

"ONE FRAGILE MOMENT" 1

The Spirituality of *A NEW ZEALAND PRAYER BOOK, HE KARAKIA MIHINARE o AOTEAROA.*

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The Anglican Church in New Zealand has another prayer book. Another book to lie beside the first to be used to give shape, form and voice to the way in which this church conducts its worship - "the highest activity of the human spirit"². Like the first, this book is a product of its time, it reflects the movements and nuances which have flowed over and shaped the church of the 20th century, but even more it reflects the collective and individual experiences of people encountering God in a place. The first prayer book grew out of the turmoil of 16th and 17th century Reformation England, this book has added to it the experience of being Christian in 19th and 20th century Aotearoa-New Zealand. These experiences have moulded and changed the Church as God has been encountered in ways which the English Church could not have expected. The publication of the *New Zealand Prayer Book* has sought to gather together and weave these often divergent threads into a single entity whilst maintaining their inherent tension.

In writing this article I have sought to discover some of the ways that this book reflects a spirituality which is Anglican, contemporary and indigenous, but realize that I have been selective, pakeha and personal. My approach has been to try and sketch some of the history of that spirituality and then to seek reflections of that within the new book.

ANGLICAN SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality, perhaps because of overuse, has become a word of rather doubtful repute. To some the word suggests a preoccupation with the inward condition of the self, to others it suggests delving into matters concerned with that rather indefinable, misty existence beyond the observable, experienced as a sense of the numinous. Both these are partly true and yet at its simplest, spirituality is to do with the way we experience God, the way we are called beyond ourselves and know a reality that is

outside our physical self. Spirituality has therefore both an individual and a collective component, it is to do with the way we pray and the way we worship, but it is also to do with the way we perceive God working in our world, our community and ourselves. It has to do, as Macquarie³ suggests, with "becoming a person in the fullest sense". To describe "Anglican" spirituality therefore is an attempt to articulate the common strands of spiritual experience which bind a particular, if very diverse, group of Christians. Such an attempt cannot limit the individual or corporate experiences of members of the group - our God is a God of surprises, but it can provide some impressions by which we can recognise some sense of corporate identity as we travel on together.

Purcell⁴ suggests that Anglican spirituality has some notable characteristics: one is a tendency to base itself upon common human experience, to have a stake in heaven and earth at the same time; another is to have a special kind of language through which to express itself - a prayer book, rooted firmly in scripture but seeking to express its thought in a style that is more refined than everyday speech. This writer also suggests that Anglican spirituality has had a strong moral element, a concern for how people live their lives, and because of this has often expressed itself in a motivation for social action.

Like all Christian spirituality, Anglican spirituality is a product of Divine revelation interacting with the human spirit and as such has been influenced by the great movements which have washed over the Church through its history. Just as contemporary humanity carries with it and expresses its genetic heritage, so the Church too cannot help but be a product of its past interacting in tension with its present. We would expect to find both acknowledged and tacit links with the past as we move through the pages of the new Prayer Book.

Anglican spirituality had its roots in the English mysticism of the middle ages, but had its first great flowering in the 16th and 17th centuries with the production of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Authorised Version of the Bible*. Both these works were written in superb contemporary English and allowed people to worship and participate in the services of the church in ways not available before. The *Prayer Book* in particular passed into English culture at a deep level, and echoes of its rich language can be still heard in common speech. At a more intimate level the *Book of Common Prayer* supplied a system of private devotion which has had a lasting effect on Anglican Spirituality⁵.

The *Authorised Version* and the *Prayer Book* became the founding documents of the reformed Anglican Church, but there was still much confusion about what constituted the essence of Anglicanism - where the Church stood along the continuum of belief. Without some order from this confusion an "Anglican" spirituality could not be discerned. The person who did most to define an Anglican theology and therefore an Anglican spirituality was Richard Hooker who wrote his *Treatise of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* at the end of the 16th century. It was Hooker who articulated an attitude of mind which is still identified as a mark of Anglicanism - a general attitude of tolerance and avoidance of extremes. As Purcell⁶ points out, for Hooker

"Nothing was to be gained by an adherence to a set code of rules. All things under God must be subject to change and development. Nor was God, for him, the dispenser of absolutes of salvation or damnation. There must be charity in all things."

