great thanksgiving prayer makes all this possible in a number of different ways. Often, the prayer begins with a reminder that we are created primarily to offer God thanksgiving and praise. Then the mighty acts of God in Jesus are proclaimed, in thanksgiving for our redemption: Christ's offering on the cross, his passion, resurrection and ascension are remembered and acclaimed. There will often also be specific thanksgiving for the saints and a looking forward to the fulfilment of the coming Kingdom and reign of God. We pray too, in that great prayer, that God's Holy Spirit will sanctify both us and the gifts of bread and wine; here is a further focus on thanksgiving.

Seminal to the prayer is the act of *remembering*—a key part of human experience. Plato believed that all learning was remembering. He pictured our lives as being like a journey from a cave out into the world of reality. In the cave there are only images and shadows, copies or silhouettes of reality. As we journey through the cave towards reality, Plato believed that we learn by having our memory of the divine Forms, upon which we gazed before birth, provoked by signs of goodness and beauty in the world. Learning is thus recollection.

Christian theology is far more rooted in history and in the mighty acts of God than Plato's ahistorical fable. We do remember—but we remember the saving acts of God in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. As we remember them, so God in Christ is present to us every time we celebrate the eucharist. In this, we experience the redemption given by God and we give thanks once again for that redemption and for our communion with and in Christ. Hence every time we celebrate the sacrament at the heart of the eucharist we repeat the words of Jesus, as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and Paul: we do this in remembrance of Jesus. The host and chalice are elevated to remind us of Christ's sacrifice and to signify his presence to us in the eucharist. The great prayer of thanksgiving is then a climax within the sacrament of the eucharist. It focuses the entire life of thanksgiving to which we are called.

Living Eucharistic Lives

We have come full circle—back to living eucharistic lives. But we now see how such lives are rooted in the sacrament of the eucharist itself. This is the place, *par excellence*, where we are formed by the patterning power of God's Kingdom. It is the place where we see, through Christ's own sacrifice, how better to embrace life as gift and to offer ourselves in grace-filled lives. Christ's suffering and death are the culmination of a life of acceptance, of seeing life as gift. The effects of this transformation are seen not solely through the life of the individual. The eucharist is unavoidably a *corporate* rite. Indeed, another reason why the experience at Taizé is so moving and so vivid is the sheer fact of numbers. Often 5,000 or more people, from a great variety of traditions that are normally separated in different churches, come together to receive communion; the sacrament of thanksgiving sends them out to live eucharistic lives, powered by the mystery of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. This means a transformed community alongside transformed individuals, which has its own theological impact.

Even within Christianity there is a tendency to treat earthly principles as absolute. This is one of the tendencies that helps to keep Christ's Church divided. It also stands at the heart of divisions within individual Churches: contemporary problems within both Roman Catholicism and the Anglican communion stem partly from such absolutising. This process makes belief in God as a gracious Creator apparently superfluous; the instincts captured so well in Gerald Durrell's writing are sidelined. Life is

no longer celebrated or seen as *gift*. Placing thanksgiving at the centre of the Christian's faith is an essential antidote to these tendencies. Thanksgiving is not simply an added luxury alongside other modes and moods of prayer. Instead, thanksgiving for life as gift effectively relativises the claims of earthly absolutes. It also relativises the claims of dictators and the prophets of consumerism and other alternative heavens. Eucharistic living is authentic Christian living; rooted in thanksgiving, it cannot avoid seeing life as gift. In Philippians, Paul puts this in context:

> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4–7)

This also places thanksgiving squarely alongside intercession, and reminds us that we *offer* ourselves in prayer rather than simply acting as if we are customers in some sort of vast divine market. John Pritchard, writing recently on thanksgiving, reminds us: 'Prayer is a relationship, not a cashpoint. It is not magic, trying to bend the world to our will. Rather it works the other way round!'[4]

The Triumph of Thanksgiving

We have now seen how thanksgiving is one of the fundamental instincts of the Christian life. We have seen too that the eucharist itself incarnates that principle for us and acts as a focal centre for eucharistic life. It does so both in our individual lives and in the Church, and potentially in the wider community as well. But how is this made effective in the world? One starting point here is balance, in both Christian theology and Christian life and prayer. It is essential for the Christian faith to take seriously the ambiguities of our world and of our experience. For this reason *theodicy* is an essential part of the Christian tradition.

