

Discrimination and differentiation in the development of worship in the Presbyterian Church of South(ern) Africa

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Dates:

Received: 04 Apr. 2023

Accepted: 04 Aug. 2023

Published: 20 Feb. 2024

How to cite this article:

Duncan, G.A., 2024, 'Discrimination and differentiation in the development of worship in the Presbyterian Church of South(ern) Africa', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(1), a8949. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.8949>

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Worship as the work of the people of God does not arise in a vacuum. It is contextual and cultural. In the areas of the world, long designated as the mission field, many developments were transported to countries in the global south and imposed on local peoples. This was true of the arrival of Presbyterians who came to settle in southern Africa. Presbyterians imported two differing traditions of worship, the evangelical and the liturgical, and introduced them to the indigenous peoples they encountered. They were adopted without adaptation and have largely followed their European ancestors and contemporaries. Africans have largely followed their missionary mentors but have found ways of subverting these traditions by forming a new tradition by blending aspects of each and adding their own African brand of Spirit inspired and led. worship while their mentors pay only lip service to their African colleagues.

Contribution: This article highlights the historical continuities in the worship of a mainline Church of European Origin (CEO) with their ecclesiastical and ecumenical source(s). This is in discontinuity with the worship traditions of African Christian communities, which are less formal and tend to incline towards the charismatic and Pentecostal traditions with their freedom of expression of faith rather than the more cerebral forms of expression.

Keywords: Catholic; Charismatic Movement; evangelical; liturgical; Liturgical Movement; Presbyterian Church of South(ern) Africa; worship.

Introduction

Worship (*leitourgia*) is what the people do when they wish to acknowledge and praise their creator for all the blessings they receive and also when they need assistance. In the Presbyterian Church of South(ern) Africa (PCSA) worship has never been a matter of imposed forms. It was largely cerebral because of its strong commitment to the centrality of scripture derived from the Reformations in the 16th century. This model was inherited from the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in Scotland and England. Although it did not use defined liturgies, one of the models that was adopted had an almost inflexible pattern arising out of the Evangelical Movement. In some ways it was regarded as sterile and lacked innovation and creativity. The other was a product of what came to be later known as the European Liturgical Movement. These two models survived throughout the life of the PCSA.

Scottish roots

In the Scottish context, Worship was determined from the Reformation by John Knox's *Book of Common Order* (1560). As a guide (Burleigh 1960:162) it consisted of confession, invocation of the Spirit, Old and New Testament lessons, sermon, thanksgiving, and intercessory prayers and Holy Communion if ministers were available to celebrate. The Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments were affirmed at each service. Music consisted of the metrical Psalms. Other services included were:

Forms for the election of superintendents, ministers, elders and deacons, for public worship and the administration of the Sacraments, for marriage and burial, for the visitation of the sick, for ecclesiastical discipline, e.g. excommunication, public repentance, and absolution and for a General Fast. (Burleigh 1960:162)

Burleigh (1960:163) evaluated 'Knox's Liturgy' as 'the religious core of the Scottish Reformation'. This pattern has endured although it was largely superseded by the Westminster Directory of Public Worship (1643). However, Spinks (2008:3) describes how by the 17th and 18th centuries worship had become 'moribund and stagnant and represent a low ebb in the history of the British

Note: Historical Thought and Source Interpretation.

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churches'. For instance, creeds and confessions were suspect (Burleigh 1960:306). In Scotland, extemporaneous worship was the order of the day in Presbyterianism, so research is very difficult as there is a dearth of sources. Spinks (2008:25) also commented that in the absence of a service book 'extemporary prayer in the wrong hands (or mouths) lends itself to such banality'. This was the heart of evangelical worship. However, at the same time, High Churchmen expressed 'a concern to return to classical Christian sources' (Spinks 2008:251).

Significant changes in worship began to take place during the 19th century with the beginning of the Liturgical Movement, which originated in the Roman Catholic Church, and sought to make the liturgy both more attuned to early Christian traditions and more relevant to modern Christian life and encouraged the need for people to participate. Protestant churches also participated in this early expression of the ecumenical movement and have also revised texts in their liturgical rites, often taking advantage of the broader ecumenical studies.