No better example of this approach could be found than his words on the manner of Christ's presence in the Eucharist:

"Shall I wish that men would give more of themselves to meditate with silence what we have by the sacrament and less dispute the manner How?"⁷.

Among the many other influences, prior to this century, upon the developing Anglican spirituality two more must be mentioned. The first was the Evangelical revival of the late 18th century. This movement emphasised an individual recognition of Christ as personal saviour, an entire surrender to God's love shown forth in Christ. The fruit of this was a dedicated life. This movement, which had a profound effect upon English life, brought with it an intense belief in God and in the saving power of the Christian Gospel, the necessity of conversion and an intense moral earnestness⁸. This gave rise to a highly disciplined spirituality centred on prayer and Bible reading, a de-emphasising of sacramental worship and a strong commitment to social action and missionary effort. The second influence was the Anglo-Catholic revival (the Oxford movement) which began in the first half of the 19th century and by the end of the century was firmly established as one wing of the Anglican Church balanced by an equally influential evangelical wing at the other.

Whereas the Evangelicals saw the Church as a vehicle through which the grace of individual salvation was channelled, the Anglo-Catholics emphasised the centrality of the Church for both faith and life. The Anglo-Catholics re-emphasised the historical ministries, especially the sacramental priesthood. Evangelicalism was a redemption-centred faith, Anglo-Catholic

faith emphasised the incarnation. Evangelical Anglicanism was a religion of the Word; Anglo-Catholicism was a religion of the sacrament, particularly the Eucharist. Its spirituality emphasised the transcendent nature of God and its worship was rich in ritual and symbol and instilled a deep sense of the holy. These divergent spiritualities arrived with the Anglican Church as it became established in this country in the 19th and 20th centuries. During this century I believe there have been at least four other influences which have affected the development of an indigenous Anglican spirituality as it diverged from its English origins. One of these was the charismatic movement of the '60's and early '70's. This movement emphasised the power of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. Christians were encouraged to discern and use the spiritual gifts described in the Book of Acts, to meet and recognise each other in love and spiritual intimacy and to worship "God in our midst" in a freer, Spirit-led style with a sharing of ministry. The movement was transdenominational and, together with the progress of the ecumenical movement, was the catalyst for much "grass root ecumenism" setting the stage for the breaking down of denominational barriers which the churches are now experiencing.

A second was the ordination of women to the priesthood. This not only changed the face of the ordained ministry in New Zealand, but also challenged strongly the gender related language, the patriarchal imagery, and through the influence of the women's movement, the assumptions about hierarchical structures implicit in every corner of the male dominated church. The church was soon faced with a need for its language to be inclusive, and recognised valid scriptural precedents for the use of feminine imagery in addressing God. As these insights began to be accepted by progressive elements within the Church a whole treasure of new imagery, new experiences, new ways of praying became available to broaden and deepen the Church's spiritual life.

The third influence was the commitment to the bicultural development of the Church. There has always been a strong Maori component in New Zealand Anglicanism but until recently its influence on the Church's development has been small. Now Maori language and *kawa* is integral to the visible presence of the church. Maori spiritual values, particularly those pertaining to the *whanau* and the intrinsic value of the land and environment, are strongly influencing the spirituality of the whole of Anglicanism in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

The fourth influence was the publication in response to the influence of the Liturgical movement of the first "*New Zealand Liturgy*" in 1966. This, coupled with the availability of the Bible in modern English and the subsequent publication of other resources for worship, began the process of weakening the links between New Zealand Anglicanism and *The Book of Common Prayer* and the *Authorised Version*. A whole generation of New Zealand Anglican has grown up largely without the Prayer Book. This has allowed the new movements to gain currency and validity in the Church more quickly. Worship leaders have felt free to obtain resources for expressing the needs of contemporary spirituality where they could, creating new resources where appropriate, adding and discarding with a freedom that would have been unheard of when the concept of an "Authorised Service" was strictly adhered to.

