

3 Shaped by Worship



Worship is at the heart of Anglicanism. If you asked what it is that Anglicans do, many people would probably answer, “we go to church.” It is this gathering together to worship, on Sundays and throughout the week, that shapes us for all the other things that we do. Our Prayer Book defines worship as “the highest activity of the human spirit.”

(p.xv) It is the offering to God of our whole lives, out of gratitude for all that God has given to us. That worship is what forms us as Christians, as disciples of Christ, and nurtures our collective and individual relationships with God.

It is not just Anglicans who worship, of course, but worship is central to Anglicanism, the priority which shapes the identity of our community. At the heart of an Anglican parish is its worship. It’s also an important clue to our theology. Where other denominations often keep their theology in a document (the Westminster confession for Presbyterians, papal encyclicals for Roman Catholics, for example) we Anglicans tend to keep ours in our prayer books, in the words which priest and congregation say to one another and sometimes in the rubrics (the stage directions which tell us what to do at that moment in the service). Our liturgy shapes our beliefs – as the old Latin saying goes, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, “the law of praying [is] the law of believing” – and forms our understanding of God and our relationships with one another. When we praise God as the “giver of all good things” and thank God for assuring us of the gift of eternal life and “uniting us with the blessed company of all faithful people” we are acknowledging not just what God has done for us as individuals, but also the importance of being placed together in a community which stretches across time and across space. When we offer Christ’s peace to one another before receiving communion, we admit our tendency to allow the relationships we have with one another to become fractured, and also remind ourselves that God’s desire is to heal those fractures.

- ❖ ***“Liturgy” – the word which talks about our public prayer and worship – literally means “the work of the people.” What do you think about this as a reminder that the congregation is not there as an audience, but has work to do? And what work is that?***

Common Worship

A key characteristic of Anglican worship is the use of written prayers, said by priest and congregation, in which a given framework is enlivened by features (readings, prayers, and songs) which vary to reflect the church's liturgical year. The first Anglican prayer book, Thomas Cranmer's 1549 one (more about Cranmer later) was entitled *The Book of Common Prayer* – and that title, as well as the prayer book itself, continued for several hundred years; it's still in use in several Anglican provinces today. As Archbishop Brian Davis's preface to our Prayer Book notes, one of the treasures of Anglican spirituality has been its authorised Book of Common Prayer, intended both for personal use at home and for public liturgical worship. "Common" means the book is for the whole people of God to use together. Cranmer's prayer books were in English, not Latin, which meant it was accessible to far more people than the liturgical material they replaced.

That accessibility continues to be a key objective, as all over the Anglican world modern prayer books that fit local and contemporary needs have been developed. A particular feature of *A New Zealand Prayer Book / He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* (1989) is the inclusion of material in the other languages of this province of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, so that through our liturgies we can integrate the traditions of the past with the varied cultures of our diverse communities.



- ❖ ***Archbishop Brian noted that ANZPB “has been created in our own Pacific cultural setting, and shaped by our own scholarship. It belongs to our environment and our people.” Why might this be important?***
- ❖ ***One of the features of our liturgies is a variety of words and images used to describe God (eg “God of the planet earth” “Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver”): has this changed how you think of, and approach, God?***
- ❖ ***ANZPB notes that “worship is a skill to be learned and a creative art to practise.” What does it mean to see worship as a skill that we can learn? How is it an art that we can practise?***

Corporate worship forms and sustains the relationships that we have within the Christian community, with God and with each other. “Corporate” here means “relating to the body” – we are the body of Christ, baptised into one body and

bound together by the love of Christ. When we worship, we strengthen the bonds of love between us and other Christians, just as much as we strengthen our relationship with God.

Our worship is “incarnational” – that’s also about embodying things (Jesus is God embodied as a human being). Worship and the rest of life are parts of an integral whole, and when we worship we take things from ordinary human experience –



water, light, bread, wine, oil – and use them to express the presence of God. Worship too can use and appeal to the full range of our senses – candles, icons, incense, gesture, music, and dance – allowing us to encounter God with our whole being. Prayer and worship can involve the whole of us, our bodies as well as our souls. (This is what lies

behind our “Anglican aerobics” – the way we sit, stand, kneel, or move to gather around the font or the altar-table.) It’s an active way of worshipping.

- ❖ ***How important to you is music in worship?***
- ❖ ***Do you see a connection between the use of ordinary things in worship (ordinary water in baptism, for example) which is taken and blessed and becomes something extraordinary, and God’s use of ordinary people (like you and me) which can become something / someone extraordinary?***
- ❖ ***Think back to worship during lockdown (Zoom services, livestreaming or pre-recorded, services in a Facebook group): what did we miss? What does that tell us?***

There are two main types of Anglican services in which we might participate: Services of the Word and the Eucharist. Very likely, we have encountered both of these, and both of them can shape us.

Services of the Word

A few decades ago the classic pattern of Anglican worship was Morning Prayer (Matins), and Evening Prayer (Evensong) – the Eucharist wasn’t held as often, and tended to be early in the morning. The focus is on readings from the Old and New Testaments, the saying or chanting of psalms, and a sermon, as well as prayers. A particular feature is the use of canticles – songs of praise taken from

Scripture such as Mary's song the Magnificat, and the Nunc Dimittis (Lord, let your servant depart in peace) – both from the Gospel of Luke.

Our prayer book includes several options for Morning and Evening Prayer including the Daily Services (a different service for each morning and evening during the week, incorporating a wider range of scriptural texts), and the Daily Devotions, a briefer and more informal style of worship based on the New Testament. As well as these, we are offered the opportunity to pray at different times of the day in the services of Midday Prayer, Night Prayer (the old service of Compline), and Family Prayer. All of these services can be led by a layperson.

