

# The 'Difficult Adventure': Bishop Ramsey's Church Catholic and Beyond

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## Introduction

Michael Ramsey is an unusual figure. A convert to Anglicanism from a nonconformist background, he displays an unusual lack of the "zeal of the convert". Instead, throughout his writing and ministry, he points toward a vision of the Church which offers a glimpse of a Church which might be more united and more truly Catholic than any of our earthly expressions of such Catholicity. This article attempts to draw on some themes found in Ramsey's writings which provide a critical challenge to our theology and understanding of Church today, both as Catholics and Anglicans. It is an attempt to ask what some of these trajectories in Ramsey's thought might have for the way we as Catholic Anglicans practise and inhabit both our Catholicism and our Anglicanism, for the sake of the whole of the Church Catholic, and the whole of the Church of England in particular. It is common, when thinking about Ramsey, to regard *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1936) to be the definitive statement of his theological output. Commentators often focus on this work because of its unusual clarity and its prophetic contribution to ecclesiology before the modern ecumenical movement. Paul Avis, in a recent lecture on the place of the Reformation in Ramsey's thought, notes it is rightly regarded as a classic work of Anglican theology. (1) Archbishop Rowan calls it a 'still remarkable book'. (2)

We will unpack some of what Ramsey has to say in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* below, but first I want to give space to some less widely-known writings to illuminate our understanding of Ramsey's famous work, and what he is attempting to do.

## *The Body of Christ*

The earliest publication of Ramsey's I have been able to find, written in 1928, before *the Gospel and the Catholic Church*, reveals him to be a peculiarly critical Catholic Christian. He writes a short article in the second edition of *The English Catholic* entitled '*The Body of Christ – an appeal to Anglo-Catholics*'.

This article stands out both in its own right and in comparison to the majority of articles within *The English Catholic*. Whereas those articles are mostly, but not exclusively, concerned with fabrics and hangings to beautify churches in the spirit of the new liturgical revival, Ramsey stands out as offering a critical challenge to the very claim to be Catholic at all. Here we see some of the seeds of the argument that he will go on to develop more fully in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. Ramsey takes as his starting point 'the fact of the indwelling of Christ in the Christian'. (3) 'Forgetfulness of this fact,' he writes, 'is the cause of much of the chaos in theology today'. (4) Reflecting on this indwelling means that theological positions regarded as "Catholic" are not exhausted by describing the Church as the Body of Christ according to Scripture Scripture: 'while the New Testament emphasises the Catholic truth that the church is the extension of the Incarnation, it stresses also the vital importance of that Faith which is associated with the word Evangelical; for the Indwelling of Christ, which makes possible the Church, is linked to Faith in Him "Who loved me and gave Himself for me"'. (5) Here we see a consistent feature of Ramsey's thought in the way he finds common truth in what are usually regarded as contrasting ecclesial options. He notes that 'faith', more usually associated with positions stemming from Lutheran ideas of justification, is an essential component of what it means to be part of the Church Catholic. He asks: 'Cannot Catholics learn from Evangelicals much concerning Faith and Justification, which, brought within the fuller Catholic life, will lead to a greater realisation of Christ indwelling in His Church?' (6)

Ramsey criticises the neglect of this faith in some Anglo-Catholic circles: 'Much is heard in Anglo-Catholic circles about "the Faith" in the sense of the body of Christian truth; but this use of the word in the New Testament is entirely secondary to "Faith" without the article, the relationship of the belief to Christ Crucified and to God'. (7) It is not doctrinal Catholicism that is primary, but the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, and that faith in Him to which Catholic doctrine attests. Ramsey gives short shrift to those who lose sight of this and take solace in devotional excess. He cites approvingly the criticism of Canon Oliver Quick: 'The interest of many Anglo-Catholics is often fixed so exclusively on the worship, not the doctrine of Catholicism, that they seem willing to adopt the most un-Catholic of doctrines if only it can be represented as affording ground for the external practice of Catholic devotion'. (8)

This leads Ramsey to focus especially on the Eucharist. He is critical of any tendency to isolate the Eucharist within the Church and from the rest of the Christian life: 'The isolation of the Eucharist in piety and doctrine is the way of chaos'. (9)

By focusing on the Church as the Body of Christ, Ramsey seeks to go beyond debates concerning the Eucharist itself by drawing attention to the Church as a whole: 'The Lord Jesus - His Body the Church - the Body in the Holy Communion; perplexities about each one of these are solved by turning to the one before'. (10) Perhaps optimistically, he sees a focus on the Body of Christ as a means to overcome divisions between Evangelicals and Catholics on the nature of the Eucharist: 'The Evangelical stresses the omnipotence of God and fears that the High doctrine of the Eucharistic Presence conflicts with this. The Anglo-Catholic urges that the omnipresence need not exclude the specially vouchsafed Presence in the Eucharistic elements. The cleavage is wide ... for controversialists on both sides omit the central truth that the Church is the Body of Christ'. (11) The rise of charismatic Christianity might suggest that a focus on the role of the Spirit in the sanctification of the Eucharistic elements might provide us with a contemporary version of Ramsey's appeal to unite Catholic and Evangelical.

