

Generous Orthodoxy - Doing Theology in the Spirit

When St Mellitus began back in 2007, a Memorandum of Intent was drawn up outlining the agreement for the new College. It included the following paragraph:

“The Bishops and Dean of St Mellitus will ensure that the College provides training that represents a generous Christian orthodoxy and that trains ordinands in such a way that all mainstream traditions of the Church have proper recognition and provision within the training.”

That statement reflected a series of conversations that happened at the early stages of the project, and the desire from everyone involved that this new college would try in some measure to break the mould of past theological training. Most of us who had trained at residential colleges in the past had trained in party colleges which did have the benefit of strengthening the identity of the different rich traditions of the church in England but also the disadvantage of often reinforcing unhelpful stereotypes and suspicion of other groups and traditions within the church. I remember discussing how we would describe this new form of association. It was Simon Downham, the vicar of St Paul's Hammersmith who came up with the idea of calling it a “Generous Orthodoxy”, and so the term was introduced that has become so pivotal to the identity of the College ever since.

Of course, Simon was not the first to use the phrase. It was perhaps best known as the title of a book published in 2004 by Brian McLaren, a book which was fairly controversial at the time. He wasn't the first to use the phrase either. Most scholars trace it back to the work of Hans Frei, a theologian at Yale Divinity School in the 1970s and 80s, who in turn often credited the idea, if not the phrase, to the work of a previous scholar at Yale, under whom he had studied, Prof. Robert Calhoun, and his unpublished lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine.

The phrase comes in an article written by Frei in 1987 as a response to another article written by the evangelical scholar Carl Henry. In the article Frei writes *“my own vision of what might be propitious for our day, split as we are, not so much into denominations as in two schools of thought, is that we need a kind of generous orthodoxy which would have in it an element of liberalism, and an element of evangelicalism. I don't know if there is a voice between these two, as a matter of fact. If there is I would like to pursue it.”*

The reference to liberalism must be understood quite carefully. Frei does not mean by this the habit of thought that takes the general opinion of a particular culture as normative, and sees the task of the theologian as to translate Christian faith into something that is believable within that framework. He writes about how *“if something didn't seem to suit the worldview of the day, then liberals quickly reinterpreted it, or as we say today, revised it. and my sense of the matter... was that you can revise the text to suit yourself only just so far.”* That is definitely not the kind of liberalism he has in mind.

George Hunsinger, the Princeton theologian, in an article entitled “Hans Frei as Theologian: The Quest for a Generous Orthodoxy”, describes further what Frei means by this: *“in the wide range of learning brought to bear upon the argument, in the carefully formulated and nuanced judgements, and in the reticence to say more than one could really support, an element of liberalism is in evidence. Yet in the respect accorded to the gospels for their own sakes and on their own terms, in the espousal of the historic faith of the ecumenical church as represented by Nicaea and Chalcedon, and in the struggle to understand the dilemmas of modernity squarely from the standpoint of that faith, an*

element of evangelicalism is also in evidence. it is as though Frei sensed in his theological bones that generosity without orthodoxy was empty but that orthodoxy without generosity was blind.” It was a blend between this kind of thoughtful, careful, modest liberalism allied to an evangelical confidence in the abiding and controlling validity of historic credal faith that Frei meant by his ‘Generous Orthodoxy’.

Frei’s approach, and the less theologically nuanced and more anecdotal approach of Brian McLaren, are conditioned very much by the culture wars between evangelicalism and liberalism in the United States. Our context is different and while I think our understanding of Generous Orthodoxy bears many similarities to that outlined by Hans Frei, especially in its combination of rigorous learning, scrupulous scholarship and commitment to the biblical credal orthodoxy of the past, I also want to go beyond it to try to explain what I think we mean by Generous Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy

I want to start with the word Orthodoxy. Those of you who know your Greek will know that it comes from two Greek words - **Orthos**, meaning ‘straight’, or ‘right’, and **Doxa** meaning ‘Glory’. I am aware that etymology is not always the best guide to understanding meaning, as words are defined more by their use than their origin, however this may give us a way into thinking about what a Generous Orthodoxy means. I want to claim that Generous Orthodoxy is not a pragmatic compromise, a useful way of holding together contradictory viewpoints, or somehow finding a balance between unity and truth, as we will see in due course, but it is a particular way of doing theology.

