

Address by Pat Terry, Evensong 26 March 2017

On the occasion of Dr Andrew-John Bethke's last
Evensong conducting the full Cathedral Choir

It is indeed a privilege and a joy to stand here this evening to talk to you all.

We Anglicans are strange people. When times are sad we are encouraged to be happy and to celebrate. The most obvious example of this is the practice at funerals not to mourn the death of loved ones, but to celebrate their lives.

In a few days time we shall be celebrating another death and a resurrection at Easter; and in my mind I am taken back sixty-one years to my first Easter in this place, where we sang "This joyful Eastertide". I wondered whether this year the choristers might think we should sing "This mournful Eastertide", but no, there is so much to celebrate in what AJ has done for the choir, the congregation, and for the city in which we live.

We meet tonight in a building that has remained pretty constant for nearly two hundred years. We have taken part in a service where the liturgy has remained almost constant for nearly four hundred years. We face the altar when we recite the creed just as our parents and grandparents did, and we sing the music of centuries past as well as of centuries present. So tonight we have sung three compositions by people who have lived and worshipped in this place - the preces and responses by Patrick Wise, who was music master at St Andrews when I went to school there, the anthem "My sacrifice O God" by Brian Judge, choral director at St Andrew's when my son was in his choir, and the magnificent evening canticles by Andrew-John Bethke, composed while we were all in his choir, and which can surely hold their own against the best of the English Cathedral tradition.

The choral directors in this Cathedral have all been held in high esteem by all who have known them. Like all great educators, they become acutely aware of the influence they have over the young choristers whom they mould, youngsters who might only realise many years later the extent to which they benefitted from being in the choir. When I look back over sixty-one years my hope is, that although I will not be here sixty-one years hence, some at least of those who fill the front choir stalls tonight will be able to look back in the same way as I do. To look back and remember a rather remarkable short little man who achieved so much in his five years here - composing canticles, composing masses, introducing new forms of service, preaching sermons, making recordings, conducting the university choir, lecturing in the university music department and in the College of the Transformation, and in between all this managing to complete a Masters degree in Composition with distinction.

But above all AJ will be remembered for the way in which he brought meaning and action to that badly overworked word "Transformation". When others merely mumbled it, AJ got in and effected it, drawing people together through the power of music.

It was Tennyson, in his great poem "Ulysses" who wrote "I am a part of all that I have met". Over the years I have often wondered which way to interpret that line. Does it mean, as I think it does, that part of my thinking, my values, my experience is transmitted to all the people with whom I come in contact, and by extension, to all the people with whom they come into contact? Is this somehow one of the ways in which we can try to understand eternal life?

Everyone who leaves here tonight will carry something of AJ with them; we have all been touched by him in that way.

Tennyson might have meant something like the converse - that I gain something from everyone I meet, rather than give. Yes, indeed, that must surely also be true? Is it too much to hope that AJ will go from this place enriched by what we have been able to give him of ourselves, and by what five years in this quaint little city have meant to him.

Thank you AJ, and "haste ye back".

Prof Pat Terry is the Chair of the Makana Choir School Committee