Finally, Ramsey turns again to Faith as a means to develop a stronger sense of the Church as the Body of Christ across ecclesial divisions: 'The recovery in religion and in doctrine of belief in the Church as the Body of Christ can only come from the recovery of New Testament "Faith". Here Catholics can turn to their Evangelical brethren and learn much.' (12) This in turn leads to a greater emphasis upon the atonement as constitutive of that faith. 'A far greater emphasis upon the Atonement and upon personal Faith as linked to the Atonement is urgently needed to enable a truer realisation of the Church as Christ's Body'. (13) Ramsey seeks to focus on the Atonement as a means for the Church to realise its nature as Christ's Body. We shall see that this emphasis is a key part of Ramsey's argument in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. In this early article, we already see three features that would categorise Ramsey's theological approach, reflected in a dictum he quotes approvingly: 'The truth about something is realised not by considering it but by thinking of what is above it and behind it'. (14)

Firstly, he seeks to see in traditions which are not his own something of value that might be lacking in his. In this case, the role of faith and the place of the atonement in understanding the body of Christ.

Secondly, he is critical of his own tradition and frank about areas in which it has produced a lopsided Christianity. In this case, the excess of theologically-deficient liturgical devotion and an isolation of the Eucharist from Christ's presence in the Church more broadly and in the individual Christian more generally.

Thirdly - and the ground from which the first two spring - Ramsey demonstrates a desire to push each tradition deeper to discover its source beyond itself 'by thinking of what is above it and behind

it'. All three of these are essential components of Ramsey's argument in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*.

### ***F. D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology***

Before turning to Ramsey's argument in *The Gospel and The Catholic Church*, I want to illuminate his theological method by jumping ahead to his *F. D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology* published in 1951 during his tenure as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. In this work, he summarises Maurice's theological method in a way which is illuminating of his own. Ramsey praises Maurice for doing: 'what no dogmatic theologian of his time succeeded in doing, and what few dogmatic theologians of any time have done - he meets other people on their own ground ... he draws out with sympathy the positive principle of each; he acknowledges whatever validity that positive principle possesses and he goes on to show how in each case the positive principle fails to maintain itself as a result of being twisted into a self-contained system. Finally he turns from the partial theological systems with their divisive tendencies, and he asks what are the signs of a 'spiritual and universal Kingdom' which goes behind these systems'. (15) This description of Maurice's theological method is important, as here we see parallels to Ramsey's own theological method of seeking the Kingdom beyond the systems developed by particular ecclesial traditions.

Ramsey's appreciation of Maurice is clear throughout his discussion of Maurice's approach to the distortions of ecclesial traditions. For Maurice, argues Ramsey, 'it is systems which are everywhere at fault, the systems made by the orthodox no less than those made by heretics'. (16) 'The Protestant, because he treats his principles of justification by faith as a shibboleth, slips from faith in Christ the Justifier into belief in an experience of being justified: and great is the fall'. (17)

Ramsey's presentation of the errors Maurice detects in Catholicism bears a striking resemblance to those Ramsey himself asserted in the early article we have discussed above. For Maurice, Ramsey notes, the Catholic has a tendency 'to regard the sacramental system as a mechanism whereby men strive to win contact with an absent Christ, as if to climb up to heaven to bring Christ down, instead of proclaiming Christ to be nigh already to men in their hearts'. (18) Furthermore, Ramsey notes Maurice criticism of Catholicism's tendency 'to substitute belief in a structure of reasoning for faith in Christ Himself'. (19)

In this presentation of Maurice's thought we see echoed two of the keystones of Ramsey's earlier arguments: the primacy of the indwelling Christ, and the mistaken identity of 'the faith' as a body of ideas with faith in Jesus Christ. The latter, he notes, is not just a Catholic tendency but 'the recurring temptation of all whose business it is to reason about their faith'. (20)

Two further themes bear drawing out of Ramsey's presentation of Maurice. Firstly, his approval of the reluctance to reduce Catholic Christianity to a body of ideas, instead insisting on the primacy of baptism for membership of the Catholic Church: 'The Catholic... often speaks as if catholicity meant holding correct opinions, and was not inherent in the fact of our baptism; as if it were a treasure to be won by discipline, and not a treasure already given'. (21)

