

MINISTERIAL FORMATION IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Part of the motivation for writing this article comes from recent access to an article written in 1931 by Dr Alexander Hetherwick, *Training a Primitive People in Christian Worship*. Hetherwick was insightful enough to note 'the psychological outlook of the people on the unseen and spiritual in their life, and the form in which that outlook expresses itself in their own heathen worship' (:42). Though we would nowadays use somewhat different terms, there is considerable truth in Hetherwick's statement. Unfortunately, many missionaries threw the baby out with the bathwater in their assumption that all that preceded the coming of missionaries in the nineteenth century was not Christian and their lack of appreciation of the spiritual dimension of the worship of black people as a basis on which to build the training of black Christian ministers.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century those coming forward to be trained as ministers can no longer be regarded as coming from a 'heathen' perspective for many black candidates come from situations where their traditional faith expression has been successfully blended with that of western Christianity over a considerable period of time, despite some being recent converts. This background might negatively be described as syncretistic, or more positively as holistic or inclusive inasmuch as African life is not as neatly compartmentalised as that of Europeans. Western Christians in the African context have difficulty with this concept because they see these two tensions in opposition to one another. In seeking to impose their dualistic notions they denigrate black approaches to life and faith. The black person's worldview sees life in its entirety and does not consider any aspect of life as beyond or separate from God's influence, concern or control.

Viewing and expressing the life of faith in its entirety results in a richness in worship where celebration is a key element (sadly lacking

in western worship) along with hospitality to visitors and strangers, inevitably leading to their participation with the people in their worship of God. African worship is no longer a matter of either/or (note the dualistic categories again!) with regard to traditional or western forms, but an enrichment of the traditional worship of the church universal within the particularity of each context. This takes us back to the Early Church where each context fashioned its own particular liturgy as part of the catholic church and this was also an enrichment rather than the result of a blind acceptance of the tradition formulated in one place for all peoples of all times.

Preparation for leadership in Christian worship is a priority in the training of ministers in any context and at any time, not least in South Africa today. From its inception in 1870, ministerial education (which, incidentally, was ecumenical) at Lovedale Missionary Institution, within the mission of the Free Church of Scotland, centred on a pattern of daily worship. This has continued to the present day in different places and in different ways. Theological education continued to be offered at Lovedale until 1920 when it was transferred to the Department of Divinity at the University of Fort Hare, an institution whose foundation owed much to the Free Church mission. The regime of regular worship continued. This was strengthened with the opening of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (FedSem) for black ministerial candidates on a campus to the east of Fort Hare in 1963, its expropriation in 1974, its subsequent wilderness experience first in Umtata and then at Edendale, Pietermaritzburg until it resettled at Imbali, Pietermaritzburg in 1979. FedSem worship centred on a morning and evening office, and a weekly eucharist shared with Anglicans, Methodists and Congregationalists. For the most part, liturgical influences prevailed and set forms became the order of the day. The closure of FedSem in 1993 led to the Presbyterian churches returning to Fort Hare in 1994 and moving to the University of Pretoria in 2002. From 1994, this changed to a morning office and weekly eucharist. All the while daily worship was the mainstay of the spiritual life of staff and students as well as being an opportunity for ministerial formation. Yet, these

developments cannot be seen independently of what was going on in the liturgical life of the church.

Throughout the history of worship development in Presbyterian theological education in South Africa, two approaches to worship have been held in creative tension. They are the desire to be both Presbyterian and ecumenical. Within the Presbyterian, there were an additional two influences, both of which were derived from Scottish tradition.

The roots of the 'Catholic' heritage in South African Presbyterianism are to be found in the Church of Scotland¹ as part of the holy, catholic and apostolic visible institution in terms of its tendency towards more liturgical forms of worship in its:

- understanding of the 'office' of the ordained ministry
- 'high' and 'low' doctrines of the sacrament of Holy Communion (Calvin, Institutes, IV:17)
- liturgical concern that all things be done 'decently and in order'
- desire to relate church and community (i.e. world)
- sense of tradition and continuity of ecclesiastical life
- creedal and confessional nature.

With regard to official liturgical books, which are vital resources for theological education, South African Presbyterianism has followed its Scottish roots, by and large. These roots have themselves been influenced by the Liturgical Movement² which is part of the Ecumenical Movement of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The formation of the Church Service Society in Scotland (1865) marked the beginning of liturgical reform marked by 'a return to the catholic note of the Reformers' doctrine and practice' (Burnet

1 with the exception of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa whose roots are to be found in Switzerland which, in turn, also provided Scottish Presbyterianism with its roots!