Theodicy seeks to face up to the problem of evil. How, if we believe in an almighty and loving God, do we explain the existence of evil and suffering? What logic can there be for the occurrence of

[4] John Pritchard, unpublished paper.

earthquakes and floods, of painful and crippling diseases? How too do we account for the fallenness of humanity? Christian theologians must answer these questions seriously and responsibly—it was that final question about human fallibility which prompted the exclamation in the Exsultet: '*O felix culpa!*' (O happy fault!). For this fault, the hymn reminds us, helped to win us so great a Redeemer as Jesus Christ.

Nonetheless, it is possible for this darkness, this consciousness of ambiguity within our world and experience, to be overplayed. As Gerald Durrell reminds us, there is a very great deal in which we should rejoice and for which we should give thanks. The encouragement of vocations to the ordained ministry and to religious life, for example, is in itself an individual and crucial vocation. Part of the effectiveness of this ministry of encouragement lies in the ability to point towards the splendour of our world and the remarkable opportunities offered by working with people as a minister in God's Church. Someone with such a vocation must be a eucharistic person, in whom praise and thanksgiving to God for all that we are given are simply instinctive. The instinct of thanksgiving is itself infectious and nurtures many kinds of vocation in a great number of very different people. This is singularly important since the way we live our lives can be self-fulfilling. Complaint directs humanity towards negativity, but praise and encouragement point in the opposite direction. They fill our lives with thanksgiving, and make possible eucharistic living.

The ability to offer thanksgiving does not depend upon having the sort of golden experiences recounted by Gerald Durrell from his Corfu childhood. Looking back to the twelfth century, for example, we encounter Peter Abelard who, through his love for Éloise, suffered untold pain, indignities and tribulations. Out of his suffering, however, issued one of the great hymns of praise still regularly printed in our hymn books and sung in our churches. Translated, his hymn '*O quanta qualia*' begins:

> Oh, what their joy and their glory must be,
> Those endless Sabbaths the blessed ones see;
> crowns for the valiant, for weary ones rest:
> God shall be all, and in all ever blest.[5]

[5] This translation, by John Mason Neale, appears in many hymnals.

Later in the hymn, Abelard is realistic about our trials and challenges, but still praise and thanksgiving are his instinctive response:

> Now in the meanwhile, with hearts raised on high,
> we for that country must yearn and must sigh;
> seeking Jerusalem, dear native land,
> through our long exile on Babylon's strand.

In the verses of this great anthem of praise, Abelard combines our experiences of suffering and joy, and offers them up in an individual and community song of thanksgiving.

A very different example of thanksgiving triumphing over grief and tragedy is found in the diary of Francis Kilvert. Kilvert, an Anglican clergyman in the late nineteenth century, was struck down by ill-health and died when he was just 38 years of age. Two extracts from his diary illustrate some of the responses from another eucharistic life. First of all, there are echoes of resurrection:

> An intense feeling and perception of the extraordinary beauty of the place grew upon me in the silence as I passed through the still sunny churchyard and saw the mountains through the trees rising over the school, and looked back at the church and the churchyard through the green arches of the wych elms.[6]

God's creation was often what awakened thanksgiving in Kilvert's heart. Here he captures well the different and contrasting moods suggested by landscape and weather:

> The afternoon had been stormy but it cleared towards sunset. Gradually the heavy rain clouds rolled across the valley to the foot of the opposite mountains and began climbing up their sides wreathing in rolling masses of vapour …. The Black Mountains were invisible, being wrapped in clouds, and I saw one very white brilliant cloud where the mountains ought to have been …. There was not a flake of snow anywhere but on the mountains and they stood up, the great white range rising high into the blue sky, while all the rest of the world at their feet lay ruddy rosy brown. The sudden contrast was tremendous, electrifying. I could have cried with the excitement of the overwhelming spectacle.[7]

[6] *Kilvert's Diary: Selections from the Diary of the Reverend Francis Kilvert, 1870–1879*, edited by William Plomer (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), 133–134.
[7] *Kilvert's Diary*, 112.