We might define Ortho-doxo as a kind of “**right glorifying**”. If so, it suggests that the purpose of theology is that we might be able to glorify God aright. We do theology not to pass exams, gain degrees, sort out ecclesiastical problems, or even to get our thinking straight about God. We have to confess that theological work in the academy, or even the church, often slips into academic posturing, or a search for exact doctrinal correctness for its own sake, with the goal that at the end of the day we might be able to sit back, satisfied that our theology is more correct than anyone else’s. Instead we do theology in order that we might glorify God rightly, which is our true human calling.

If we as human beings, out of all the different species of creation, have been given the remarkable and unique gift of language, or at the very least our capacity for language is developed in a far more sophisticated way than any other animal, it is primarily for the purpose of worship. As T.F. Torrance put it: “*Nature itself is dumb, but it is man’s part to bring it to word, to be its mouth, through which the whole universe gives voice to the glory and majesty of the living God.*” Or, if you prefer, Jürgen Moltmann: “*The human being is able - and designated - to express the praise of all created things before God. In his praise he acts as representative for the whole of creation. His thanksgiving, as it were, looses the dumb tongue of nature.*” We were given the gift of language so that we might worship, that we might be able to describe the goodness and glory of God - that we might tell him how good he is, not because he needs to be reminded of it, but because we do.

Of course worship is not just verbal. It is not just what we do in church. As Romans 12 reminds us, we are to “*present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship.*” Perhaps we can put it in more memorable terms in three words beginning with ‘W’. The purpose of theology is that we learn **Wisdom** - not just knowledge or information, but true wisdom about the nature of things, who the God is who created the world and who summoned us into being, who we are and what is the true

nature of this world in which we find ourselves. This is a wisdom that calls us to **Worship**, putting into words the silent praise of creation, completing the cycle of revelation and response where the creation gives back praise to the one who brought into being. This Wisdom and Worship also leads to a life of **Witness**, a life that reflects the glory of God, bearing witness to all of creation, the powers and principalities, the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, as St Paul puts it, including those who have lost their connection and communion with this God, so that they might rediscover it again.

We do theology so that we might see God more clearly, as the only one properly worthy of worship. When you read a text such as Athanasius' "On the Incarnation" or Basil the Great's "On the Holy Spirit", you often notice two things. One is their concern for precision in theological language, arguing over which exact preposition is to be used in the Gloria referring to the Spirit, or which term is most fitting to describe the relationship of the Son to the Father. The other is that so many of these arguments are around the right language to be used in Christian worship. Modern minds, more impatient with theological argumentation, may think it's all a waste of time, yet for them this is vital, because theology is all about worship. It is like the photographer who looks at the object she wants to picture through a long zoom lens. She turns the dial with finite exactness to get the clearest and most perfect picture she can in order that the full beauty, colour and splendour of the object will be seen in the resulting picture.

So we do theology in order that we might see God as clearly as we are able, to appreciate his glory, splendour and beauty, and be caught up in the desire to worship him with all our being. We do theology in order to be able to put into words, as best we can, the excellence and glory of God, and that we might live in a way that not just pleases, but draws attention to his excellence and beauty - to those who believe as well as those who don't. This is why we have always said that we do theology in the context of worship. It is not just that worship helps us to do theology better, in fact it is more true to put it the other way around: that theology helps us to worship better, both in our words and in our lives. It is significant that whenever we gather as a College we begin our day and end our day in worship. It is because we want to do our theology in full awareness that we are in the presence of God as we do so, and in a way that also leads back into prayer and worship.

