

JERRALD LAWSON

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Master of Divinity, Theological Educator,
Theological Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria
(der. Kolbino, d. 25a, Leningrad region, Vsevolozhsk district, Russia, 188680)
jerrald.lawson@lcms.org

*ENGLISH CHURCH DESIGN
IN ITS LITURGICAL PRACTICE AND BELIEF
THROUGH THE CENTURIES*

The article shares some reflections on the liturgical traditions of the English Church. For more than a thousand years the English parish church had been the center of the Christian's worship life. Its art and architecture reflected their beliefs, the *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*. The brief history of the development of the English ecclesiastical tradition is given from the early Middle ages till the Reformation. The author having spent some years in England gives his view and estimations of the long Church culture that is rooted in the medieval tradition despite the changes made in the Reformation era.

Key words: altar, Christ, green man, Rood cross, the Reformation

ДЖЕРАЛЬД ЛОУСОН

магистр богословия, преподаватель,
Теологический институт ЕЛЦИ
(дер. Колбино, д. 25а, Ленинградская обл.,
Всеволожский район, Россия, 188680)
jerrald.lawson@lcms.org

**АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЦЕРКОВНЫЙ ИНТЕРЬЕР
НА ПРОТЯЖЕНИИ ВЕКОВ:
ЛИТУРГИЧЕСКАЯ ПРАКТИКА И ВЕРА**

Статья посвящена обзору английской литургической традиции. Более тысячи лет приходские церкви Великобритании были центрами христианской жизни и христианского культа. Искусство и архитектура этих приходов отражает верования прихожан, их интерпретацию *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*. В статье дан обзор развития английской литургической традиции, начиная от раннего Средневековья до эпохи Реформации. Автор, проводивший в Англии несколько лет, дает оценку продолжительной церковной культуре, укоренной в средневековой традиции, несмотря на изменения, произошедшие в эпоху Реформации.

Ключевые слова: алтарь, Христос, «зеленый человек», летнер, Реформация

*ECCLESIASTICAL ARTS*¹

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi — simply defined as we pray, so we believe. This is a statement not limited to what we do in our liturgical practices but can be extended to what is or is not included in the sacred space's architecture and art where those prayers are said.

The physical things of ink, paper, and voice reveal what is believed through participation in the liturgy. Liturgy tends to dominate discussions of *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* of how and what is said or used during the liturgy. From the liturgy's order, the prayers said, the hymns sung, the paraments hung on the altar, and what the pastor wears all reveal statements of faith.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi is not limited to speaking and hearing but is visibly seen of how the church is artistically designed and decorated. Stone, brick, and wood are physical things that provide a visible presentation of what is believed. This is best seen in the history of the English parish church. Parish churches reflected the confessional statements through architectural design and art through the changes in response to historical and theological events from the Medieval Saxon churches through the Reformation. The parish church was the center of the English village's religious life a confessional statement made by the placement of its physical dominating presence in the village center.

When Christian missionaries from Rome sent by Pope Gregory the Great, arrived in the south of England in the late 6th century they set into motion the first worshipping communities with a desire to build places of worship. These early missionaries, led by St. Augustine (later to become the first bishop of Canterbury), brought with them the practice established by the Pope to establish buildings for worship. The Pope had stated that pagan temples should be used for worship, to destroy pagan statues in the countryside and replace them with Christian imagery.

To decorate the church with art in England was encouraged by St. Augustine of Canterbury who wrote, «For a picture is introduced into a church so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in book».

¹ Paper for the conference 29 June 2020 held at the Theological Institute of the Church of Ingria in Koltushi.

These two traditions tied in with the parish system's introduction saw the local church tied to the village. These churches were built by the local lords to meet the need of worshiping communities for a place to worship. As money became more available from the Medieval wool trade simple structures gave way to larger and artistically grand designs.