As Bishop of Durham, in a sermon celebrating the anniversary of Methodism, Ramsey will repeat this insistence that membership of the Catholic Church is conferred by baptism and belief in Christ above any particular system of doctrine: 'All who are baptized in the name of the Blessed Trinity and worship the Lord Jesus are fellow members with us in the Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. Methodists and Congregationalists lie within the Catholic Church'. (22)

Secondly, Ramsey discovers in Maurice a path to Christian unity: 'Maurice shows us the roots of its unity. Things which we commonly grasp in one-sided antitheses, Maurice saw in their undivided

oneness'. (23) We have already seen something of Ramsey's ability to go beyond one-sided antitheses, which will become a key feature of Ramsey's theological approach.

### ***Healing Our Divisions***

In a 1946 lecture Ramsey traces the one-sidedness of all ecclesial traditions to the Great Schism between East and West. Divisions have arisen, he writes, 'from lopsided presentations of Christianity, one sort of lopsidedness often leading to other sorts of lopsidedness by way of reaction. Thus the lopsidedness of Rome in the later Middle Ages led to the lopsidedness of Luther and Calvin, and the lopsidedness of the Church of England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century encouraged the separation of the Methodists'. (24)

Ramsey argues that since the Great Schism no Christian body 'has been able to present the wholeness of Christian and Church life'. (25) There is an inevitable one-sidedness in whatever tradition we find ourselves. For those of us who are Western Christians, Ramsey holds that 'we are heirs of the Schism. It affects us all. It is a part of our own Christian life ... We are Westerners, and there is nothing wrong in this; but as a result of the Great Schism to be Western means to be lopsided, and one sort of lopsidedness leads on to another'. (26)

It is not good enough simply to identify the lopsidedness in each tradition and attempt to ride above them all. Maurice, Ramsey argues, warns of the danger of such attempts: 'There can be something worse than parties - the attitude of those who in their cocksureness at being 'non-party' are naively inventing a new non-party type of their own'. (27) Instead, for Ramsey, as for Maurice, the Church is not to be found in the perfect system of ideas liberated from particular weaknesses of ecclesial tradition, but in the act of God who creates and sustains it. (28) The divisions in Christ's Church are not so much for Ramsey the existence of particular denominations, however scandalous he finds the existence of such denominations; the real division lies between different lopsided ways of presenting the Christian faith. (29)

Preaching in Oxford in 1947, he reiterates this theme: 'The real and significant cleavages are not between this and that "denomination", but between distinctive sorts of Christianity, each of them a parody of the fullness of the Biblical and Apostolic faith'. (30)

In this sermon, Ramsey identifies three such dominant types: classical Protestantism, Western Catholicism, liberalised religion. Given the rise in charismatic Christianity over the last century, we should probably add charismatic Pentecostalism as a fourth such type. Each of these types has 'clung to some elements in the primitive pattern, and yet has distorted those elements by severing them from others. The result is that the inner unity of the Christian tradition is divided, and all our systems represent sadly battered versions of the fullness of the Gospel and the Church'. (31)

Ramsey points to strengths and weaknesses in each type. He notes, for example, Catholicism's rich spiritual fruits and tenacious witness to the supernatural, 'yet the errors of the Middle Ages die hard, and linger even in those who are most sure they have repudiated them ... The common identification of the Church with the Kingdom of God, and a forgetfulness of the subjection of the Church to the Word by which it is judged, have been the most fruitful causes of distortion'. (32)

For Ramsey, the challenge of Christian unity runs deeper than the reconciliation of particular denominations. It is these more fundamental distinctions between types of Christianity that lie at the root of the disunity of the Church: 'It is these deep, sometimes hidden, schisms in the unity of the Christian truth that lie beneath our palpable ecclesiastical schisms. The former do not correspond directly to the latter, and they often cut across them - but they are the root cause. And perhaps it is because of these deep wounds in the integrity of the tradition that our surface problems of polity and order have become confused, futile, stubborn'. (33)

A note of caution is needed here. Ramsey is not suggesting that the task for Christian unity is to seek a purified or renewed uniformity of the type of Christianity we all profess. He recognises that there is a need for variety in theological approach: 'Of course there must be big varieties in theological outlook and religious ethos: uniformity is inconceivable and wrong'. (34) Ramsey is also not suggesting a return to a pre-division or pre-schism form of Christianity as the solution: 'We need to be aware of a sort of archaism, an idea that we can reconstruct the past. The reunion of the future may include new things as well as old, with fresh understandings won from the trials of the centuries'. (35)

