
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP III ASSIGNMENT

MOORE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE ~ DIPLOMA OF MINISTRY

CANDIDATE: JODIE C. MCNEILL

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A PRAYER BOOK FOR AUSTRALIA is an important step forward in Anglican liturgical revision. It provides many helpful improvements in ease of use and simplicity. However, this revision has also made unhelpful changes in direction and emphasis from the original benchmark of the Book of Common Prayer. It is our intention to evaluate the Holy Baptism service in terms of methodology and theology. We will draw attention to both helpful changes and areas where amendments have been made that represent an unacceptable shift from the theology of BCP.

The layout and simplicity of the APBA service is excellent. It is easy to read, and the rubrics are clear and helpful. Many of the lengthy didactic sections of the BCP order are now transformed into responses, which assist the congregation in listening to the statements in the liturgy.

The amalgamation of the three BCP services (infants, infants at home, and those of riper years) aids simplicity, and provides for times when both adults and infants are baptised at the same time. This change has led to the removal of reference to 'godparent' to 'sponsor' allows for this change.

The incorporation of the service into Morning or Evening prayer is a helpful change, for it rightly assumes that the baptism will occur during 'the regular pattern of congregational worship' (p.70).

Much of the language is simplified and summarised. This has the advantage for use with those who are not regular church members. However, in summarising some concepts, the writers have also made a shift in the meaning (see below for details). Additionally, complex concepts still remain, and the attempt to provide a 'sense of the noumena' (introduction to APBA) is reflected in the formality of many of the prayers. Furthermore, the standard of English language remains very high, placing this liturgical resource out of the reach of many less literate English speakers.

In keeping with the general direction of APBA, there is a significant shift from redemptive theology to creation theology. Unlike BCP, there is the inclusion of material relating to God as creator, hence the prayer:

'We give you thanks that at the beginning of creation your Holy Spirit moved upon the waters to bring forth light and life. With water you cleanse and replenish the earth; you nourish and sustain all living things'

The implication of this shift towards creation from redemption is that God is considered to be the kind God of love, not the angry God of wrath. Within the APBA service, there is no reiteration of such BCP phrases as 'men are conceived and born in sin'. Indeed, the act of baptism is regarded as obedience of Jesus' command in Mt 28:19, and thus need to be restored from our fallen relationship with God is not emphasised. So, God's 'great mercy' (BCP) is replaced with God's 'all-embracing love' (APBA).

In BCP, Baptism is grounded in the gospel of Jesus. The set reading from Mark 10:13f shows the need to humbly come to Jesus, and the warning that failure to do so will exclude a person from the Kingdom of God. In APBA, this is replaced with a rubric suggesting the reading of an appropriate NT passage on baptism. In BCP, this set reading formed the basis for the rest of the service, whereas the omission in APBA is reflected in its reduced emphasis on the objective work of Christ.

In addition, the absence of the declaration of the ramifications of ignoring God minimise the importance of making a choice to follow. In BCP, the brief exposition of Mark 10 showed the need to respond, and the threat of God's judgement upon those who did not repent. Yet, this minimisation of wrath and judgement is an unfortunate accommodation to those who subscribe to a universal salvation of humanity.

In contrast to the Reformers' desire to remove superstitious acts from occasions of worship, the provision is made for 'a lighted candle to be presented to each candidate'. This detracts from the Biblical sign of water, and its understanding of regeneration and washing.

After the baptism, the priest addresses the newly baptised and exhorts them to 'live as a disciple of Christ: fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith'. This is a weakened version of the BCP imperative to 'to fight under his banner against sin, the world and the devil'. This is another shift away from a doctrine of redemption, with the removal of the express need to avoid sin.

There is a shift in the APBA service away from the language of divine election. Immediately before the act of baptism in BCP, the priest says 'grant that this child, now to be baptised therein, may receive the fullness of thy grace and *remain in the number of thy faithful and elect children*, through Jesus Christ our Lord' (italics mine). However, APBA replaces such references to election by praying 'continue for ever in Jesus Christ'. Again, the objective work of Christ, of which we respond to solely in faith as shown by baptism, is de-emphasised, for when election and divine sovereignty is played down, the emphasis on human response is increased.

In BCP, the godparents promise to 'see that this infant be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession he hath here made by you. . . and that this child may be virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a Christian life'. The parallel in APBA is less demanding. It only requires that the godparents 'encourage this child in the life and faith of the Christian community'. This reflects less of the need for the individual to make sure their solemn vows made on their behalf.

There is no doubt that liturgical revision is necessary. However, this order departs from BCP in ways that make it an unacceptable alternative. The movement away from the wrath of God minimises the extent of his love. For if all are being saved, then his love only enhances our life but does not save it. The change in format and simplicity is welcomed in this revision. If that could occur whilst

continuing to reflect the theology of BCP, then it would be a worthwhile resource for contemporary Anglican worship.