



The Bishop of Lincoln

Raising the Spiritual Temperature – Paper Two

Contours and Practices

Introduction

When we raise the temperature in ourselves, our bodies are radiating warmth. *Raising the Spiritual Temperature* therefore is about radiating the love of God: How can we be ‘short-sleeved’ Christians for a world in winter? What are the behaviours, attitudes, and fruits of the Spirit which underpin how we live the Christian life? How can we live Galatians 5, which converts classical virtues into the fruits of the Spirit?

You might want to look at my Preface to the Lincoln Offer to clergy coming to share our life in Lincolnshire which sets out the characteristics and aptitudes I am looking for in my ordained colleagues. The Preface embraces licensed and authorized lay ministers, lay co-leads in deanery partnerships and diocesan trustees. In fact, my prayer is that each community would be an amalgam of them.

This second paper provides me an opportunity to share at greater length my outlook and conviction about where *Raising the Spiritual Temperature* fits in to our shared life. In Paper Three I will make some practical proposals for initiatives and interventions.

Worship

African Christians sometimes identify European sisters and brothers as those who can sing without dancing. We have a wonderful catalogue of songs with which to sing God’s praises. Many of us sing our faith and theology more easily than we have the confidence to speak about them. Here are some of my favourite songs and pieces of music that draw me into adoration, praise, contrition and intercession - into worship:

- We have a Great Big God
- Bach’s St John Passion
- Bruckner’s Locus Iste
- Brahms Requiem Mass

- He's got the whole world in his hands to Makaton sign language
- Meekness and Majesty
- Mozart's Coronation Mass
- The Servant King
- In Christ Alone
- My chains fell off and I was free
- All for Jesus
- Sweet Sacrament Divine
- How shall I sing that majesty
- Blessed be your name
- The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want
- Dolly Parton's He's Alive! And There's Power in the Blood of the Lamb
- Ye who own the faith of Jesus

Just some of my favourites that when I hear (or sing them) warm my heart and lift my spirit. You will have your own. When I hear this music I find myself being given answers to my inevitable question: How do we live in the reality of grace in the world as it is? And the answers are - through beauty, mystery, revelation - and in worship (which equally involves song and dance, of course!)

Scripture and Doctrine

I acknowledge that I may be unusual in being excited by the beauty of doctrine; but I know that I am not alone and I am keen to encourage all of us to be practical theologians in our own setting. My revered predecessor, Bishop Edward King, was the pioneer who piloted the first direct development of practical and pastoral theology as disciplines in the formation of ministers of the gospel. How might we recover his legacy more fully? How do we meet his exhortation to be Christ-like Christians? This appeal had him accused of being a Methodist which is ironic given his trial for ritualism. He just wanted people to know Jesus by whatever possible route. I sign up to that completely. - We know the Lord as we explore his interactions with the world that he created and the deposit of theology that has been left in his faithful people.

More, we know the Lord as we encounter him in Scripture and as, individually and together, we explore the Word.

You will know that I begin every meeting and gathering that I can with Dwelling in the Word'. I have found that this is an extraordinarily potent way of getting close to God, and to each other. It requires us to listen intently - to the Lord and to our neighbour. I recognise that Dwelling in the Word is not the only way of reading the Bible and I equally value more formal exegesis and teaching. What matters to me is that we explore Scripture together.

The Life of Prayer

My generation was taught about prayer through ACTS: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.

Adoration: First, we tell God that we love Him, and hope that becomes more true and deep through the dynamic of our lives.

- Confession:** If we love God, we will have a clearer appreciation of our sin and our need for forgiveness.
- Thanksgiving:** When we know ourselves forgiven and free, our hearts turn to thanksgiving. We call the Holy Communion ‘the Eucharist’ because that comes from the Greek word for ‘thank you’.
- Supplication:** Thankful hearts need exercise in active intercession, as we join our prayers with those of Jesus, our great High Priest.