What is needed, according to Ramsey, is something deeper. We see here again the importance of going above and beyond the surface of our traditions in Ramsey's theological method. 'We must go behind our divisions in the quest of something of which our several systems are distorted representations'. (36)

He continues: 'The negotiation of unity must be part of a deep movement, within all our bodies, towards realising our distortions and correcting them in the light of the primitive pattern.' (37)

It is worth noting the shape of the primitive pattern to which Ramsey alludes: 'the Scriptures, the Creeds, the Sacraments of the Gospels, the historical episcopate - as the ground whereon Christians can unite'. (38) This pattern is the same as the signs of the spiritual kingdom Ramsey finds in Maurice: 'the marks of the society, founded by God, wherein God may deliver us from the bondage of man-made schemes of religion'. (39)

Ramsey's vision is bold. In calling all Christian traditions to realise their distortions and correct them in the light of this pattern, he asks 'If we all dare, in doing this, to be drastic with ourselves, what fresh possibilities of understanding may not lie before us?' (40) He does not shy away from the implications of this for his own tradition: 'If we Anglicans are commending episcopacy to others, does it not behove us to spare no pains in correcting our own practice of episcopacy in England?' (41) To understand what Ramsey might be calling us to here, we now need to turn to his argument in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*.

### ***The Gospel and the Catholic Church***

We can now finally turn to *The Gospel and The Catholic Church*, written in 1936, when Ramsey was in his early thirties, as Sub-Warden of Lincoln Theological College. The death and resurrection of Christ are central to Ramsey's argument as a whole. He claims that 'the meaning of the Christian Church becomes clearest when it is studied in terms of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ'. (42) His subject is the relationship of church order to these central events of the Christian faith: 'The Church's outward order expresses its inward meaning by representing the dependence of the members upon the one Body, wherein they die to self.' (43)

The work as a whole is an attempt to further Christian union by getting beyond divides between those concerned with Catholic order and those who lack a concern with such order in the proclamation of the Gospel. Ramsey attempts to 'study the Church's order not in institutionalist terms but in terms of the Gospel, and to ask (to give but one example) whether Episcopacy tells of some aspect of the Gospel which would lack expression if Episcopacy were to be abandoned.' (44) We can already see two features of his argument in the early article of 1928 replicated here. Firstly, his focus on the death and resurrection of Christ reinstates the Atonement as central. Secondly, by attempting to demonstrate Catholic order through the Atonement and proclamation of the Gospel, he is attempting to get beyond a dispute about the historic episcopate and to seek a deeper more fundamental unity concerning the events and consequences of Christ's passion. Ramsey expounds the doctrine of the Church and its order 'not primarily in terms of an institution founded by Christ,

but in terms of Christ's death and resurrection, of which the one Body, with its life and its order, is the expression'. (45)

Christ's death does not play merely a theoretical role in Ramsey's ecclesiology. He introduces other approaches to Christian unity, which might be categorised as theological, political and philanthropic and notes that the Church for ever points beyond each of these to the death of Christ. (46) The Church confronts each of these approaches with the death of Christ: 'The dying is a stern reality; theologian, reunionist, philanthropist learn that their work and their ideal is, in itself and of itself, nothing. But all that is lost is found; and the Cross is the place where the theology of the Church has its meaning, where the unity of the Church is a deep and present reality'. (47)

For Ramsey, the death of Christ constitutes the Church: 'Here then is a complete setting forth of the meaning of the Church; the eternal love of Father and Son is uttered in the Christ's self-negation unto death, to the end that men may make it their own and be made one. The unity in a word means death. The death to the self *qua* self, first in Christ and thence in the disciples, is the ground and essence of the Church'. (48) He finds this demonstrated in II Corinthians 5.14: 'One died for all, therefore all died. To say this is to describe the Church'. (49)

Key to understanding Ramsey's insight here is how he understands this death. The death of Christ is not for Ramsey an event in the past simply to be believed in. It is a present reality with which the Christian identifies. 'The Church is a scene of continual dying.' (50) Christians are 'to be identified with Christ's death in such a way that they think of themselves no longer as separate and self-sufficient units, but as centred in Christ who died and rose again ... as the inclusive head and centre of a new humanity, wherein a new creation of God is at work.' (51)

The Church's identity in the death of Christ therefore has consequences in the life of the Christian. 'By his place in the Body the Christian finds the Gospel of death and resurrection active around and through him. To "believe one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" is to die to self.' (52) This death of self is true not only of individual Christians, but also for groups within the wider Christian church: 'Each group of Christians will learn its utter dependence upon the whole Body... By its dependence upon the Church of history it will die to self-consciousness and self-satisfaction.' (53) Instead, both individual Christians and their various groupings come to realise that the gifts that they possess 'belong to the Body, and are useful only in the Body's common life.' (54)

We can push Ramsey's insight further than he himself does. The various groupings, denominations, ecclesial traditions of which we are a part are called to submit themselves, as we all are, to this continual process of death to self. Only then do the gifts that we possess as Anglicans or Catholics come to fruition, when they are shared fully in the body's common life. Of course, the history of the Church has been that individuals and groups within the Church prefer to live to self than to submit themselves to the death Ramsey enjoins.