The second implication of this understanding of Orthodoxy, is that the **object of theology is the Knowledge of God**. Theology is ultimately about God not about us. It is not a description of our experience of God, or our reflection on human culture, or the practice of religion, but it is our attempt to do justice to God as he has revealed himself to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This is why in St Mellitus, you will hear more about Karl Barth than Friedrich Schleiermacher, more about Martin Luther than Paul Tillich. There is a proper place in theology for Christian experience, but not as the object of theological work.

Generous Orthodoxy works from the text of Scripture, as the basic primer in the knowledge of God, the place we go to understand the nature of the God that we are dealing with, because it is in the pages of Scripture that we find the ecclesiastically authorised and recognised account of God's self-revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We read Scripture through the lens of the catholic creeds, with their minimal yet carefully considered account of the Christian reading of Scripture, as focused on the doctrines of Creation, Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension and final consummation, in the Holy Spirit, the Church, Baptism and the forgiveness of sins. We read Scripture in conversation and company with the great tradition of all those who have read Scripture before us, particularly those whom the church is recognised as authoritative teachers and interpreters of the faith. Of course those figures do not always agree with one another. The church

recognises Augustine and the Cappadocians as authentic teachers of the faith, even though they don't always agree on their Trinitarian doctrine. The church in general acknowledges both Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin as true witnesses to the truth that is in Jesus Christ, even though they have deep differences in their theologies of nature and grace. There is however in a Generous Orthodoxy a recognition that despite these differences there is a core of common understanding, a common faithful attentiveness to Scripture, and a conviction that the purpose of theology is to lead us back to worship, that enables us to engage in conversation with these different witnesses, in a way that does not elide their differences, but recognises that ultimately they are talking about the same thing - God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the Creator and Redeemer of the world. A Generous Orthodoxy says that we are able to speak about God intelligibly, not because we have the words to do God justice, but because he has given us a language in which to speak of him - the language of Scripture.

Having said that, it always has a certain reserve. Scripture, however much it may convey to us the definitive revelation of God as divine speech, is also communicated to us in frail human language - Greek and Hebrew, or in translation, as English, French, Spanish - with all their peculiarities and foibles. No human language can ever fully describe and capture God. Credal Orthodoxy therefore maps out the territory within which God can be described. It is both kataphatic (saying positive things about God) and apophatic (describing what God is not). Heresies are designated as such simply because they deny something important that we want to say about God. So, for example, Arianism denies the Incarnation; Gnosticism denies the goodness of creation; Sabellianism denies the fullness of the Trinitarian life; Manichaeism denies the sovereignty of God; Donatism denies the fallibility of the church and the goodness of the world; Marcionism denies the value of the whole of the Bible; Pelagianism denies the priority of grace. Orthodoxy never claims to have fully described God, to have captured him in human language. It simply seeks to tell us where God can be found. It says what God is not, as well as to do its best to say who God is, so that we might understand him, appreciate him and love him.

Good theologians always need to be aware of the two vital poles of theological discourse, that God has revealed himself in Christ, so that we are able to say something about him, and that at the same time all our attempts to summarise the teaching of Scripture, or to describe God are penultimate not ultimate, tentative not final. As a result, however good or exact our theologies are, they always have to be held provisionally and humbly. And this applies even more to our own attempts to articulate our witness to the God of Jesus Christ. Generous Orthodoxy always therefore holds a certain humility in theological statements. Karl Barth makes the point that to do otherwise is to overreach ourselves:

“To determine whether a particular theology has as its object merely a deified concept or the living God, the first criterion might be whether this theology is conscious of its own relativity. Has it retained the patience necessary toward other theologies (which is quite compatible with posing rigorous questions)? A theology too impatient in polemics might just be a theology of the Deus nudus. A theology based on God’s Word, at any rate, will need to be patient as well as incisive. For God is indeed patient, and with whom does he need to exercise more patience on this sorry earth than with us theologians, never mind what variety.”