The churchyard at Clyro, where Francis Kilvert was curate

Elsewhere in this same piece Kilvert reflects:

> One's first involuntary thought in the presence of those magnificent sights is to lift up the heart to God and humbly thank him for having made the earth so beautiful.[8]

This reaction is not unusual in Kilvert's writing. It is there despite the harshnesses of life's experience for him. Such instinctive thanksgiving does not negate or ignore the reality of suffering. That would allow the theological balance to tip in the other direction. Suffering, however, which is oblivious to thanksgiving and eucharist, ignores an essential part of Christian prayer.

Another classical example of such eucharistic writing comes, once again, like the writings of Kilvert, from a country rectory in Herefordshire in England. This time the writing springs from the seventeenth century. Thomas Traherne wrote a series of reflections or *instructions* on the Christian life that were later called *Centuries of Meditations*, since they had been composed in discrete collections of one hundred. Traherne was born in Hereford in 1637 and on two occasions—during the

[8] *Kilvert's Diary*, 112.

Cromwellian Commonwealth and after the Restoration of the monarchy—was presented to the living of Credenhill near Hereford. He wrote the *Centuries* when he was 35 years old, just two years before his death in 1674. Traherne gave the book no title himself but, had he done so, it would probably have been 'The Way to Felicity'. Much of his writing picks up the theme of felicity or happiness. He wrote:

> An empty Book is like an Infants Soul, in which any Thing may be Written. It is Capable of all Things, but containeth Nothing. I have a Mind to fill this with Profitable Wonders.[9]

Just one of his meditations might frame the broader message he aimed to convey: 'Are not Praises the very End for which the World was created?'[10] Throughout his *Centuries* this theme remains at the centre. Two more extracts offer something of this mood of prayer and thanksgiving:

> You never Enjoy the World aright, till you see how a Sand Exhibiteth the Wisdom and Power of God: And Prize in evry Thing the Service which they do you, by Manifesting His Glory and Goodness to your Soul …. Your Enjoyment of the World is never right, till evry Morning you awake in Heaven: see your self in your fathers Palace: and look upon the Skies and the Earth and the Air, as Celestial Joys: having such a Reverend Esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels …. You never Enjoy the World aright, till the Sea it self floweth in your Veins, till you are Clothed with the Heavens, and Crowned with the Stars.[11]

> Your Enjoyment is never right, till you esteem evry Soul so Great a Treasure as our Savior doth: and that the Laws of God are sweeter then the Hony and Hony Comb becaus they command you to lov them all in such Perfect Maner. For how are they Gods Treasures? Are they not the Riches of his Lov?[12]

The whole of God's economy for the world, and indeed the universe, is embraced in the mind, heart and spirit of Traherne. The *Centuries* are written to give instruction on how we might begin to pattern our lives after the Kingdom of God. Creation as we experience it at present,

[9] Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 3.
[10] Traherne, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, 159.
[11] Traherne, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, 14–15.
[12] Traherne, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, 19.

our future promised bliss, and also our fellow men and women are brought together within these *Profitable Wonders*. Yet we find a world framed by an attitude of thanksgiving. Prayer flows out into a structure and pattern which fashion human life, both for us individually and in community.

At this point, prayer as thanksgiving is not far from the prayer of adoration or even contemplation; it is integrally related to the pattern of our moral life. We have seen how such prayer helps us to appreciate 'life as gift'. It helps us apprehend that element of grace which is at the heart of the gospel. It thus frees us from ourselves. Iris Murdoch, in both her novels and her philosophical writings, applauds contemplative prayer, since it helps to unself us. This brief extract from her novel *The Bell* is telling. Dora, one of the key characters, is in the National Gallery in London:

> Dora was always moved by the pictures. Today she was moved, but in a new way. She marvelled, with a kind of gratitude, that they were all still here, and her heart was filled with love for the pictures, their authority, their marvellous generosity, their splendour. It occurred to her that love at last was something real and something perfect. Who had said that, about perfection and reality being in the same place? Here was something which her consciousness could not wretchedly devour, and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless.[13]

The answer to Dora's question about perfection and reality is Plato. Plato was foundational for Murdoch, but the same point can equally be made about contemplating, adoring and giving thanks to God. God's perfection takes us out of ourselves, God 'unselfs' us, allows us to embrace life as gift, allows us to live grace-filled lives. It changes the basis of our behaviour, of our attitude to the world and of how we relate to others. This is what Traherne saw in his profitable wonders.