Yet I believe there has also been a ground-swell, small maybe, but significant, of Anglicans wishing to reclaim their heritage as the "people of two books". To be a people who can point to a book, and say "in here is expressed what *being Anglican today* is all about". This new Prayer Book attempts to be that book. We would expect this book to distil the essence of all those influences described above and to express them in a language that is accessible and yet appropriate. Above all we would expect our Prayer Book to be able to draw from us deep yearnings to praise our creator; to bring us close to God in times of need; help us celebrate our communal life; to help us come into the very present of Christ in the Eucharist and to articulate our experiences of God's grace at the significant moments of passage in our lives. In short, we would expect it to be a book that helps us to live in the continual presence of God as we express love for each other. These are great expectations! But in my opinion this book goes a long way towards achieving them. I do not believe modern Anglicanism could expect to find all the nuances of its spirituality in a single book, but this book should become a highly significant resource for worship that is contemporary and "Anglican".

'REFLECTIONS' IN THE BOOK

My first impression is of the variety of different worship experiences which are offered and the diversity of the Prayer Book's sources. Much of the book is original, growing out of the diverse spiritual experiences of its compilers; yet the acknowledgements at the back show how wide the net was cast for suitable material.

A second impression was a usefulness of the short introductions to each section and the explanatory rubrics throughout. For the most part these are suggestions, allowing for individual preference. I notice more emphasis on the use of symbols (eg. candles, oil). This follows a new understanding about the significance of symbols within the whole Church.

THE CALENDAR

The liturgical recognition and remembering of special people in the history of the Church has always been a part of Anglican spirituality to a greater or lesser degree. It "provides a way . . . to participate, through memory and imagination . . . and so be strengthened" (*NZPB* p 3). It is a mark of our increasingly indigenous spirituality that an increased number of New Zealand and Pacific Saints are identified and there is more recognition of the contribution of women, including a new commemoration on October 30th - "Holy Women of the New Testament".

LITURGIES OF THE WORD

Liturgies for daily life are deeply embedded in Anglican spirituality. The *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)* provided the beautiful services of Mattins and Evensong. However, these have not weathered the reaffirmation of the Eucharist as the central act of worship of the Church particularly well. There would be few parishes where there are regular, well attended celebrations of these services. Likewise I have found in informal discussion, that many clergy no longer use these as their regular daily devotion. Yet the need is there just as strongly. *A New Zealand Prayer Book (NZPB)* has recognised this change in spiritual expression and has provided well crafted resources to meet many needs. The book acknowledges the precedence of sacramental worship on Sundays and provides "Morning and Evening Worship" for "... public worship when there is a need for a Service of the Word" (p 30). It is modelled on Mattins and Evensong, but provides a very rich resource of scriptural sentences and Songs of Praise which add to the traditional canticles of the *BCP*. The inclusion of those strong words of personal assurance from Lamentations - "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases" (p 41) are for me an inspired addition.

To provide a structure for daily devotion "Daily Services" (p 54) and "Daily Devotions" (p 104) are provided. The former has strong links with the early monastic tradition centred on regular reading of scripture and the recital of

the psalms. There is thus a restatement of traditional Anglican spirituality. This service may be adapted easily as a single daily service or for personal use. Again there is a rich resource in the "Songs of Praise" (p 946), touching many images of God and creation which could be used in diverse worship situations. Of particular note is the *Benedicite Aotearoa* which replaces the more universal images of the *Benedicite Omnia Opera*, with images rooted in the experiences of the people who live in this land. Yes it will become dated, but it has a freshness and a relevance to current spiritual experience. The Collects too have some very beautiful images which have opened new spiritual experiences for me -- "God the source of eternal light, shed forth your unending day on us who watch for you . . ." (p 68). "O God, the well-spring of life, pour into our hearts the living water of your grace . . ." (p 92).

For me one of the gems of the *NZPB* is the section entitled "Daily Devotions" - short devotions based on the New Testament, "with a morning and evening devotion for each day" (p 104). As I read this I was reminded of Matt 6:9 "This then is how you should pray . . .", for each of these devotions has as its theme a section of the Lord's prayer. I find that the possibility of one's daily devotions being centred upon the prayer of Christ himself to be very evocative.