Thirdly, this understanding of Orthodoxy as right glorifying, explains why **theology belongs within the church**. It explains why we at St Mellitus have moved away from the idea that theology is best done in secular universities, or even in seminaries, standing to some degree apart from the life of the church, in either its local, or diocesan form. From

the beginning, St Mellitus set out to be rooted in, and derive life primarily from the church, not the Academy, with students fully involved in the life, mission and ministry of churches, rather than being taken out of them in order to do their theological work. The reasons for this were not economic - in that it was simply a cheaper way of doing training - or even pragmatic - thinking that it would attract more students. Fundamentally it emerged from a conviction that theology belongs in the church, because it is all about worship, and the church is the place where worship happens, and where Christian life is lived and learnt.

There is of course real value in theology done in secular universities, in conversation with other disciplines, and with the resources they can bring to bear on the task, but that can never be the primary place where theology is at home. It is of course possible to do religious studies, the scientific, historical or philosophical analysis of religion as a human construct and practice but that must never be confused with theology.

Theological Education has to be rooted in the church, in mission and ministry, because all that we do as mission and ministry is ultimately witness, which is part of our offering of ourselves in worship to God, and as we have seen the whole purpose of theology is that we gain the wisdom that leads us to worship and to witness.

Generosity

I want to move on to the second word we use - the word 'Generous'. Why do we speak of a *Generous* Orthodoxy? The two words can be seen as somehow balancing each other, even to the point of embracing two quite irreconcilable principles. Those who are keen on Orthodoxy can be nervous of the word 'Generous', as it may seem to imply a blurring of the distinctives of Christian orthodoxy, a softening of the imperative to guard the pure gospel. On the other hand those who are keen on Generosity can be nervous of the word 'Orthodoxy' as it could imply a harsh, rigid insistence on doctrinal correctness. I prefer to see the two words as entirely compatible, and that each brings out the full meaning of the other. In other words true Orthodoxy is Generous and Generosity is true Orthodoxy.

We can often think that at the end of the day, you either have to choose Orthodoxy or Generosity, because the two are in ultimate tension with each other. This is, I think, a misunderstanding, both of orthodoxy and of generosity.

The point can be illustrated by Augustine's controversy with the Donatists. The argument between Augustine and the Donatists can be said to be an argument over the interpretation of Cyprian's ecclesiology. In his famous statement "*extra ecclesiam, nulla salus*", Cyprian had laid stress on two of the marks of the church: that is it One and that it is Holy. In other words, he stressed both the **Unity and the Purity of the church**.

Of these two, the Donatists emphasised above all Purity. If there was to be a choice, at the end of the day, we must preserve the purity of the church. Impure or unworthy ministers would compromise the purity of the church and therefore the true church must separate from the impure, thus justifying schism. When there is a choice between unity and purity, whether doctrinally or morally, we must always choose purity – purity at all costs. (Or in our terms, when you have to choose between Orthodoxy & Generosity, you must choose Orthodoxy).

Augustine however sees it differently. It is not, as you might expect, that he does the opposite – laying stress on unity at all costs rather than purity (Generosity over

Orthodoxy). Rather he recasts the issue. For Cyprian, as for Augustine, the church is always, underneath everything, One, just because Christ is one, even though it may exist in many forms. **As Cyprian wrote:** “*As there are many rays of the sun, but one light; and many branches of a tree, but one strength based in tenacious roots, and since from one spring flow many streams... yet the unity is still preserved in the source.... The church... broadly expands her rivers, liberally flowing, yet her head is one, her source one, and she is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness; from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated.*”

Just as the church’s unity is found in Christ, so is her holiness. Taking his stand on Cyprian’s insistence that heretics who return to the church should not be re-baptised, and his statement, often quoted by Augustine “...**judging no-one nor depriving any one of the right of communion even if he differ from us**” Augustine insisted that the purity or holiness of the church is not something which inheres in itself or its members, something that can be tainted or lost by the sin and mistakes, or even errors of its members, but it derives from the holiness of Christ. The church is holy and pure NOT because its members are holy and pure, but because Christ is holy and pure, and the church is his body. As Augustine puts it in his Letters to the Donatist Petilian: “**Christ is always the origin of the Christian... the Christian always plants his root in Christ.**” Christ is the source and giver of sacramental grace, not the minister, so that an unworthy minister does not obstruct divine grace, just as the sun still shines through a dirty sewer.