It is here that Ramsey claims that the historic episcopate and Catholic order are the best means to transcend individualism or the self-satisfaction of different ecclesial factions and traditions. Firstly, he recognises, as suggested above, that it is not necessarily the episcopate as it currently exists but freed of certain corruptions: 'The centralisation of the Papacy, the turning of Bishops into "prelates", the obscuring of their meaning by the outward divisions of Christendom have all tended to conceal the true place of the Bishop in the Church and in the Gospel, and his true character as a Father in Christ. Stripped of alien excrescences the episcopate will stand out, not as something "Anglican" or "Roman" or "Greek" but as the organ of the one people of God before and behind all that is local or sectional.' (55) Ramsey sees the episcopate as the potential means to go behind and beyond the divisions between different forms of Christianity.

Secondly, Ramsey sees Catholic order, including the historic episcopate, as the best means of being freed to live out the Gospel in light of the death and resurrection of Christ: ‘Catholicism is not a burden upon the mind of the thoughtful Christian but rather the means whereby he can be free. For it frees him from partial rationalisms, such as have identified Christianity with the Bible or with some scholastic system or with some humanistic shibboleth; and it delivers him into an orthodoxy which no individual and no group can possess, since it belongs only to the building up of the one Body in love.’ (56)

Ramsey’s appeal to unity around Catholic Christianity, including the historic episcopate, as a means of liberating all forms of Christianity is an expression of an argument he makes in a later sermon: ‘We are apt to think that tradition is inevitably a thing which enslaves and holds in bondage. In truth, tradition can be a gloriously liberating thing for us. It frees us from the dominance of some passing fad or fashion or enthusiasm; it liberates us into a larger realm wherein we are free from the tyranny both of today and of yesterday. Consider for a moment the Apostles’ Creed, the classic document of Christian tradition. It binds you indeed to a pattern of words and images; but it liberates you from current ideologies in to a large perspective wherein saintly men and women of every age have lived in glorious freedom.’ (57)

Whilst discussing *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Rowan Williams articulates Ramsey’s insight into the dangers of treating the structure of the Church as incidental: ‘If we are left to devise our own structuring for the communal organism of the Church, if this is a matter incidental or indifferent for the real identity and integrity of the Body, does this not suggest that there is, so to speak, some bit of our unreconstructed individual ego-existence that remains untouched by incorporation into Christ; and thus that an element of concern about ‘works’, in Luther’s terms, finds its way back into theology?’ (58) Instead, Williams notes that ‘accepting the historical thereness of the Church prevents us from the kind of reinvention of the Church that throws all the emphasis upon our needs and our judgement.’ (59)

Williams argues that Ramsey in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* is trying to demonstrate ‘a radical connection between ecclesiology and justification by faith.’ (60) Ramsey is, Williams notes, ‘in effect saying that justification by faith really requires something like apostolic succession if it is not to slip into fresh distortion.’ (61) Here we see again Ramsey attempting to find unity in Christian expression, by going above and beyond particular Christian expressions to a common and more fundamental source.

Therefore, we can see Ramsey attempting to hold together two Christian expressions which are ordinarily held in tension: Catholic order and justification by faith. We can see this holding of what seem to be contrary positions reflected in Ramsey’s understanding of what God achieved in Christ.

In a much later address on the Christian concept of sacrifice, Ramsey will note how Christ transcends what are usually held to be opposites of offering and kingship: ‘In the fusion of images we see the distinctively Christian thing. Nothing remarkable in anybody offering sacrifice; nothing very remarkable in the concept of kingship: the fusion of the two *is* remarkable.’ (62) Ramsey resists ‘fitting Jesus Christ into pre-existing concepts, but rather letting our view of the pre-existing concepts be twisted round by the fact of Jesus Himself.’ (63)