Turning this on its head reveals God’s relationship with us:

- Adoration:** We believe that God adores us as his children.
- Confession:** Confessing is not just about being sorry, it is about standing up with determination and courage. God literally stands up for us on the Cross, where justice is done. Confessing our faith is standing out in favour of the truth and in support of the weak, like the Confessing Church defying Hitler.
- Thanksgiving:** We know that God doesn’t need to thank himself, but instead he rejoices in all that he has made, like the Eternal Novelist who gives life to all His characters and allows them to co-author the unfolding story under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. St Irenaeus, one of the Early Church Fathers, wrote that the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God ’(forgive the second century language).
- Supplication:** We see this in the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus (John 17) and the Spirit embracing the groaning of Creation (Romans 8).

Other forms and patterns of prayer are equally valuable. Some people are natural contemplatives. Others pray through activity, or in tongues, or in eucharistic adoration. What matters more than the form of the prayer is that we pray, and that we encourage and support others to pray.

Heavenly worship

In Revelation 4 we see the door of heaven opened and the full ‘shalom’ of God’s joy and peace are revealed. While the resources of heaven are not available to us in any of our parish churches on earth, it is my hope that our worship, in whatever style, lifts our hearts and feeds our souls. How does our worship take us from Revelation 4 to Revelation 21/22?

To point us towards ‘heavenly worship’, when I have already written about ‘worship’ itself is not to repeat myself needlessly (I hope). Rather, it is to ask that we always lift our heads to the highest level possible when we prepare worship for others and for ourselves. What, then, does ‘faithful worship’ look like in our Lincoln context today? I am convinced that people, especially currently young people, are interested in God and drawn to mystery and worship but worry that what they will find in our churches does not touch them.

How can we raise the standard of our offering, whether it be high mass, lay-led morning worship, forest church or charismatic praise?

As bishop I engage in all of these and more, and I ask myself how can I do better for God?

In my first paper, you might have thought that I was writing to and for older generations - especially in my illustration of Donatello's Mary Magdalene. I need to stress that our worship (and life together) should provide a context in which people of every generation, and background, might find something to intrigue them and something to feed them. This means that we will need to have a diocese in which worship of different styles is available in different places. One style no longer fits all (and it probably never did - which should be a liberation).

More and more of us are engaged not only in formal preaching but also in informal addresses, children's talks and testimonies. Although the overall number of life events we conduct has diminished, more of us are involved as clergy and lay ministers in speaking into these situations. I preach and teach often, not always as well as I might. Sometimes what we say does not count because our hearers have heard truths we have not actually shared. Underneath our words the Spirit has spoken directly to people's hearts. However, just as we say in school that ethos and quality are inseparable, so it is in our preaching and witnessing of the Gospel of Jesus. How do we encounter the Word in worship and do we take our proclamation of the Word sufficiently seriously such that our hearts are warmed in the process?

Holiness of life

A particularly Anglican gift to the world church is an awareness of the significance of Holiness of Life. We need to go on digging deep into this tradition, which nourishes, sustains and challenges us - while recognising that expectations of 'holiness' clearly change through time.

Archbishop Michael Ramsey was once asked how long he prayed for each day. He replied, 'About three minutes. But it takes me about 57 minutes to get there. 'Are we ready to keep turning up so that the Spirit can do the work in us to make us holy?

The Church of England position on making your confession is that all may, some should and none must. Whether we make our confession or not, we could all do with a regular if not frequent spiritual MOT. We all need some form of self-examination and reflection, whether that is with a spiritual director, your partner/spouse, or Christian friends.

How does faith influence our conduct as individuals, and our shared culture in community? How might we describe our sanctification in the Spirit?

Living our baptism

I have often said I have a high view of ordination, but an even higher view of baptism. Baptism, not ordination, is the primary sacrament of calling, as well as belonging. All are called and all are sent.