We have increasingly been able to see how thanksgiving as a mode or mood of prayer is positively life-transforming. It lifts us out of ourselves, placing us firmly in the hands of God and within the context of the whole of creation and the wider human community. All of this is brought together uniquely in the celebration of the eucharist. But finally,

[13] Iris Murdoch, *The Bell* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), 190.

then, how can this help us to understand thanksgiving more widely and outside the confines of the eucharist itself? Is thanksgiving transferable to *any* aspect or moment of human life?

Thanksgiving and Prayer

The beginnings of an answer to this question may be discerned in a lyrical section of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Paul writes:

> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes'. For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'. For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment. (2 Corinthians 1:19–22)

Two key points emerge from this brief extract. First of all it confirms our belief that Jesus Christ sets the pattern for the Kingdom, the pattern that fashions eucharistic lives—lives of thanksgiving. Jesus offers himself entirely to God: in Jesus every one of God's promises is 'Yes'. But this leads on to a further corollary: God establishes us and anoints us, giving us his spirit. God thus stands as the ground of our being, as the reason why life is meaningful rather than meaningless.

At the beginning of John's Gospel a similar point is made, but in a very different way. Here God is described as the *Word*. 'Word', however, translates a Greek term which is rich and multi-layered in its resonances. The Greek *logos* is translated in antiquity in a variety of ways: 'word', 'reason', 'wisdom', 'purpose', 'ground'—even 'meaning'. Picking up Jewish classical resonances then, God gives meaning to our world and God is perfectly revealed in Jesus who is also the Word or *logos*.

It is in response to the enrichment of our lives and of our world, as seen in God, that we are provoked into a mood of gratitude and thanksgiving. Jesus lives out a eucharistic life to perfection and from this the eucharist itself emerges. So, in one sense, there is no separate mode or mood of prayer which is thanksgiving. It is the context within which all other prayer is formed, a context of meaningfulness and gratitude for all—even for the trials and sorrows that help fashion our lives. Now we see life as gift. This sets the context for all moods of prayer. *Intercession*, for example, fits into the pattern as we align our

wills with the will of God. *Confession* calls us back to a life of thanksgiving when and where we have fallen away from our grace-filled vocation. *Praise* is the natural expression of this instinct for gratitude and thanksgiving.

There are, of course, moments in individual lives when thanksgiving pours out abundantly in our prayer—from the birth of a child to healing from disease, from the exhilaration provoked by God's creation to deliverance in times of trial. Similarly there are moments for thanksgiving in the lives of communities and nations. Days of remembrance are also times of thanksgiving. Harvest festivals give thanks for the fruits of the earth. In our own life of prayer, it is important to remind ourselves of the instinct for thanksgiving. The needs of our world focused in intercession and the penitence expressed in confession for our falling away can both obscure that ground bass of gratitude for our creation, preservation and redemption by God.

Gratitude for our creation, preservation and redemption by God

One of the new additions to the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England, when it was republished following the restoration of the monarchy in 1662, was the 'General Thanksgiving'. Written by Edward Reynolds, Bishop of Norwich, it became a classic resource for prayer, usable by people of all traditions. At its heart it captures something of the same spirit that we encounter in Traherne, an all-encompassing response to God for everything that we receive as gift:

> We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

Later on, rather like Traherne's instructive *Centuries*, it calls upon us to live eucharistic lives:

> And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Its position, among the occasional prayers and thanksgivings in both the *Book of Common Prayer* and more recent prayer books, means that

it is obscure for many. It is a magnificent prayer, in both its original and its contemporary forms, that frames all life in the context of thanksgiving. It makes all life eucharistic, not naïvely ignoring the evils of the world, but rather allowing thanksgiving to embrace evil as well as good, as a part of the totality of life's experience.

There is another remarkable prayer which does just this. It was found on a piece of wrapping paper in Ravensbrück, the largest of the concentration camps for women. It runs:

> O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us; remember the fruits we bought, thanks to this suffering, our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of this; and when they come to judgment, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.[14]

The Right Reverend Stephen Platten, the Anglican Bishop of Wakefield, has been in ordained ministry since 1975. He has been a member of the House of Lords since June 2009. His interests include reading, music, walking, Land Rovers and Northumberland.

[14] Reprinted, for example, in J. Neville Ward, *Five For Sorrow, Ten for Joy: Meditations on the Rosary* (New York: Church House, 2005), 73.