The early Saxon churches were based on a simple basilica design of a rectangle nave, with a semi-circle chancel with an arched entrance separating the two areas. The chancel was first separated from the nave by a curtain and later with screens. Above the chancel arch hung a crucifix also called a Rood cross. Inside the chancel sat a stone altar. And off to the sides were small chambers to serve as vestries. Toward the west end of the nave was the baptismal font and before the chancel stood a wooden lectern in the shape of eagle to represent St. John. Outside was a porch entrance that served as the place where oaths and business transactions were made, disputes settled, marriages sanctified, and pre-Baptismal exorcisms performed.

Later Medieval church designs saw the expansion of the building's dimensions, porch entrances becoming the transepts, towers were constructed that served as vestries, places of burial, and the place to hang bells. Side aisles were added to the north and south parts of the church, the chancel went from being a semi-circle to a square with additions of steps and railings. And as churches grew a choir stall was placed between the chancel and the nave where the clergy and choir sat. Deceased members were buried around the church and inside under the floors. At first burials inside the church were covered with a marked stone. Later church burials the graves were marked with effigies and brasses. Church burials were considered the member's continued presence in the church through Christ. A person was buried facing East and the preference was to be buried in the South side of the church, the sunny side, as opposed to the North side, the dark side.

Inside the churches were painted with brightly colored images of God's salvation story. The walls were covered with images and statues depicting Biblical stories and saints. When stained-glass was introduced in the 12th century the windows displayed the same

stories. The porch bore these same images and above the entrance stood the Virgin Mary's statue. It was here in this brightly colored, visual environment the believing community gathered between Heaven and Earth to see and hear God's cosmic drama of creation and salvation played out Sunday after Sunday. With the worshipers receiving of God's plan for them through participation in the Eucharist celebration. [здесь точно точка?]

The confession shown through the art focused on Christ's life and especially the crucifixion, God's retribution to punish the wicked, the Apocalypse, and the good works of the saints. Art was designed to inform and be contemplative so images of the seven deadly sins, the Ten Commandments, Christ's victory over Satan, separating the righteous and unrighteous at the last judgment, the horrors of hell contrasted with heavenly glory were common themes. Through these images the example of how a person should live was expressed to inspire contemplation, obedience, works, and questions of worthiness.

The parish church saw different adaptations to architectural design by theological decrees of Western councils. After the second council of Nicaea in 787 altars included saint's relics. And the relics of saints, especially English saints, was housed and displayed in the church for veneration. Leading to the development of side chapels and the practice of pilgrimages to venerate them for good works. When the Lateran Council of 1215 AD adopted the teaching of transubstantiation the chancel was became the focal point of the church. Altars included five candles to represent the five wounds of Christ and a pyx containing the Host was suspended above the altar. The pierced wood screen (also called a Rood screen) separated the chancel from the nave. And when Thomas Aquinas' teaching on purgatory was codified under the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 AD the chapels and extra altars were added to offer prayers for the dead.

Yet through all this artistic religious confession of faith the old Saxon, Celtic pagan beliefs were still interwoven within the religious architecture and art. Images such as the Green Man and the Earth Mother were included in the boss images in the roof, on baptismal founts, the stone reliefs throughout the building, and included as part of a Biblical story painted on the wall.

It was this space of color and stories the English church worshipped Sunday after Sunday. It continued through Danish and Norman invasions along with the wars of Plantagenet Kings. It was not until the English Reformation that any dramatic artistic confessional design change occurred after decades of slow change.

King Henry VIII's break with the Roman papacy in the early 16th-century affected the English church's art and architecture for more than a century through political and theological turmoil. English bishops and theologians divided between the different Protestant confessions and others remained loyal to Rome. This resulted in various confessional artistic and architectural interpretations in each English diocese of how far to make or resist changes. Henry's political needs for money added to the changes of the parish church's appearance.

The English Reformations first major impact on churches was the monasteries' closures. Their contents taken by the crown and the land sold to pay for Henry's wars and building projects. Many English bishops ended the liturgical practice of prayers for the dead, veneration of saints, reduce the number of festivals, and forbid the use of rosaries. And relics were removed and handed to the bishop for destruction and the money raised for votive candles by the relics' presence were used to buy the parish a Bible.