Christ is central to Ramsey in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* not as distorted by this or that existing ecclesial tradition, but in the reality of His death and resurrection which stands above and beyond all such traditions. This stands as an example of Ramsey’s encouragement to let our view of pre-existing concepts be twisted round by the fact of Jesus Himself. We can summarise Ramsey’s argument in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* as follows: all Christians and Christian traditions must share in Christ’s death and die to self. In doing so, they will find themselves incorporated into

the Body of Christ, the Church, in a form devised not by a particular tradition but by God Himself. This ecclesiology is demanding. It is not a one-off covenant of Christian reunification. Rather, it requires we constantly conform ourselves to the death of Christ which Ramsey has identified as the Church's centre. Williams notes: 'There's the problem, of course: it is more attractive to go in quest of the real Church than to seek for the pattern of cross and resurrection in the heart of where we happen to find ourselves. But Ramsey implicitly warns us that the quest can be a way back to the self-defining and self-protective religious institution that always distorts or stifles the Gospel. Somewhere in this is a very substantial paradox – that the harder we search for a church that is pure and satisfactory by our definition, the less likely we are to find it.' (64)

### ***The Charismatic Christ***

Finally, we can turn to two late addresses given by Ramsey published in 1974 as part of a short edited volume entitled *The Charismatic Christ*. Here Ramsey not only reflects on his earliest book, but also has much of value to say as we attempt to tie the threads of our exploration together. This volume is written against the backdrop of the emergence of charismatic Christianity as an influential form of Christianity within the wider Church. In these talks, Ramsey outlines how to approach to such new and distinctive trends within the Church: 'we learn from contemporary movements and are humbled by them as we try to preach a Jesus who is greater than any of them.' (65)

Ramsey's search for Christian truth beyond the distortions of competing ecclesial traditions continues in *The Charismatic Christ*. 'The true Jesus', he argues, 'will lead people beyond Jesus movements, beyond a Jesus cult, beyond Jesus worship, to the Father and the worship of the triune God ... If we are faithful to the Gospels we shall never see Jesus as Himself the goal or end. He will always lead us beyond Himself.' (66)

For Ramsey, being confronted by Jesus presents two challenges. The first is to consider whether it is really the true Jesus we are meeting: 'When we look at the conventional orthodox piety of our own church we have to ask, "Is this the real Jesus?" So, too, our own preaching and teaching invite the same question, "Is it the real Jesus whom we preach?"' (67) The second is the challenge to think: 'Every man confronted by Jesus is challenged to think ... Men are to worship with their minds. No presentation of Jesus is true to Him which evades the obligation of thought or seeks to stifle the mind with fundamentalism.' (68)

More importantly for our purposes is Ramsey's treatment of charismatic gifts. Just as Ramsey attempted to bring together Catholic order and justification by faith in a previous generation, so here he attempts to find common ground between Catholic order and charismatic gifts in a way that gets beyond both: 'Where exciting charismata are seen, there is the Spirit; but where hard work is done with cheerful and unexciting perseverance, where sorrow and pain are born with quiet fortitude, where scholars pursue the truth with patience, where contemplatives serve us all by praying with a love beyond our own experience, here too is the Holy Spirit, here too is the charismatic Christ.' (69)

In *The Gospel and The Catholic Church* Ramsey sought to demonstrate that justification by faith requires a form of apostolic succession, so in *The Charismatic Christ* he argues that charismatic Christianity and Catholic order belong together: 'for it is by all of them that the Spirit glorifies Christ. And among the gifts there is the gift of "order", order not in the sense of restriction or regimentation but in the sense of the pattern of a free and disciplined common life.' (70) He once again finds the positive in these distinct approaches and finds that they need each other for these positives to be fully realised.

Ramsey returns once again to the primitive pattern of early Christianity and notes that 'the Church needed both a tradition of rite and teaching that witnessed to Christ's words and acts in history and

also an openness to the actions of the Holy Spirit in particular situations, challenging, interpreting, commanding ... If it relied on the vertical action of the Holy Spirit alone, the Church might be misled through forgetting the total stream of Christian experience and the basic truth of Christ once revealed in history. But if it relied on the horizontal tradition alone, the Church could let its hold upon basic truth become fossilised through missing the Spirit's challenge to new perceptions and new actions.' (71)

Ramsey's essential message is that the gifts given to different parts of the Church belong together: 'The different experiences of devotion to Jesus – Evangelical, liberal, ecstatic, political - all need one another, for while Jesus rejects none who invoke His name He would have all grow in His truth and His obedience. They all belong together ... while the liveliness of new movements rebukes the traditional churchman, the latter has access to something apart from which the new movements would never exist at all.' (72) Here we see Ramsey articulating for a new generation with a new set of Christian divisions the essential argument we have been tracing above: that whatever our tradition, we possess elements of a distorted truth unless the truths we possess are united in Christ's death and share in that more fundamental truth beyond our particular expression.