This led in 1865 to the formation of the Church Service Society in Scotland at a time when Presbyterian worship had lost some of its classic expressions and had become unstructured and wordy. The purpose was to regain and promote the ancient worship heritage of the Church. Despite all the innovation in Scottish worship: 'spiritual freedom was the breath of life' (Burleigh 1960:369).

Worship in South African Presbyterianism

Without clear evidence, it can only be assumed that the two models mentioned earlier existed side by side. We learn from the history of the first congregation in Cape Town that:

In 1840 three services were held during the week, two for reading and Biblical instruction and one for catechism classes. Between 300 and 400 usually attended these services. On Sundays four services were held; two for preaching and two for catechetical lectures. (Quinn & Cuthbertson 1979:17)

The focus in worship was clearly directed towards the edification of the mind.

During the almost hundred years before the establishment of the PCSA, Presbyterian congregations existed without any supervision from higher courts such as presbyteries. They acted virtually like independent congregations and were unwilling to give up any of their congregations' rights to a superior body (Duncan 2022:2) and this included the control of worship, which was traditionally the preserve of the minister.

Following the formation of the PCSA in 1897, the first *Service Book and Ordinal* was produced in 1921 under the Convener of the Church Service and Aids to Devotion Committee, Rev E Macmillan. It was the result of 'the widely expressed desire for a greater degree of order, dignity and uniformity in certain special Services and Ordinances of the Church' (PCSA 1928b:v)

amid freedom of expression. It was not intended to replace earlier Scottish publications. A rather full aim was included:

To incorporate all the best elements and traditional usages of the Presbyterian Church, and, indeed, of all the Reformed churches holding the Presbyterian system in the matter of worship. There has been no attempt to introduce alien forms or ceremonies; the tendency has been, rather, to return to the more ancient offices and prayers of the Scottish Kirk, which will furnish for us the most satisfying examples wherewith to beautify and enrich our orders and forms of Service. At the same time, a place has been found for other ancient and venerable forms of prayer, which are the common, and, in the true sense, Catholic heritage of Christendom. (p. vi)

Here, we can see clearly the influence of the Scottish Church Service Society, 'prepared primarily for the needs of our own Church in South Africa' (PCSA 1927:ix). The work is permissive (not mandatory) rather than prescriptive.

The Church of Scotland *Book of Common Order* (1940) marked a significant move towards promoting the Liturgical Movement's ideas and gained widespread acceptance well beyond Scotland (PCSA 1984:003.01E) including South Africa until a new service book was issued in 1967 as the result of a developing commitment to the Ecumenical Movement and a need for 'a greater "indigenisation" of the Gospel ... to allow cross-fertilisation from other cultures and backgrounds' (PCSA 1984:003.02E). However, there is little evidence that this occurred.

An outline of a new Service book had been approved by the General Assembly of 1959. It consisted of three parts: Part 1, the most inclusive part, included orders for the main services including the sacraments and ordinances (marriage, burial, ordination of lay people, annual dedications of church workers and young people), forms of prayer for the Christian year, special occasions and natural seasons, lections, and other prayers. Part 2 contained a selection of these services in Afrikaans. Part 3 provided the ordinal for use in the courts (councils) of the church (PCSA 1959:180–181). A completed draft was presented in 1965. It is sad to notice that a matter of concern was the quality of publication to be chosen: 'it is an open question whether the book should be printed in this country' (PCSA 1965:212). What an indictment of the quality of South African printing and publishing when the Bantu Presbyterian Church with whom the PCSA had been in frequent unity negotiations had its own company, Lovedale Press, which published good quality books. The intention to publish in African languages was also mentioned with the positive comment that: 'Changes in detail will be necessary because our African congregations are moving much faster than our European congregations towards real participation of the people in worship' (PCSA 1965:212).

A report was brought by the Architectural Committee on the design and construction of modern church buildings (PCSA 1959:79). Strangely, no direct attention was paid to the suitability of the buildings for the type(s) of worship to be celebrated therein.