When Edward IV ascended to the English throne more reforms were introduced that removed religious statues, the chancel screens and rails, the altar, and the votive candles. Chalices, patens, candle stands were melted down and the metal sold. The stairs to the chancel were leveled and the altar replaced with a table. Gone were the brightly colored Biblical stories on the walls covered with white paint and replaced with Scriptural passages. And in a prominent place stood the pulpit. In England at this time was an anti-Catholic attitude and any artistic element deemed Catholic were removed. These artistic elements were replaced with art that reflected a confessional emphasis on the Word. The worship focus moved from the chancel and the Sacrament toward the pulpit where the proclaimed Word took priority. And chapels that offered prayers for the dead now housed the grand tombs of nobility and the merchant classes who could afford to build them.

With Edward's passing succeeding monarchs imposed their own religious views on the English church's practices and art. Mary I attempted to restore Catholicism but only limited Catholic practices were restored. Elizabeth I then reversed Mary's Catholic restoration attempt, but it did not go back to the Edward's reign of anti-Catholic attitude to strip the church completely. Elizabeth's reversal resulted in a mixture of confessional practices across the many English churches with toleration of some Catholic elements in some and others followed more stringent Protestant practices from the European continent.

When James I ascended to the English throne in the early 17th century, he continued Elizabeth's policies toward Catholic practices. This toleration infuriated the Puritan movement that had started in the late 16th century. The Puritans sought to purify the church of any Catholic practices and implement a Calvinist theology. To them the church was a place of prayer that should be stripped of superstitious and idolatrous monuments. But the church under James saw an artistic revival that the Puritans argued was unacceptable. This tension between English traditionalists and the Puritans carried into the rule of Charles I and eventually became a cause of the English Civil War. Parliament's victory in the war resulted in a Puritan controlled Parliament under the leadership of the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. Parliament Puritans now free to implement their artistic beliefs on the churches established commissioners tasked to remove and demolish anything that appeared to be superstitious and «idolatrous popery». Churches were cleared of art even more extensive than under Edward's reign. Chancels were removed to include the communion rail, altar, and candles. All art was removed or destroyed this time to include the stained glass, relief sculptures on the walls, and the brass inlays. By the end of Parliamentary rule, the parish church had been reduced to a great hall of white-washed walls with pews and a pulpit. A place to simply pray and hear the Word.

With Cromwell's death Charles II was restored to the English throne and a sense of normalcy came upon the country. But the English church had already begun to lose its prominence as the center of parish life. English Dissenters such as Anabaptists, Sabbatarians,

Quakers and many similar groups had started becoming competing faiths from the end of 16th century. By the time of Charles' restoration, they now challenged the Anglican church's authority as the only place to worship. By 1688 the Act of Toleration was passed that allowed for Dissenters to worship outside the recognized church. The parish church was no longer the center of village life.

For more than a thousand years the English parish church had been the center of the Christian's worship life. Its art and architecture reflected their beliefs, the *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*. Lost now for the next 200 years of neglect, revival, romantic restoration, and secularism was a church design with a singular confessional design. New churches would be built to look like a meeting hall, some would attempt to restore Medieval designs for mystery and a Sacramental theology, with many other churches with several different artistic interpretations and designs but no single confessional statement, and other churches looking no different than a theater stage. Each with their own interpretation of *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*.

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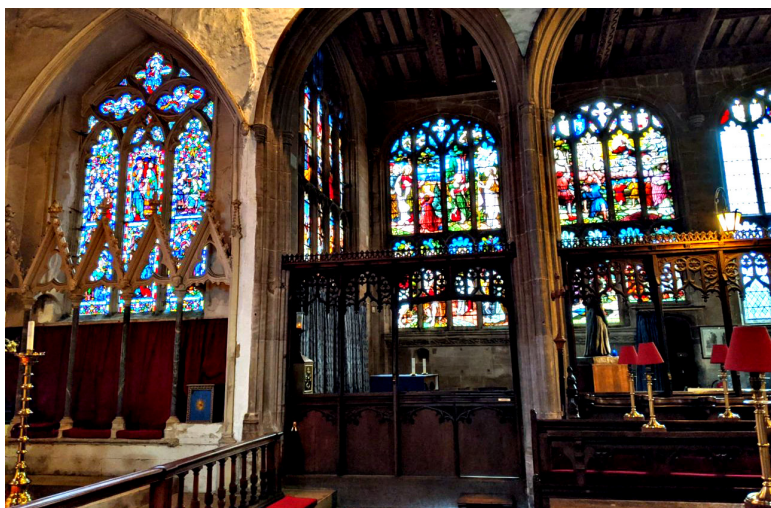
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Nave of the Holy Trinity Church, Blythburgh, Suffolk, England.
Author's photo.