In this new climate, Ramsey revisits the argument set forth in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* nearly forty years later. He reaffirms the argument he made there but notes how he 'would not now press the metaphor of *structure* in the same way, for the language of structure is but one among several metaphors for the Church.' (73) He finds the givenness of Catholic order speaks not so much of what the Church might be in the present as to what the Church might be in the future: 'The sacramental order of the Church witnesses to its historical givenness and witnesses also to its growth toward a future plenitude when, partly within history and partly beyond history, the Church will become perfectly what it is already.' (74) Ramsey reasserts the importance of Catholic order for properly realising the gifts given to respective ecclesial traditions for the building up of the body of Christ, whilst recognising the truth present and gifts being given to the Church through traditions which do not yet realise the gift of such order. He states 'We cherish the historic norms of Catholicity in scripture, creed, sacrament and apostolic succession; but we cherish them not as the walls of an enclosed fortress but as gifts of God for the building up on the Church in unity and in truth.' (75)

For Ramsey, Catholic order is an essential gift in the realisation of what it means to be fully Church. Crucially, Ramsey calls us to strive to reach out beyond our ecclesial silos and traditions to seek the fulness of Christ beyond such divisions. To do so is to embrace the death which he called us to undergo in *The Gospel and The Catholic Church*. In *The Charismatic Christ*, Ramsey describes this essential process as 'a difficult adventure ... but it is not an adventure that can imperil our souls. No; our souls would be imperilled if we were content either to rest within a static structure of tradition or to be swept into some enthusiastic movement of the day, without relating it to the larger world of Catholic truth and life.' (76)

Thus we can summarise Ramsey's contribution to our ecclesiology and the prospects for Christian unity as a call to set out on this difficult adventure and to ask ourselves what gift is the Church being given through us and through traditions of which we are not a part. Ramsey challenges us to put aside the sniping and cynicism with which it is all too easy to paint those in traditions that are not our own. Instead, following Maurice, he challenges us to articulate first what is positive in those traditions, and what the whole Church gains from them. More painfully, Ramsey challenges us to conform our ecclesiologies as well as ourselves to the life-giving death of Christ, and to ask what aspects of our distorted inheritance must die in order for the gifts which God is giving to the Church through us to be realised for the whole. In doing so, Ramsey believes that we might arrive at a truth more fundamental than that represented by our particular traditions and so allow the Church to be more fully realised as the Church beyond such divisions which God is calling us to be.

Ultimately, Ramsey finds such a notion of Church foreshadowed in the Eucharist. His first article ended by inviting us to recognise Christ's presence in us and taking us to the Upper Room where Jesus gave us the Eucharist, reminding us that 'questions as to "How" and "Whither" are unanswered; the disciples must first know that Jesus is the Way.' (77) Towards the end of his life, in *The Charismatic Christ*, Ramsey invites us once again to the upper room. He finds in the Eucharist the place where all our divisions and distortions are united, where lopsided presentations of Christianity 'are united and the fragmentary insights and apprehensions of Christians are joined in one. Here the new militant is given the humility with which alone his warfare will be Christian, the activist is called to silence for a space to contemplate his saviour, the new mystic is shown the goal of his quest, and all of us celebrate the sorrow and the joy of Jesus in the glory of the triune God.' (78)