If the church’s unity and purity, its oneness and holiness is found in Christ rather than in its members, precisely because the church is the Body of Christ in a sense that is stronger than mere metaphor, then there is no ultimate competition between unity and purity, Oneness and Holiness, Orthodoxy and Generosity. This is not a zero-sum game where you have to choose between them, any more than you have to choose between the oneness and the holiness of Christ. You could say that for Augustine unity *is* truth. The Church is bigger than us - it is the Body of Christ - we do not constitute it, we join it, and to cut ourselves off from the church is to cut ourselves off from Christ, his purity and his holiness. Schism is to rend the body of Christ – as it were to tear his arm off, if you pardon the expression. “**For in the same manner as if a limb be cut off from the body of a living man, it cannot any longer retain the spirit of life; so the man who is cut off from the body of Christ, who is righteous, can in no wise retain the spirit of righteousness....**” The existence of sin and even doctrinal error in the church is not a reason for schism, as the church is bigger than us – it finds its unity in Christ its head. We join the church, rather than constitute it: only Christ constitutes the church. “**Any divergence from the Head, or the body, whether caused by difference in doctrine or government, is per se outside the church.**”

Ultimately for Augustine, schism is an act against Christ and an act against love: “**Christian charity cannot be preserved except in the unity of the Church... We hold fast charity if we cling to unity.**” To break from the church is to break the rule of love. We are to strive for Generosity despite the mistakes and divisiveness of the church, yet at the same time continue to strive for Orthodoxy, aware that both exist primarily in Christ not in us and are fundamentally eschatological - things we strive towards, not necessarily enjoy here in the present.

Let’s explore this idea that Unity and Truth, Generosity and Orthodoxy belong together a little further. There are number of ways of using the word ‘generous’. One would be to describe something that is **wide, embracing and full**, in the way we talk of someone, perhaps rather unkindly, as having a generous figure! In this sense we want to say that

true Orthodoxy gives a properly large view of the world. Augustine's view of the church is bigger, expansive, more hopeful and yet humble than that of the Donatists, who insisted that the pure church could only be found in north Africa.

In a recent McDonald lecture, the novelist Marilynne Robinson outlined a theology for today, which needs to be a big vision of the world. It needs to be a theology that can embrace and give an account of the origins of the world and its destiny, the identity of the one from whom the world sprang, it needs to explain and encompass human activities such as science, art, literature, technology and economics. When you read St Basil's *Hexaemeron*, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, or Calvin's Institutes, you cannot fail to see a big picture of the world, one that is expensive and enlarges your vision.

True orthodoxy is generous in this sense. It is embracing of a wide range of disciplines, interpreting the world in the light of the Gospel (not the other way round!). It is therefore quite in character for us to have developed an MA in Christian Leadership, which enables students to look at the task of leadership in the fields of the arts, spirituality, science, business and economics as well as in the church, all through the eyes of the Gospel. It is entirely consistent for us to develop modules in social and political theology, enabling students to understand how politics, society and culture, look when seen through the eyes of the gospel. I remember hearing the testimony of a young man who had come to faith through the Alpha Course, and when asked what difference Jesus had made to his life, saying that suddenly the world looked bigger. Its colours were brighter, its dimensions were larger, its scope wider. True orthodoxy enlarges, rather than diminishes our view of the world - it gives the world a dignity, depth, and a grandeur it doesn't have, if seen merely as an accidental ball of rock produced from an impersonal big bang at the beginning of time. Instead, Christian Orthodoxy tell us it is a place carefully crafted and shaped by and in the Love out of which it was born; it is the arena of revelation and salvation, a sign of the goodness and generosity of the one who made it.