The addition of "Midday Prayer" (p 147) and "Night Prayer" (p 167), largely from the writing of Jim Cotter, are welcome additions to the *NZPB* as they accent the ancient tradition of taking time out at the cardinal points of the day to consecrate our life, work and existence to God. I have admired Jim Cotter's unique style of prayer and imagery for a while - the little touches which change the whole theology and spirituality of hitherto traditional phrases - "Who is making heaven and earth" rather than "Who has made heaven and earth" add to the vibrancy of the prayers. The additional canticles from the work of James K Baxter, T S Eliot and Edward Carpenter are creative and helpful innovations. Yet the compilers have been sensitive enough not to demand too much from some of the users of these prayers. Wisely, Cotter's interesting, but easily misunderstood, image of the unicorn at the beginning of Night Prayer⁹ has been omitted, and the extended meditation on the Lord's prayer which includes the phrase "Father and Mother of us all" has become optional. I was delighted to find that the "General Thanksgiving" from the *BCP* included in the *NZPB* (p 182). This prayer has pleased many by its elegant shape and content and its absence had been felt in the revisions. For me, however, the prayer on page 184 has

such a simple profundity that it will surely become much loved. Images of trust and peace flow easily from such phrases as

what has been done has been done
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.

- the whole prayer is superb in its simplicity and elegance!

I find the little "Family Prayer" (p 187) important, whether it finds wide use or not. Its addition points to the desire of the compilers to produce resources which provide for every aspect of Christian worship. The spirituality of the *BCP* is very Church oriented; the *NZPB* in its inclusion of liturgies such as this is reclaiming Anglican spirituality in its widest sense - encompassing the whole of human experience.

BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION and RENEWAL

The liturgies of baptism, confirmation and renewal have radical changes from the earlier revisions and I think are the better for it. In keeping with contemporary thought it is assumed that initiation rites will occur as part of community worship. But not all may agree with the implicit theology of the rite; time will tell. Baptism, in the *NZPB*, is seen as a gift declaring God's love for us (p 383) to which we respond by declaring our faith. It is not seen, as in the earlier rites, as having been given in response to a declaration of faith. The important innovations are the acceptance by the community of corporate responsibility for the nurturing of the faith of a child brought for baptism (p 389), and the recognition of the personhood of a child, no matter how old she/he is, by the direct address made to the child (p 389). Other important features of these rites include the corporate reaffirmation and celebration of faith required of the assembled community. These features link the church in significant ways to the spirituality of the early Church and make strong statements about who it is to whom the Church belongs. The blending of all the initiation rites into a single service, whilst requiring careful preparation by worship leaders, does provide a unity which demonstrates considerable strength.

THE EUCHARISTIC LITURGIES

So much has been written about the spirituality of the great revisions of Eucharistic form and theology which have occurred this century that I shall confine my remarks to a few selected areas. In keeping with the earlier revisions there are liturgies provided for several different types of

celebration, following differing underlying themes. In all there is an equivalence maintained between the ministry of the Word and that of the sacrament - a very important feature of contemporary Eucharistic revision.

Some points. The absolution given in the first liturgy (p 408) focuses upon the source of all forgiveness in a way that I have observed nowhere else. Whilst retaining absolution as a priestly function it states categorically that it is through the redemptive act of Christ on the cross that forgiveness for humanity comes. A cornerstone of faith perhaps, but something that needs to be continually restated.

Similarly, the alternative prayer of "Humble Access" (p 435). Whilst acknowledging the intrinsic beauty of the prayer some have found difficulty, in a modern context, with its image of the complete unworthiness of humanity in approaching God. For some whose most profound experience is of a God who is love dwelling in our midst, this prayer could be viewed as having unfortunate connotations. The *NZPB* provides a simple yet effective solution; by using the past tense there is a recognition that, although we came unworthy to God's table, through acceptance and reconciliation we are now worthy to approach and be enfolded by the love that God brings us through Christ.

The diglot liturgy of Thanksgiving and Praise (p 476) is of particular merit. It is here that the echoes of indigenous spirituality sound loudly in the English version, right from the three-fold welcome at the beginning through the images of bread, water and wine in the invitation. These are distinctly Johannine images and yet they are made to sound a distinct note of Aotearoa-New Zealand in a way that is not forced or obtrusive.