Services of the Word can form us as the people of God in two ways: by encouraging us to interact with a wider range of passages from the Bible, and in particular the psalms, and by offering us the opportunity to pause for prayer and worship at certain times of the day. There is a peacefulness that can come when we pray, before going to bed, “I will lie down in peace and take my rest, for it is in God alone that I dwell unafraid.”



❖ ***What experience have you had with some of these services? What might it do to your day if it began or ended with praying like this?***

Eucharist

The Eucharist is – as the Catechism at the back of *ANZPB* tells us – “the sacrament of thanksgiving given by Christ for the continual recalling of his life, death and resurrection. It is the family meal of the Church in which we are strengthened in our union with the living Christ and with one another for service in the world.” It's worth quoting this in its entirety because it tells us so much about what it is we're doing when we gather, on a Sunday or during the week, for Eucharist. The word "Eucharist" simply means “thank you.” We make present again what Christ has done for us and we thank God for all of that. It's the meal at which the church gathers as family to be nourished in order to carry on serving God in the world, strengthening that connection between us and Christ which lies behind the term “communion.” It is Christ who invites us to this meal and who presides at it, welcoming all baptised Christians, including children. At the heart of our worship is a meal. And it's a meal which feeds us, paradoxically, by making us hungrier for God.

❖ ***What could help us to remember that the Eucharist is a family meal?***

- ❖ ***And what might seeing Eucharist as a family meal mean for those other family meals that we have at home?***

A text for worship: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

We learn from this that the church has been celebrating Eucharist from its earliest days: we are part of a very ancient tradition! The night before Jesus died, just before he was arrested and his community started to disintegrate, he gave to his disciples – including all of us who are disciples today – a meal to keep him present with us. Ever since then, sharing bread and wine together is the central act which defines a Christian community.

Very early on, the church understood that the consecrated bread and wine undergo a transformation. Something happens to them which means that



Christ’s presence is made real amongst us. Anglicans believe the bread and wine *are* the body and blood of Christ but we don’t try to work out exactly how this occurs. (It was theologian Richard Hooker c1554-1600 who articulated this.) This is different from the semi-magical understandings of the mediaeval period¹ and the beliefs of some of the Reformers that the Eucharist was a only symbolic memorial of Christ’s death.

- ❖ ***Bishop John Pritchard says, “we take Communion because we need it.” What does this mean to you?***

Sacraments

As we saw earlier, the Eucharist is a sacrament. What are sacraments? They are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ to the

¹ Did you know that “hocus pocus” comes from the Latin *hoc est corpus meus* (“this is my body”)?

church. That combination of outward and visible with inward and spiritual is important, for it links the two worlds we live in – the physical, secular, body, material world and the spiritual, sacred, soul world. But it's really one world, and we shouldn't split it up. We exist as spiritual *and* embodied beings in a material world, the world that is created and sustained by God.

Sacraments channel God's grace to us. The two sacraments commanded by Christ in the Gospels are Eucharist and Baptism. Baptism is how we become members of the church and heirs of God's kingdom. It's about new birth into God's family, forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit. Anglicans (like a number of other denominations) baptise people of any age, including infants. This is a sign of belonging to a community, as the Church includes people of every age-group, and an affirmation of the faith of the community, into whose midst the child is baptised.

In addition to these two, there are five sacramental actions:

- Reconciliation of a Penitent
- Anointing, for healing and wholeness
- Christian Marriage
- Confirmation, or commissioning for Christian witness and service
- Ordination of Deacons, Priests and Bishops

Services for all of these are found in our Prayer Book.

- ❖ ***The sacraments have been described (by theologian Joseph Martos) as "doors to the sacred." What has been your experience of sacraments? Do they function for you as a door to the sacred?***
- ❖ ***At the Last Supper, Jesus broke bread and poured wine – and he also washed his disciples' feet. Should foot washing be a sacrament?***

THOUGHTS / QUESTIONS

Meet the Family

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) Archbishop of Canterbury, Liturgist, Martyr

As Archbishop of Canterbury 1529-53 Cranmer steered the Church of England through the Reformation. He was burnt as a heretic on 21 March 1556. As archbishop, he was instrumental in having a copy of the Bible placed in every church, and he had a good understanding of the Scriptures. His greatest contribution to the Reformation was the Book of Common Prayer. This was the first English prayer book, replacing the Catholic liturgy in Latin. It remained largely unchanged in the 1662 book used by Anglicans throughout the world for four centuries.



Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), Writer and Mystic



Evelyn Underhill was a lay woman who led clergy retreats and was a spiritual director to many. Her 39 books, including *Mysticism* and *Worship*, developed a central theme – the love of God. She was the first woman invited to lecture in theology at the University of Oxford. She wrote, “After all it is those who have a deep and real inner life who are best able to deal with the irritating details of outer life.” “My growth depends on my walls coming down.”

Florence Li Tim-Oi (1905-1992) First Anglican Woman Priest

Florence Li Tim-Oi was born in Hong Kong. Ordained deacon in 1941 she led a congregation in Macau. Because of the war, no priest could get to Macau to celebrate the Eucharist, so the local bishop ordained her; she had to sneak through the Japanese army’s encampment to attend her own ordination. She served as a priest in Macau until the war ended in 1946. Then the Anglican world was alarmed by her ordination and she gave up her license to officiate, but took up parish ministry again in 1981 in Toronto.



How has worship shaped you?