Christian orthodoxy is generous in this sense but also in its ability to embrace a number of different complementary perspectives, as we have already touched on. This is something we have learnt as **Anglicans**. After the Reformation, on the continent, Protestantism and Catholicism split into different churches. Here in England we tried something different. The Elizabethan settlement, coming after decades of religious strife and conflict, sought to keep together the main strands of Protestant and Catholic religion in England with the view that they were better together than apart. It was not an unprincipled and unboundaried unity. Catholics who insisted on recognising the authority of the Pope could not be part of this new church. Neither could those who refused to recognise the authority of Bishops, preferring a Presbyterian system modelled on the church in Geneva. But everyone else was invited to be part of this new church.

The two sides did not agree on lots of things - on sacramental theology, which practices were and were not allowed in worship, the wearing of robes, and the exact role and status of bishops within the church. However these were held together in a kind of creative tension, bound by common allegiance to the creeds, to a fairly broad statement of theological principle in the 39 Articles, and a common standard of worship in the Book of Common Prayer. Anglicanism continues to be a slightly uneasy coalition between different forms of Christian faith and spirituality held together on this island, with a sense that different as we are, we may well have things to learn from one another that we could not learn on our own. Evangelicals can learn a great deal from the depths of prayer in the Catholic tradition, as well as its commitment to embodied forms of Christian life, which overcome the temptation towards an over spiritualised form of religious life in evangelical

circles. Catholics can learn a great deal from evangelicals about close attention to Scripture as the basic primer of Christian theology, and about the imperative of evangelism, inviting people into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Anglicanism has always had a generous spirit in that way, even if we haven't always been that generous towards each other!

But there is another way in which we use the word generous - that of **giving something away**. If Orthodoxy is generous in its nature, then we might also say that generosity is also orthodoxy. What I mean by that, is that at the heart of Christian orthodoxy, is the vision of a God who is generous in his very nature. *"God so loved the world that he gave his only son."* *"If you knew the gift of God, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water"...* *"Thanks be to God for his indescribable Gift"*. God's nature is to go out from himself in giving. He is no monad, sitting in glorious isolation, but even in his very nature, there is this centrifugal impulse, in the begetting of the Son and the procession of the holy spirit, which in turn leads to the temporal acts of God in incarnation and then sending of the Spirit. Generosity is of the very nature of God. Hence in the Kingdom of God there is a crucial principle - that only by giving away can be receive. In the curious and counter-intuitive economy of the Kingdom, letting things go paradoxically means you gain rather than lose those very things. ***"The measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you."*** The gospel is about generosity - the Generosity of God.

In imitation of God, any holding of Christian Orthodoxy has to be expansive, and exhibit a generosity in spirit towards others within the church, both giving and receiving insights offered from other parts of the church. Of course, Orthodoxy will seek to test each insight, in the light of central Christian convictions of creation, Incarnation, Resurrection and so on, yet the basic stance has to be generosity rather than suspicion, openness to learn not the assumption of error. If we fail in our generosity, we lose our orthodoxy.

It will mean a generosity of spirit, hoping to share what God has given us with the rest of the church and the world. So Mission is always central to a Generous Orthodoxy - an outward-looking sense that the gospel has to be shared, lived out in the world, not kept to ourselves - yet another reason why our students here are not locked up in a College but encouraged to be involved in mission in local communities or workplaces while they go through their training.

It also explains why it is entirely in character for us to seek to share what we have with others in the worldwide church. It is why we have helped new theological training to begin not just in London & Chelmsford, where we began, but in Liverpool, Plymouth, Kuala Lumpur, Bermuda, Burundi and no doubt many more places in future. A truly *Generous* Orthodoxy demands no less.

Maintaining a Generous Orthodoxy

How can such a generous Orthodoxy be maintained? What lies at the heart of it? I think the clue lies here in this very notion of generosity. If it is the nature of God to give generously, then that notion of the Gift of God finds a name - it is that of the Holy Spirit. There is a long Christian tradition, that stems from John's Gospel, runs through St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas among others, that identifies the **Holy Spirit with the name of 'Gift'**. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God which draws us into the intimate love

between the Father and the Son. The Spirit makes us one with Christ, so that we know the love of the Father, and are enabled to address him as “*Abba, Father*”, just as Jesus does. The Holy Spirit turns a distant knowledge of God into personal communion. The Spirit turns arid theology into worship. He turns the law into the gospel. The Spirit is even able to do the most remarkable miracle for a theological student, of turning an essay into prayer.