Let us reflect upon the Baptism of Jesus. The outpouring of the Spirit is accompanied by the declaration by the Father of love for His Son. The challenge of the wilderness only comes after this affirmation. We are called and sent by the God who loves us. Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus takes our hand and places our hand in the hand of the Father. Our readiness to be witnesses can be undermined by fear, low confidence or lack of support, but never because God does not love us enough. I regularly confirm people of riper years. The Lord has no time limit. Simeon's most profound witness required a long expectant patience until those shaking hands held the fragile Son of God and prophesied what was to befall.

How can we better develop as a multi-generational Church, with a profound and positive theology of childhood and aspiring adulthood? How do we set children and young people free to be witnesses and evangelists in their setting and culture in person and safely online? How do children teach their Mum and Dad to be parents and how do parents teach the young how to be children?

I am passionate about our reaching out to generations and groups with whom we have become largely unfamiliar. There is an opportunity to join in the quiet revival going on at the moment, reflected in the growing numbers of Gen Z young people becoming interested in spiritual clarity and living mystery.

In the reality of our situation across the Diocese of Lincoln, growing younger also embraces Simeons and Annas evangelizing the generation of their children. I am conscious that in our desire to see safeguarding even more central to our common life, it is our Annas who are often seen as the most trustworthy by children and their parents.

Can we, then, set out the recipe for a good Christian life lived in a community of the baptised? As I watch cookery programmes I realise that the delivery of perfect meals on screen makes my cooking look like the out-takes. We are a school of forgiven sinners longing to be saints. Thankfully, the heavenly meal which defines us is not of our making. We are bearing treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4.7). We are bank cashiers dispensing riches not our own.

Sacrificial discipleship

All of the above amounts to exploring, encouraging and inhabiting the concept of sacrificial discipleship. We are all called and we are all sent. In Isaiah 6 God asks, 'Whom shall I send?' and the reply is 'Here am I; send me.'

We see this reality becoming apparent in the faithful service of so many Christians in our churches, and in the way that people are responding by becoming Authorised Lay Ministers and Focal Ministers. The shift from 'church-going' or 'cultural Christian' to 'worshipper' and 'disciple' is one that we must continue to encourage - mindful of the fact that our discipleship will express itself differently, because we are all different. Nevertheless, the questions: What does 'confident discipleship' and 'joyful service' look like? Are vital. As is the question: How is that measured by joyful and generous giving?

It is particularly important that as we consciously seek to *Raise the Spiritual Temperature*, so we are aware of the importance of exploring vocation: How can we enable more people to discover and discern a calling to particular ministries? Who are our future ALMs, Readers, Focal Ministers, and Ordinands?

The work of vocation and calling is not just for experts. Any of us can discern signs of calling in our fellow disciples. It is a trap to think that vocation is my calling to my ministry. It is the calling of the whole Church. In my experience, the most reliable callings of individuals is sometimes generated but always corroborated by the prayer and insight of others. Let us not hold back from raising them up. The example of Ambrose, who was called by his community before he was aware of the work of the Lord in his own life, is very relevant.

One of the most creative signs of humble sacrificial discipleship is our readiness to grow people past us and rejoice that we have raised up people better than ourselves. What a joy that can be.

Living our shared ministry

This brings us, finally, to living our shared ministry. In Luke 10, Jesus sends the disciples not only to preach but to model the fact that ministry and evangelism are shared tasks. Collaboration is essential to our character as the Church. The disciples do not journey alone but are sent out two by two. Collaboration is a gospel requirement, not an option. This realisation is clear in *Time to Change Together* and is absolutely central to *Time to Grow Together*. We are called to be ‘companions on the way’ the people who break bread together, share food, feed the poor. How can we be ‘God’s bread’ for the world?

