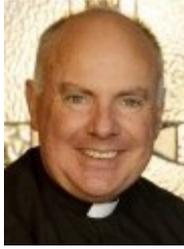


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John Macquarrie, who died in 2007, was a noted Anglican theologian and Anglican priest who served as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford. His theological and spiritual writings have been extensive and explore the depth of the Anglican tradition. Macquarrie was considered Anglicanism's most distinguished systematic theologian for many years. Macquarrie had an international reputation with a great gift for teaching and was as much at home in a small parish gathering as he was at an international conference.

In his excellent book, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, Macquarrie presents an essentially realist view of the sacraments where signs are seen to convey what they signify in a real way. Macquarrie's theological output is a developed example of such realist sacramental theology. He therefore argues that 'perhaps the goal of sacramentality and sacramental theology is to make the things of this world so transparent that in them and through them we know God's presence and activity in over very midst, and so experience his grace' (Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, 1997: 1). Macquarrie observes that in a sacramental universe there is a duality: seen and unseen, ordinary and extraordinary, natural and supernatural; subjective and objective. We cannot, he says, 'escape the fact that we exist as embodied beings in a material world ... constantly involved in the tension between spiritual and material, soul and body, sacred and secular. To live in these tensions is the condition in which God has placed us, and we must seek the right balance between the polarities' (Ibid, p. 4). It is the sacramental principle, he argues, that allows us to find the balance between the polarities.

Of course not all Christians share these views and some argue that God is only revealed propositionally to an individual in say the words of Scripture and by faith alone. This subjective view lessens the objective nature of what Macquarrie calls the sacramental principle, but at the same time Macquarrie argues that we must seek a balance between these two polarities of subjectivity and objectivity.

Perhaps this balance is found in the intimate connection between Word and Sacrament which has always been at the heart of Anglican theology. Sometimes this balance has been obscured with a marginalisation of the Sacrament and an elevation of the Word. This results in what some have called 'bibliolatry' and an exclusive 'textual calculus of the real' (Pickstock, *After Writing*, 1998: 3).

Certainly the Word and preaching of the Word should be exalted and indeed sacraments without the Word tend to degenerate into superstition, but violence is done to our essential human nature and its physicality if the Word and the hearing of the Word, that is, verbal communication, is isolated from sacramental action.

It may be that any imbalance between Word and Sacrament is really a product of our imbalance between the transcendence and immanence of God. Post-Reformation theology

tends to stress God's transcendence (God is far away) at the expense of God's immanence (God is close at hand) and this in turn has led to an emphasis in some traditions on the 'spiritual' at the expense of the 'material'.

Indeed in some theologies the material has been seen as suspect, even evil and lifeless, despite the fact that God chose God's greatest revelation in the human form of Jesus Christ – a human materiality.

The idea then of a sacramental universe suggests both a transcendence and immanence of God. William Temple says that 'our argument has led us to the belief in a living God who, because he is such, is transcendent over the universe, which owes its origin to his creative act, and which he sustains by his immanence' (Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, 1933-4: 473). Macquarrie says the same thing more simply telling us that 'God is near as well as far' (Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments*, 1997: 8). Balance between the polarities is essential in any theological reflection.

By Reverend **Brian Douglas**