2 with its markedly greater concern for the centrality of the Eucharist (cf. John Knox)

1960:280). This brought forth fruit in the form of the *Book of Common Order* (1940, 1979) and *Common Order* (1994). Although the Liturgical Movement began in the Roman Catholic Church, its new Mass was only sanctioned in 1975. Today, it is difficult to differentiate mainline English-speaking churches' liturgies, so much have most of them been influenced by the Liturgical Movement³ as well as the International Consultation on English Language (ICEL) with its agreed forms of liturgical texts. This influence is also clear in the liturgies of the Church Unity Commission (CUC)⁴ in South Africa. This has resulted in a greater concern for the more regular celebration of the eucharist⁵, the use of creeds⁶, the use of vernacular languages, the regular and orderly reading of Scripture, but most importantly congregational participation.

Even service books in the vernacular have been similarly influenced e.g. the order of service for holy communion in the Zulu service book of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa is virtually a direct translation of the Church of Scotland *Book of Common Order* (1940) which has also been influential in the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa⁷ often being translated in use by its users. All of this testifies to a desire and need (?) for set forms of prayer and worship to guide Presbyterians in their corporate devotional life and possibly also in their private devotions. The more recent *Service Book and Ordinal* of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (1984) which is suitable for private or group devotions 'is characterised by modernity in expression and simplicity in style' (Elias sa:2) despite its resultant reduction in 'the note of majesty and grandeur' (:2). It is marked particularly by its:

- ecumenicity

3 see Thurian M & Wainwright G *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, Geneva: WCC

4 see bibliography

5 a good Reformation principle which was lost in Scotland as a result of the shortage of ministers initially, and later out of a deeply spiritual concern for the purity of the sacrament and those participating in it, though it is now being reinstated in many places

6 which are necessary for our identity and for the mission of the Church

7 since 1979, renamed the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa

- realisation of the various ministries in the Church
- greater sense of community in worship
- concern for language which is understandable⁸
- realisation that worship involves all the senses in a holistic manner
- need for indigenisation⁹
- awareness of the Lordship of Christ in *all* we do
- greater concern that our entire life and witness is an act of worship

A similar unpublished volume of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa was prepared¹⁰ in the hope that it 'may be serviceable to Christ the Lord of the Church and to his people and may promote the glory of God' (RPCSA 1986:Preface). The recent Scottish *Common Order* is also proving to be influential in South African Presbyterianism as it becomes more accessible. At the time of writing, there is a proposal before the General Assembly to adopt it as the standard for the worship of the recently united Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa¹¹ while this young denomination prepares its own book of common order. It includes a daily office for the use of individuals and groups and stresses that worship is 'the duty, joy and prerogative of all believers' (1994:x).

Within the context of theological education, ecumenism has been a key motivational force. The Federal Theological Seminary was an institution formed by Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists and Anglicans. Though there were always tensions in the area of worship, an amazing convergence of opinion was achieved during the years of apartheid when there was a constant need for innovative forms of worship to meet the tragic circumstances of the times. Ecumenical forms were adopted, especially the liturgy of the Church Unity Commission and the Lima Liturgy of the World Council of Churches (WCC). In addition, the Seminary produced its own

8 although little has been done to develop the use of vernacular languages, including Afrikaans

9 though its use of the word 'translatability' is ambiguous at the very least

10 but never published

11 the result of the union of the RPCSA and the PCSA

Worship Folder as an ecumenical resource for worship. Within the specific Presbyterian tradition, set forms for the Daily Office and the Sacrament of Holy Communion have been used, sometimes a little too religiously!

Yet, at the same time, the other tradition was integral to the worship of the Seminary. The Free Church or evangelical tradition, also derived from the same Scottish source, with its lesser concern for set forms retains a deep concern for order and emphasises:

- evangelical concern
- strong commitment to personal and immediate faith
- zeal for freedom in prayer and worship¹²
- separation of church and world¹³
- its view of the local congregation as fellowship¹⁴
- its adherence to individual liberty
- concern that the sacraments¹⁵ be received in purity of faith and piety
- suspicion of ‘tradition’

Of these traditions, the former has predominated in the public ordering of the Church’s life and witness, resulting in an ethos in which the vital concern for ‘order’ has become the priority and where the recognition of individual liberty is recognised but as being necessarily subject to self-restraint. It is interesting to note how this occurs in the worship of black Presbyterians where the mood and tone of spontaneity and celebration changes significantly to solemnity and dignity in Sunday worship as the service moves from the ‘Liturgy of the Word’ to the ‘Liturgy of the Upper Room’ (Maxwell 1936:12-13) where ‘there is often a combination of spontaneity and freedom

12 despite its rigid adherence, e.g. to the singing of Psalms only in some of its branches

13 especially church and state

14 sometimes to the extent of almost becoming congregational in the manner of its polity

15 especially the sacrament of Holy Communion

alongside formulaic prayer and ritual action' (Dupre & Sauer 1989:521).

