

Trinity Sunday, June 11, 2017

Solemn Evensong

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 1: *Job* 38:1–11; 42:1–5, *John* 1:1–18; *Ephesians* 3:14–21

When I was rector of a parish with teenagers, I often found myself saying to one or more of them, “I haven’t seen the movie, but I’ve read the book.” Well, right now, I’m reading a book because I saw an episode of the BBC television production of Hillary Mantel’s 2009 novel *Wolf Hall*.<sup>1</sup> I’ve had a copy of it for quite a while. It got such good reviews when it was published. Historical fiction. It’s based on the life of Thomas Cromwell, who would become the minister of Henry VIII who oversaw, among other things, the king’s divorce from Queen Katharine, his marriage to Anne Boleyn, and Anne’s beheading.

If you’ve read the novel you know that it takes a while to figure who is speaking and, often, where—room, place—they are. I’m sure I set it aside because it reminded me of the torture of trying to read William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*<sup>2</sup> when I was in high school. But I liked the PBS program enough to give

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<sup>1</sup> Hillary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> William Faulkner, *Novels, 1926–1929* (New York: Library of America, 2006).

the novel another go and discovered how to enjoy its narrative.

Unlike novels, God's creation and God's creatures live in real time, in real places. Moments of human lives may seem disjointed from expectations and desires, but human lives are a whole. Memory, of course, is a tricky thing—especially childhood memories, that is, memories of events and people before our adolescence years that brings a new level of cognitive ability.<sup>3</sup> But even in us adults, memory is often incomplete.

Hillary Mantel's Thomas Cromwell—who will himself be executed by Henry VIII for bringing Henry an unattractive Anne of Cleves to be queen—is a master of self-control and of knowing what is real about money, relationship, emotions, facts, and power.

He's secretly a Protestant in Henry's catholic England. Because of his position, Cromwell has access to William Tyndale's Bible in English. He knows Greek, too. Mantel has him in opposition to Thomas More,

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<sup>3</sup> <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/10/131030-child-memory-testimony-neuroscience/>, (Accessed 11 June 2017).

who famously opposed the translation of the Latin Bible into English—or any other language.

I grew up with the later King James' Version, where Paul's most famous passage from the First Letter to the Corinthians begins, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."<sup>4</sup> But Mantel's *Cromwell* prefers William Tyndale's earlier translation, "Though I spake with the tonges of me and angels and yet had no love I were eve as soundinge brasse: or as a tynklynge Cymball."<sup>5</sup> It made me remember how tendentious translation was for the Christian West as it moved into the periods we call the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

George Edward Moore was one of the great British philosophers of the twentieth century. I can usually remember two facts about his work from my undergraduate philosophy major. In contrast to the widely popular work of idealists—those who say there are only ideas, nothing is really real—Moore famously held up his right hand and said, "Here is one hand."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1. KJV

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.biblestudytools.com/tyn/1-corinthians/13.html>, (accessed 11 June 2017).

<sup>6</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moore/#2>, (accessed 11 June 2017).

He argued persuasively for the role of common sense in philosophy—and I would add in life generally and especially in religion.

Moore was also known for a paradox, “It is raining but I do not believe it is raining.”<sup>7</sup> One is a statement of fact; the other a statement of belief. When it comes to God’s revelation of God’s self as the Trinity, I find my sympathy for the ambiguity of reality helpful.

My favorite lesson since our observance of Trinity Sunday began last night, is our first lesson tonight, where God asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”<sup>8</sup>

Common sense, faith, hope, and love lead me to believe and not necessarily to expect more certainty as

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Job 38:4.

the years of my life pass, but to have greater joy in trusting what I see and what I believe.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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