## Notes

- 1 Avis, P., *Michael Ramsey and the Reformation: a lecture given to the Anglo-Catholic History Society at St Clement Danes, London, on 12th June 2017* (London: Anglo-Catholic History Society, 2017)
- 2 Williams, R. 'Lutheran Catholic - A lecture given in Durham Cathedral by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Michael Ramsey (Tuesday 23rd November 2004)' available at <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/2102/ramsey-lecture-durham-the-lutheran-catholic> [accessed 4th July 2019]
- 3 Ramsey, A. M., 'The Body of Christ - An Appeal to Anglo-Catholics' in *The English Catholic: the Quarterly Gazette of the Anglican Society* (Vol 1.2, Summer 1928) 20 - 24, 20
- 4 Ramsey, 'Body', 20
- 5 Ramsey, 'Body', 20
- 6 Ramsey, 'Body', 23
- 7 Ramsey, 'Body', 20
- 8 Quick, O. C., *The Christian Sacraments* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1927) 222; Ramsey, 'Body', 22
- 9 Ramsey, 'Body', 22
- 10 Ramsey, 'Body', 21
- 11 Ramsey, 'Body', 22
- 12 Ramsey, 'Body', 22
- 13 Ramsey, 'Body', 23
- 14 Ramsey, 'Body', 20
- 15 Ramsey, M., *F. D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1951) 27 - 28. Ramsey is referring here to Maurice's method in Maurice, F. D., *The Kingdom of Christ, or Hints to a Quaker, Respecting the Principles, Constitution and Ordinances of the Catholic Church* (London: Gilbert & Rivington, 1842).
- 16 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 29
- 17 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 29
- 18 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 29. cf. Ramsey, *Body*, 20: 'The Body of Christ, the Indwelling Christ and the Indwelling Spirit, not as "ideas" to which "we ascend" but as facts within us'.
- 19 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 29
- 20 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 29
- 21 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 33
- 22 Ramsey, M., 'The Methodists and the Church of England' in Ramsey, M., *Durham Essays and Addresses* (London: SPCK, 1956) 69 - 73, 70
- 23 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 113
- 24 Ramsey, M., *The Church of England and the Eastern Orthodox Church: Why Their Unity is Important* (London: SPCK, 1946) 4
- 25 Ramsey, *Eastern Orthodox*, 4
- 26 Ramsey, *Eastern Orthodox*, 6
- 27 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 33
- 28 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 33: 'The Church is defined by the acts of God which create and sustain it, systems are defined by the opinions held by their upholders: the difference is a radical one'.
- 29 Ramsey, 'Methodists', 70: 'Divisions are divisions between brethren in Christ. It is because of this that our divisions are so scandalous, and the existence of "denominations" is scandalous'.
- 30 Ramsey, M., *The Healing of Our Divisions. A Sermon Preached before the University of Oxford on April 27, 1947* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1947) 6
- 31 Ramsey, *Healing*, 7. In a set of lectures given his retirement, Ramsey notes that such distortions strip the Gospel of its dynamism: 'Through the centuries the living past has been realised in Christian experience, for it is the work of the Holy Spirit to reproduce it in its dynamic power. But it has been all too easy for the perversity of Christians to twist it into being a past that can be even deadening rather than creative... It is possible to cling to particular aspects of the apostolic experience and language so as to miss the larger context in which these aspects are a part... In all these ways the devotion of Christians to the past may miss the dynamism of its living character'. [Ramsey, M., *Jesus and the Living Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 8 - 9]
- 32 Ramsey, *Healing*, 7
- 33 Ramsey, *Healing*, 7

- 34 Ramsey, *Healing*, 8
- 35 Ramsey, *Healing*, 8
- 36 Ramsey, *Healing*, 8
- 37 Ramsey, *Healing*, 11
- 38 Ramsey, *Healing*, 8
- 39 Ramsey, *Maurice*, 27
- 40 Ramsey, *Healing*, 11
- 41 Ramsey, *Healing*, 11
- 42 Ramsey, M., *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1936) (Second Edition) (London: Longmans, 1955), vi
- 43 Ramsey, *Catholic*, vi
- 44 Ramsey, *Catholic*, vii
- 45 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 7
- 46 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 9
- 47 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 9
- 48 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 25 - 26
- 49 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 27
- 50 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 41
- 51 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 32
- 52 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 45; cf. Ramsey, *Catholic*, 38: "'Individualism" therefore has no place in Christianity, and Christianity verily means its extinction. Yet through the death of "individualism" individuals find themselves; and through membership in the Body the single Christian is discovered in new ways ... the self is known in its reality as a self when it ceases to be solitary and learns its utter dependence, and the "individuality" of Christians, with all its rich variety, springs from the death and resurrection in the Body which is one'.
- 53 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 44
- 54 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 44
- 55 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 84
- 56 Ramsey, *Catholic*, 135
- 57 Ramsey, M., 'Hugh James Rose' in Ramsey, M., *Durham Essays and Addresses* (London: SPCK, 1956) 110 - 114, 112
- 58 Williams, 'Lutheran Catholic'.
- 59 Williams, 'Lutheran Catholic'.
- 60 Williams, 'Lutheran Catholic'.
- 61 Williams, 'Lutheran Catholic'.
- 62 Ramsey, M., *Sacrifice and Spirit* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2005); originally published as *The Christian Concept of Sacrifice* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1974)
- 63 Ramsey, *Sacrifice and Spirit*, 7
- 64 Williams, 'Lutheran Catholic'.
- 65 Ramsey, M. et al., *The Charismatic Christ* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 16
- 66 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 16, 24
- 67 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 19
- 68 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 25 - 26
- 69 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 31 - 32
- 70 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 32
- 71 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 42
- 72 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 32
- 73 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 43
- 74 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 43. He makes the same criticism of an eschatological deficiency in Ramsey, *The Living Past*, 84 - 85.
- 75 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 44
- 76 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 44
- 77 Ramsey, 'Body', 24
- 78 Ramsey, *Charismatic*, 50