The contribution of African worship within the Presbyterian tradition is also significant. Here, spontaneity and freedom (especially of movement through music and dance!) as well as maximum participation mark certain parts of worship services, particularly services to meet crises such as bereavement and illness, as well as celebrations such as graduation parties. African worship is holistic, being based in the totality of the life experience¹⁶ of the community of which the individual is a constituent component. For a black person a sense of belonging is what constitutes identity and the operational ethic is communal and collective aiming at the integration of persons. The African concept of *ubuntu* denotes a harmonious collective mutual concern:

African spirituality relates to the unique notion of communality and collective solidarity that the African society exhibits in all spheres of life. There is a profound sense of interdependence, from the extended family to the entire community. In a very real sense, everybody is interrelated; including relations between the living and those who have departed (Mtetwa 1996:24).

Holism in African worship is further demonstrated in the area of respect for the ancestors where there is a continuity of relationship with family members who have 'passed away'. They are never considered as dead because that would indicate a finality beyond which no relationship is possible. This is a particular area of concern for western Christians who are unable to integrate past, present and future into a whole approach to time and forget the significance of the communion of saints in their own tradition. African ritual events are designed *ukukhumbula izinyanya* – to dynamically re-present the

¹⁶ compared with the holistic approach of western individualistic Presbyterianism which is holistic in the sense of involving the totality of the person – body, heart, mind and soul

Living-Dead in a sense that is not unlike (but also not identical to) our concrete remembrance of Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion which is community forming:

The ritual itself as a celebration of the lives of the departed is therefore multifold in both its execution and application. It engenders a spirit of communality and collectivity in the African society and also enhances the integrity of extended family relations. It also affirms each individual's profound sense of belonging which in itself negates the dominant Euro-American appraisal of individualism and privacy (Mtetwa 1996:23).

This holism is extended to the future of the community in the positive and inclusive way in which children are treated¹⁷.

Helpful as Mtetwa's concept of African spirituality is, it fails to demonstrate the fullness of holistic worship by omitting the Africans' relation to the environment which is part of social reality and fundamental to all life. This raises the extremely sensitive issue of relationship to the land, a relationship which is not only economic and social but also deeply spiritual as it resonates with the ethos and spirit of family – past, present and future. In the African context the family land is a holy place at which all of the family's significant events take place. Home is where the family ethos resides, rather than the place where people currently live. So nowhere is it more true that 'Christian faith and spirituality cannot be sundered from the struggles, hopes and fears of people and nations' (De Gruchy 1986:19) and the threats and celebrations that attach themselves thereto in relation to the land issue. Such was the situation in South Africa with regard to forced removals during the period of apartheid; people were relocated to an inhospitable environment, not just in terms of the geographical climate (lack of basic life necessities, e.g. water, arable land, infrastructure, shelter), but more so in terms of being physically

17 although this is under serious threat in communities where child abuse is rife and incomprehensible

dislocated from their forebears. It was an authentic wilderness experience where people were tempted to jettison God. Yet it was also the locus of intense spiritual experience as there was none other on whom to rely. Here the presence of God became a reality.

The frequency and ease with which prayer is offered (privately and publicly) is a marked feature of African spirituality. Worthy of mention here is the role of the associations, the Womens' Christian Association (*umanyano*), the Mens' Guild (*amadodana*), the Girls' Christian Association and the Youth Fellowship¹⁸. The 'highly charged' (Dupre & Sauer 1989:523) *umvuselelo*/revival service plays a key role in the life of these organisations with its emphasis on conversion, healing and intercession as well as fundraising (*umjikelo*). The spontaneity in worship 'has complex roots in oral culture and the history of revivalism' (Gaitskill 1997:261). Prayer meetings are marked by a high degree of sociability and mutual support and the associations display a combination of social activism and evangelistic commitment which is central to their spirituality. Within the Seminary context, this was another field of experience for trainee ministers. It was the custom at FedSem for the Amadodana to go into the community on Wednesday evenings after Seminary eucharist to minister to specific needs in the community.