Conclusion: Be the Church you can be now – and then see what happens

Raising the Spiritual Temperature is about looking forward, but it is also about inhabiting who we are now - in such a way that we are opening ourselves to God at all times. As I look around the diocese, I think it important to state:

Size is not everything. House groups and cell churches – ‘Intimate Church’ is good. Indeed, small churches can sometimes grow more significantly than larger resource churches, and in many of our communities, the gathered church will always be small in number. This does not mean to say that it is small in impact. I rejoice where we have communities gathered around the Word of God, worshipping and praying faithfully and with an open door to welcome friend and stranger. In other words, we want churches of all shapes and sizes: ‘A tangerine is not a small orange.’

What matters is that you be the Church you can be now, and see what God does with you. ‘Growth’ is not just about size - it is about health, attitude and outlook. *Time to Grow Together* is about *Raising the Spiritual Temperature* first, and growing in numbers as part of this purpose and focus.

In all of this, we are called to be a people with dual nationality. We are to look towards Greater Lincolnshire and towards Heaven. We are rooted in the places in which we ‘live and move and have our being.’ We should rightly celebrate our beloved ‘place’, whether that be our village, town, estate or city. But let us also be ready to move on, even if only on the inside. For we are called to be pioneers and settlers both at the same time.

I call the Church in the Diocese of Lincoln, therefore to:

- focus on the ‘main thing – ’our life in Christ together and our passion for modelling and sharing that life that we may be bearers of faith, peace and justice to the world.
- be authentic as Christian communities, households and individuals so that people desire to be drawn to Christ
- strive to be a safer and healthier Church for all, through vigilance and hope
- speak truth to power with courage but without rancour
- be kind and candid
- concentrate on the thirst for wisdom, and replace deference with the possibility of love and realistic admiration
- live the Five Marks of Mission as fully as we can, not least in treasuring Creation and all that means for seeking Carbon Zero and working fruitfully with our friends in Polynesia who also live with the threat of inundation.

We will *Raise the Spiritual Temperature* as we do all these things, and as we develop a deeper collective wisdom about the future of the Church's mission.

You may have noticed by now that I have been careful not to be prescriptively Church of England. Lots of our rural churches are unofficial local ecumenical partnerships already. Although baptised and raised in the Church of England, I was taught to pray by my Catholic grandmother. As I pray and engage with my fellow church leaders in the region, I learn that many of our joys and challenges are the same or similar. We lie awake worrying about the same things and we dance to similar tunes. What we mean by 'we' always needs expanding.

And this is true, also, as we seek to navigate the forces that currently pressure our communion. Some of these are to do with the debate about marriage, human identity and sexuality. Some of them are about gender and tradition. I have recently been appointed as Bishop Visitor of the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, even though I cannot preside at the Eucharist there because of my commitment to the ordination of women as priests and bishops. It is an attempt at commitment to mutual flourishing which I pray we can approach with healthy scepticism but not cynicism, and honour the cost and encouragement of every direction. I will, as your bishop, with my fellow bishops, support and affirm those with whom I agree as well as with whom I cannot agree on some things, on grounds of conscience. We all have a valued place in God's Church.

A test for us as we seek to raise the spiritual temperature is to look for the truth in our neighbour and not automatically look to trip people up for what we might see to be false or incomplete. We then have honest conversations according to our own risk register. Confident and courageous engagement changes us, and I believe it is true to the nature of the Triune God who created us. I am convinced that reconciliation is not a zero-sum game. Conflict transformation does not mean that A wins out over B but that A and B are taken to a shared new place at Q via Z to see each other afresh. This does not presume a particular outcome; but we are changed by the encounter. Emmaus is in sight.

A long time ago, I asked a bishop whom I admire to sum up the Christian life. He said, 'Prayer and Parties'. I long for that to be true as we embrace humble and hospitable evangelism and have people join us in praying 'Thy Kingdom come'. Isaiah 54.2 speaks about enlarging our tent which means expanding our godly ambition to grow spiritually and in number. This is less about the Mathematics than it is about abiding in the Divine Mercy.

Thank you for reading my very personal thoughts about *Raising the Spiritual Temperature*. It is *Time to Grow Together*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen', written in a cursive, flowing style.

BISHOP OF LINCOLN
June 2025