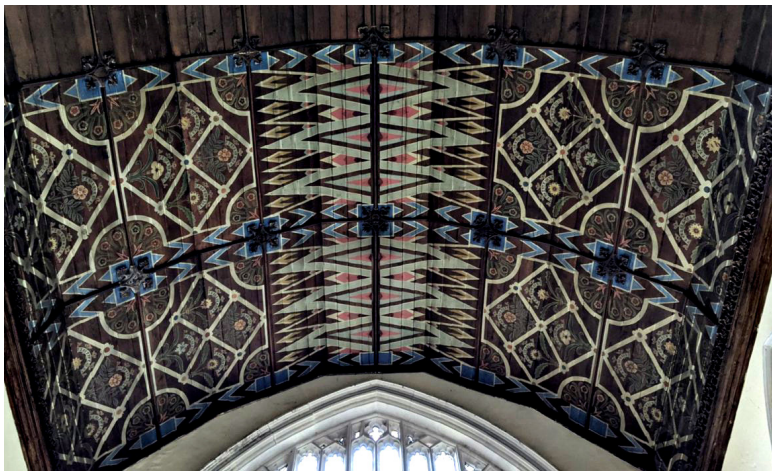
Church of the Holy Trinity, Long Melford, Suffolk, England.
Author's photo.



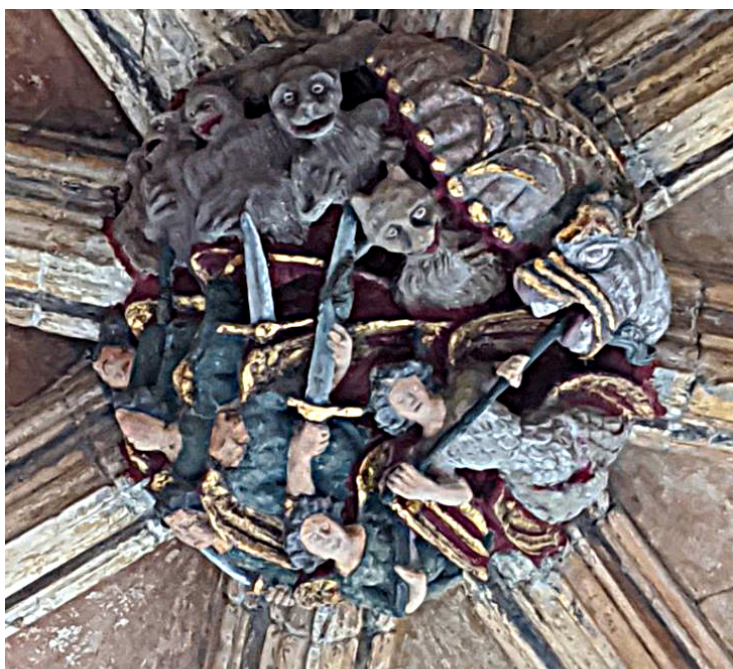
Side chapel, St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Lavenham, Suffolk, England
Author's photo.



Family tomb Pentlow, The Church of St. Gregory and St. George, Pentlow,
Essex, England.
Author's photo.



Painted ceiling, St. Mary the Virgin's Church, Cavendish, Suffolk, England.
Author's photo.



The War in Heaven (from the Apocalypse) Norwich, Norwich Cathedral,
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