The changes in mood which occur during African worship are significant inasmuch as they reflect the complexity of African life which has been described as 'schizophrenic'¹⁹. The holistic approach of the black African to life in its entirety easily accommodates different emphases of mood in its worship, hence spontaneity, freedom, celebration, dignity and solemnity are all integrated into a service. It might be said that this reflects the social life of black people where, as

18 there are slight variations in the names of associations in the different Presbyterian churches

19 I am grateful to my friend, Rev Richard Shorten, for this insight. But, further, worship and spiritual life may also be described as schizophrenic in the sense that while traditional religious practices are denied many continue to practice them as a kind of insurance policy. This is tied to the concept of African identity which Christianity in some senses seems to deny (du Toit 1998:44)

the result of their experience, they have had to present themselves as all things to all people in the context of racial discrimination, one moment having to appear in the 'all blacks are happy smiling souls!' mode to appease the consciences of their white mentors while, at the same time, they are contending with the gravest crises in their authentic personal and corporate lives. It is certainly true that they live a dual existence in a covertly (and sometimes not so covertly) racially segregated society even in the post-1994 new South Africa.

Having said all of this, it must also be noted that tradition in worship is important for black Christians. Within the *Xhosa* tradition of worship, for example, the singing of the *Te Deum Laudamus* (*Siyakudumnisa wean Thixo...*) is obligatory in every Sunday service; it is even said that people leave the service saying they haven't attended church if they have not sung *Siyakudumisa*!²⁰ The same is true of the place of Psalm 24:7-10 'Masango nyusan intloko' (Ye gates lift up your heads...) in the eucharist. The tradition of African spirituality is also catholic in the sense that it is universal and inclusive in its ethos with regard to the different African cultures and how they relate to western culture.

This idea of holism which is basic to African spirituality is fundamental to the tradition of reformed spirituality: 'true reformational spirituality encompasses the whole of life... The whole of man [sic] is involved in religion' (van der Walt 1993:16). Consequently, it is linked to African traditional religion, sharing many of its precepts. This makes it ecumenical in the widest sense of the word, as it relates to other faith systems. Yet, it is ecumenical in a narrower Christian sense and this is visible in the manner in which this worship is easily translated within and between all the black congregations of Christian denominations. The coming together of the womens' associations on the World Day of Prayer demonstrates how African services in particular cross traditional boundaries. It is

20 this is possibly the least sung hymn in the Scottish Church!

heartening to note the developing inclusiveness of such services where women cross both denominations and races on these occasions.

Temptations to view African Christian worship as syncretistic need to be resisted because Christianity has always grown out of and been attached to particular cultures. Nowhere does it exist in a pure untainted form. It is thoroughly contextual as are the many forms of Western Christianity and these are also to be judged if that is to become an appropriate criterion for approval.

Hymnody is an important aspect of Presbyterian worship. This is witnessed in the love of the metrical Psalms, Scottish paraphrases and traditional hymns in the catholic tradition, the love of choruses in the charismatic tradition and both of these in African tradition. Vernacular hymn books play an especially important role here, e.g. *Incwadi Yamaculo AmaXhosa* in the Xhosa speaking tradition. It has also to be said that these are by no means watertight categories, there being parts of Presbyterianism where all music is part of the devotional life irrespective of its origin.

Order is a vital concern in African worship. This has a biblical foundation in Paul's teaching on worship: 'let all be done decently and in order' (1Cor 14:40) since all the contributors to and components of worship 'aim to build up the church' (1Cor 14:26), not break it into factions. While the Spirit is free, it is neither uncontrolled nor uncontrollable in the liturgy 'for God is not a God of disorder but of peace' (1Cor 14:33), but also a God of change through the action of the Holy Spirit (Louw 1988:56). Consequently, structures of identity and worship are formulated with regard to rites of initiation, the liturgy of Word and Sacrament, the calendar and lectionary, the pattern of daily prayer, the ordinances of marriage and funeral services as well as the official ordinances of the Church, e.g. for ordination. This does not only apply to church orders as we have noted above. It also concerns the orderliness of our conduct in worship, no matter what kind of form is adopted. It is this concern for order that is perhaps one of the sources of solemn dignity in the celebration of the

sacrament of Holy Communion, which appears to many as a contradiction in terms, especially in the African context. Hence, the conduct of public worship is the prerogative of the minister, who is responsible to his presbytery for such conduct, and to selected others.

What is written about the Scottish context in particular is also relevant to the African situation:

Worship then is the high occasion when an external expression of the faith of the church is made... It is here not in our creeds that the deepest expression of the church's faith appears. The creed is but the formulation of that to which worship witnesses and testifies, worship, however, is the living form of faith and involves the whole church as well as the whole person. Moreover, it is in this act that we see the witness of the church at its finest, and it is from this act that the devotion of individual Christians receives its nourishment. This is the centre from which all other actions of the church take their meaning (Macleod 1965:10).

Hetherwick (1931:47) concluded his article in the following terms:

Where such foundations already exist of an inborn instinct and reverence for the spiritual and unseen, the future of the Church ... should lack nothing of seemliness and reverence in its worship of God.

In a very real sense these words were prophetic with regard to the development of the training of ministers for leading worship in the Presbyterian church in southern Africa.

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