

The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Church in the city today

Written by Gareth Powell, a member of moot

One of the pledges an ordinand must make before they are fully ordained is that they will *'professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.'* That the church upholds this profession is key to the church successfully incarnating itself within the culture it finds itself within.

In the 21st century, British culture is rather complex and multifaceted, made up of many layers and many subcultures. London, as a city, is all the more complex, caught up in a constant flux of change, change that is social, political, physical and spatial. To be incarnate within such a changing place the Church in the city must try and both be faithful to that which has gone before as well as be ready to change as people, and, as landscapes, change, not change in its core message, but rather, in the method of its proclamation. For it must also change from being a monotone proclamation — that is of a singular 'style' — to being multitone — that is of many 'styles' — for Christ was not incarnate as a 1st century Jew so that we would all become 1st century Jews but rather so that he was able to most effectively communicate the radical message that is the Kingdom of God.

St Matthews in Westminster is situated in the heart of this busy metropolis that is London, and as such finds the complex ebb and flow of this city on its doorstep. In order for St Matthews to be most fully incarnate in this space, it must reflect the complexity of its surroundings in its communities. Moot is one of the communities that meets within St Matthews, and seeks to be one such community, providing both similarity and difference compared with the other communities.

Moot grew out of a desire to allow people to connect their daily, everyday lives, with the sacred, using everyday technology, music, words and objects. Many of the members of moot have come from church backgrounds where you were encouraged to leave behind the 'evil' of the world and ascend into some ethereal space where you could 'meet' with the Lord. As can be imagined, this theology can quickly lead to an almost Gnostic view of the everyday physical world. Moot seeks to re-affirm that the Spirit binds, sustains and holds together all of creation and life, in all its guises, and that the creativity we see in the world around us is not something to be distanced from but rather something to be used and celebrated in.

Moot services therefore are made up of the 'stuff' of everyday life. Music is used from Faithless and Moby, serving to create an ambient backdrop; images are from holiday snaps or off the internet, and sometimes serve as modern day iconography. Liturgies are re-written using wordplays from modern songs or incorporating quotes from philosophers or modern theologians, and the space is further enhanced with a technological set up of an apple laptop and a digital projector projecting onto a 10x8ft screen. Services generally explore a theme or a biblical text; recent services have looked at salt & light, creation, forgiveness and life beyond achievement. Two different members of moot 'curate' each service, and spend time thinking and reflecting beforehand on the different elements they wish to bring together for their service. Services can be complex using the whole of the space St Matthews affords us, or they can be simple affairs using a circle of candles with a few short reflective prayers. However, the point of this lies not in the elements that moot uses but rather the connectivity this provides with the everyday. People leave moot services having met with God in thought, prayer and ritual, and can then begin to see the same God in the everyday spaces they inhabit, thus helping to begin to remove the dichotomy between the sacred-private and secular-public.

This approach equates to two things, firstly, an emphasis on the intrinsic goodness of creation, and secondly re-emphasising a connection between creation *and* worship.

Moot also meets on two Wednesdays each month for a discussion and ‘scripture space’. Discussion often features outside speakers, including recently the Bishop of London and Jonny Baker, but they can also lead by members of moot. Recent topics include exploring what the fear of the Lord means today, trickster, and the creeds. ‘Scripture space’ follows on from the discussion and usually takes a biblical text and explores it using a variety of hermeneutical models. Moot members prepare answers to set questions for the text and present their findings to the group, which is followed by a discussion on possible application for today. ‘Scripture space’ serves to encourage members to think critically about biblical texts, and helps them to gain a firmer grasp on the complex nature of interpretation and application – as well as to shed light on how incredibly difficult this can sometimes be with texts that are over 2000 years old!

Participation is an important part of moot. Moot members are encouraged to help prepare and take a service, or to facilitate a discussion or ‘scripture space’. Moots *modus operandi* is one of inclusiveness – that is the way that our community acts out its participation in the Christian story is shaped by the community. Anyone who joins moot helps to shape it, whatever his or her profession, sex, age or gifts. We believe that rather than allow the community to shape each individual, the individual has gifts to bring to the wider community, so you could argue that moot is open-source. In this way, we seek to be shaped into a fuller picture of the Church as seen in its fullness in Revelation 21, where the people/peoples bring their own ‘glory’ into the New Jerusalem, each adding something of the glorious presence of God. It is this inclusive approach that is allowing us to see, even within our own individual diversity, ‘God in us’.

In conclusion moot seeks to be an authentic expression of Christian community, valuing corporate, and multi-participatory, prayer and worship rooted in the rich Christian tradition. Seeking to continually rediscover what it means to be a Christian community in today’s busy world. As such, moot forms a part of St Matthews vision to be a rich, and varied, Christian community in the heart of London. A community that enables people to encounter the risen Christ from all walks of life, whether they have a long history of Anglican attendance or not, whether they are familiar with the rich Anglo-Catholic tradition or not. In doing so, St Matthews is taking seriously that desire to proclaim *afresh* to each generation the Christian faith. It also means that these various communities can learn from one another, from their differences. In being part of St Matthews, moot has certainly appreciated the strong Anglo-Catholic tradition of the church, and has found it inspirational in its firm grasp of tradition, ritual, worship and daily rhythm, and it is certainly hoped that moot has contributed to the wider community of St Matthews.

If you would like to know more about moot we have a website at www.moot.uk.net where you can find out about up-coming meetings. We also run a blog, an online communal ‘diary’, at www.mootblog.net.