

‘Worship and Desire in the Anglican Tradition: Why This Matters in Contemporary Church and Culture’

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This lecture opens up a discussion about how ‘desire’ operates, often all-unnoticed, in the workings of Anglican/Episcopal prayer and worship, and how we should think of its enduring significance in the particular context of contemporary church and culture, especially in these distressing times. It begins by ‘searching the Scriptures’ to elicit the ubiquitous importance of human desire for God in the biblical witness (especially in the Psalms), and in the teaching of Jesus and the Pauline letters. It goes on to reflect, in contrast, on the marked contemporary ‘sexualization’ of desire, and on the more pervasive ‘commodification of desire’ (for sex, goods, money, success, and fame) in the world of web-based advertisement, social media and visual culture. It then turns back to early Christian ascetic and monastic traditions (and their reception in early Anglicanism), to chart the way in which prayer and worship of a sustained kind educed detailed wisdom about the afflictive dangers of the ‘negative passions’ (false desires) and the need to re-order and re-orient desire to God through habits of prayer, praise and simple attention to Christ. It ends with a reflection on how the minister/priest participates in, and potentially modulates, the play of desire in the eucharist and other acts of worship, and how this brings both moral danger and spiritual opportunity. It is concluded that theological reflection on the ordering of desires is a spiritual and ascetic task of particular significance for contemporary Christians (in this era of intense conflicting political and economic desires, generally, and distressing divisions about sexual desire in the Church), and one that should not be dislocated from public worship and prayerful preparation for it. The question presses: how should our prayer and worship *change* the way(s) we desire and see the world? How can this help us see the way forward in this time of crisis – economically, politically, and ecclesiastically?

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*Introduction: The Scriptural Basis for Prayer and Worship as Motivated by ‘Desire’*

*I The Commodification of Desire in Contemporary Culture: Sex, Power, Money and Belongings*

*II Charting the ‘Ordering’ of Desires: The ‘Negative Passions’ and the Crucible of Prayer*

*III The Minister as Focus of Desire: Dangers and Spiritual Discernment*

*Conclusions: Desire and Its Transformations in Worship – Political and Personal Implications*

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