A Generous Orthodoxy does not just include a theology of the Spirit, it is theology in the Spirit, in other words, a theology which is suffused in, emerges out of, expectant of and results in being drawn out of ourselves in worship and praise. And when this happens to us, we know it's not our own doing - it is not that we have some psychic or spiritual ability to transcend ourselves or our circumstances, but we are taken up by something, someone beyond ourselves. Theology in the Spirit recognises that theology is not just an intellectual pursuit, but it involves the whole of our being - body, mind, emotion, affections. How and where that happens is in a sense secondary. For some of us, it happens in the objectivity and generosity of the sacrament, where God gives himself to us in the bread and wine, which is the body and blood of Christ himself. For others it is in the moment of preaching, where Christ makes himself known in the spoken Word of the gospel explained. For others, it is in the body of Christ in the Christian community, gathered together and singing the praises of God in either intelligible language or through the gift of tongues, laying hands on one another in prayer, and expectant for God to speak his direct prophetic word to us. All of these have in common, a conviction that God acts. He is not just an idea to be played with, but the objective reality who invades our lives and transforms them from within, by drawing us into fellowship, this holy Communion with the Father and the Son, along with all who call on the name of Jesus.

The unity in the truth that we have as Christians is not the unity of like-minded people, bound together by a shared liking of religious activity. It is fellowship grounded in our fellowship with God. It results from our being drawn by the Spirit into the love between the Father and the Son, which is the life of the Spirit. The communion we have with one another is grounded in our communion with God - which is what makes church different from any other kind of human community. Because our communion with each other is grounded in our communion with God, that changes the nature of our communal life. We are not at liberty to fall out and divide as we would in any human organisation, we are bound by something much stronger than our own opinions: we are bound in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, something we have not to create, but to preserve and maintain.

This is the charismatic dimension of Christian life and theology. The word charisma of course means ‘gift’, and here lies the centre, the heart of a truly Generous Orthodoxy. Of course the word ‘charismatic’ can get debased into a party label, alongside any of the other party labels that we used to define ourselves. I don't mean ‘charismatic’ in that sense - I mean the charismatic dimension at the heart of true Christian life and theology that is open to and dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Generous orthodoxy feels the need to keep praying the prayer “Come Holy Spirit”, because without the Spirit our orthodoxy lies dead and generosity is just an idea. As **Lesslie Newbigin** put it in his book ‘The Household of God, published in 1957: “the Pentecostal Christian has the NT on his side when he demands first of all of any body of so-called Christians ‘do you have the Holy Spirit?’ For without that all your creedal orthodoxy and all your historic succession avails you nothing.”

Or in the words of the Patriarch of Antioch – **Ignatios IV**: “*Without the Spirit, God is far away, Christ belongs to the past, the gospel is a dead letter, the church is a mere*

organisation, authority takes the form of domination, mission is turned into propaganda, worship is reduced to bare recollection, Christian action becomes the morality of a slave.

But in the Spirit, God is near, the risen Christ is present with us here and now, the gospel is the power of life, the church signifies Trinitarian communion, authority means liberating service, mission is an expression of Pentecost, the liturgy is a making present of both past and future, human action is divinised.”

This is what I think we mean by Generous Orthodoxy. It is a conviction of the life-giving nature of the Christian gospel, its beauty, its richness, its endless fascination, and a serious commitment to exploring and explaining it deeply and clearly as we can. It is an understanding that such an Orthodoxy gives you a big view of the world, one that is capable of embracing “*whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable*” as St Paul puts it in Philippians 4. It believes that God is in his very being generous love and that those who know him will be recognised by their own spirit of generous love especially towards their fellow Christians. It is a way of life and thinking that constantly expresses its dependence upon the Holy Spirit as the one who breathes life into theological work, and to the life of the church, who alone enables us to see, to understand and to experience “*the breadth, and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*”