In the general resources for the Eucharist there are many superb collects which could be used on different occasions, and a guide to their themes is provided (p 143). Particular mention must be made of the seasonal blessings. These encapsulate the theme and draw it into a blessing in a way that touches the worshipper with the essence of what God reveals to us in our seasonal remembrances.

The inclusion of a specific liturgy for use with reserved sacrament responds to a particular need in a community which is now reoriented towards the Eucharist as its central act of worship. Some may have theological difficulties with this concept; however, there is an important prayer linking the celebration back to the community from which the consecrated

elements came (p 520). Implicit in this prayer is the idea that 'eucharist' is made within a gathered community, but that the community may be displaced in both space and time.

THE PASTORAL LITURGIES

Birth, marriage and death are not the only markers along life's journey. There are other times of change, of opportunity and reversal, when the presence of God's love and power needs to be acknowledged. The *NZPB* provides liturgies for healing, reconciliation, thanksgiving for birth, and house blessing. I suspect the compilers do not expect these liturgies to replace entirely the creative and spontaneous liturgies which have been produced to accommodate local situations. However, the *NZPB* provides some very creative resources for these situations. I have found that, overall, these resources emphasise the close human bonding and interaction through which God's love can be communicated in a very direct and powerful way. For example, the laying on of hands with healing prayer is emphasised, and anointing with oil is encouraged (although I note that the rubric insists that this is a priestly function). During the prayer of absolution after confession, some gesture of loving touch is suggested (p 753).

The service of thanksgiving for the gift of a child, has great merit. Since the *BCP* service of the "Churching of Women" has found less favour, the miracle of new life has really gone unacknowledged in any collective way by the Church, although some have created their own liturgies for the purpose. I find the opening of this service very powerful. In emphasising the child's name and giving an opportunity to explain its origin we are recognizing in name-giving, that mystical power so often mentioned in scripture and attested by human spirituality through history. The prayers, too, in this service have a strongly inclusive pastoral dimension, recognizing, for example, the birth parents of an adopted child (p 758).

The marriage and funeral liturgies continue that same pastoral concern in providing prayers which resonate with human experience and yet connect intimately with the Divine;

for example p 789 (Marriage Service No 2)

May Christ's love purify your love for each other,
Christ's humanity keep you sensitive and practical;

p 822 (Before a Funeral)

God is with us; God's love unites us,
God's purpose steadies us, God's Spirit comforts us.

The funeral prayers, too, are sensitively written and provide for many pastoral situations, for example p 858 (No 12)

Please listen, God, while we talk to you about ..N..
who has died . . .

In these liturgies, where human emotion is at its most exposed the *NZPB* successfully acknowledges that reality and seeks to consecrate and enfold these experiences within the realm of our spiritual life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A New Zealand Prayer Book has caught a moment in the development of Anglicanism in Aotearoa-New Zealand. It is published at a time of great cultural and spiritual change, a time when even the very images through which we encounter God are being questioned and extended. Yet perhaps because of its long gestation this book seems to have captured the essence of Anglican spirituality, the breadth and depth of its language, its elevation of common human experience Godward, its rootedness in scripture and its recognition of historical tradition. Indeed it has reshaped traditions which were almost lost and presented them in modern idiom whilst still maintaining an appropriate tension with both its Catholic and Reformed heritage. It is a book for its time; it will be too radical for some, too conservative for others, but the "*via media*" is the Anglican way. We have a book again: it too will one day be replaced.

Ken Bennett

References

- ¹ A New Zealand Prayer Book, He Kurakia Mihinare o Aotearoa. Collins. p xiii
- ² Ibid p 29
- ³ MacQuarie, S. Paths in Spirituality. SCM. p 40
- ⁴ Purcell, W. Anglican Spirituality, a Continuing Tradition. Mowbrays. p 4
- ⁵ Ibid p 5
- ⁶ Ibid p 6
- ⁷ Ibid p 7
- ⁸ Ibid p 28
- ⁹ Jim Cotter. Prayer at Night. J E Cotter. p 15.

