



St Luke's in the City

150 years - 2009

# Celebrating at the Crossroads

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

22 June 2008

### Liturgy as Transformation

#### WORD: The Ambo

In the first Christian basilicas, the Ambo was that single piece of liturgical furniture which combined the functions of both lectern and pulpit.

Richard Giles

Christians are people of Word and Sacrament. The 'and' is critical. When the Sacrament is separated from the Word it is in danger of being perceived as 'magic'. When the Word is separated from the Sacrament it is in danger of being reduced to rational propositions and law. The 'and' is crucial. The catholic/orthodox tradition has wisely insisted on it. Word and Sacrament. Due reverence for the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood needs to be matched with equal reverence for the living Word, read and proclaimed. This requires a strong symbol, a physical object and space within the context of the *ecclesia*. The Ambo is to the proclamation of the Word what the Altar is to the celebration of the Sacrament.

In the early church communities, usually meeting in someone's home, two separate spaces were set apart, the place for proclaiming the Word, and the place for the Sacrament. The Ambo, whose predecessor was the synagogue's 'Bema', was at the centre of the former. On the Lord's Day the *ecclesia* gathered first around the Ambo, where the words of Sacred Scripture were read, and the good news of God in Christ were proclaimed.

Tragically, there developed a loss of the unity of the Ambo. Under the more extreme and reactionary influences of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformations the unity of Word and Sacrament was sundered, as the Bible was forced to bear the full burden of proclamation. In the context of an unbalanced liturgy of Word only, preaching came to dominate, the result being the creation of separate pulpits which grew in size and centrality. This also meant that the unity of the Ambo was lost, churches now having both a place for reading Scripture (lectern) and a place for preaching. The proliferation of furniture, along with the increasingly grand scale of both lecterns and pulpits, and the tendency to memorialise individuals in furniture has meant that many Anglican churches are not dissimilar to Steptoe & Son's yard – every single piece of furniture ever given jammed in, whether it's needed or not! The symbols of unity shattered by antiquarian clutter and misguided 'pastoral care'.

Our Ambo at St Luke's is the brass lectern located at the west end of the nave, around which we sit together as one people. In the symbol of the eagle the lectern draws on the early association which was made between the four evangelists and the four creatures – the human one (Matthew), the ox (Mark), the lion (Luke), and the eagle (John). It is John's unique insight that "In the beginning was the word, and the word

was with God, and the word was God." All who gather around the Ambo, as the one people, are recalled to the vision and clear-sightedness of the undivided Word.

Fr David Moore