There were many delays in the publication of the Service Book. There was a felt need for a different kind of service book for the African community 'to make it more suitable for African lay leaders and others who have to take services often at short notice' (PCSA 1970:104). In 1973, a bilingual hymnbook was on the verge of production (PCSA 1973:114).

A discerned change in the global ethos of worship was noticed in 1977, resulting from two sources, the impact of the somewhat earlier global Charismatic movement and a renewed emphasis on liturgical worship: 'The doxological, trinitarian and corporate dimensions of worship are again being given prominence' (PCSA 1977:22). The basis of the committee's recommendation was: In order to avoid quenching the Spirit, services should be made open instead of closed. There should be space for the extempore and the spontaneous ... 'Let the prophets give thanks as much as they will' (*Didache* X, vii) (PCSA 1979:53). The work was ongoing and began to take account of the needs of African congregations with the provision of orders such as for the unveiling of a tombstone. A political issue had to be considered here. Mixed marriages provided the context. While these could be recognised within Church law, they did not have the sanction of the state where 'the discipline of the surrounding society is necessary to give force and substance to the covenant entered into'. This would place the church in the situation where it would 'function as an alternative society undergirding marriage'. The committee continued to work on a service 'Which will at least ensure the permanent recognition of the relationship between the persons affected, without purporting to effect a valid marriage recognised by the State' (PCSA 1983:108). This was dropped at the 1985 General Assembly as it became clear that the government was to change the law regarding mixed marriages (PCSA 1985:92).

The *Service Book and Ordinal* was published in 1984 (PCSA 1984b) with an introductory section on worship and how to use the book, services for congregational worship, orders for use in congregational worship, services for special occasions, occasional services for church and home, and the ordinal. This book continued to reflect the ethos of the Liturgical Movement and the priority of the sacrament of holy communion (PCSA 1977:23, 96). For instance, for the first time it also included a lectionary (PCSA 1984b:113.05E–113.05.17E), which was produced by the British Joint Liturgical Group of mainline churches. It contained a 2 year cycle of lessons for Sundays, which followed the main themes of the Christian faith following the Calendar of the Christian year and led to a greater appreciation and celebration of the Christian festivals. This offered a model for uniformity and unity, which could be adapted to provide for diversity, throughout the PCSA which placed it firmly in the ecumenical movement. This model represents the 'catholic' or liturgical tradition, which has the following traits:

- ecumenicity
- realisation of various ministries in the church
- greater sense of community in worship

- concern for language that is understandable
- realisation the worship involves all the senses in a holistic manner
- need for indigenisation
- awareness of the Lord Jesus Christ in all we do
- greater concern that our entire life and witness be an act of worship (Duncan 2003:392).

On the other hand, the evangelicals focussed strongly on the centrality of scripture. They preferred to allow the preacher to determine the lessons as the foundation of preaching, often in an expository manner by preaching systematically through successive books of the Bible. This 'evangelical' movement was characterised by:

- evangelical concern
- strong commitment to personal and immediate faith
- zeal for freedom in prayer and worship
- separation of church and world
- its view of the local congregation as a fellowship
- its adherence to individual liberty
- concern that the sacraments be received in purity of faith and piety
- suspicion of 'tradition' (Duncan 2003:393).

In terms of the evangelical approach to preaching this often led to the sermon being placed close to the end of the service as it was believed that its impact would endure for longer coming close to the Benediction. Conversely, within the Liturgical movement of the PCSA, the sermon was placed in the central part of the service. It was designed on the basis of a threefold structure of worship: The approach to God; the Word of God (lessons and sermon); and the response to the Word of God.

Furthermore, a number of non-mandatory services were presented for consideration and critique – dedication of office-bearers, nine lessons and carols, *Tenebrae* for Maundy Thursday, blessing of existing marriages, blessing of home and family, thanksgiving after childbirth, retirement of a minister, setting apart of lay preachers and General President of the Women's Association, laying a foundation stone of a church, and the dedication of a church (PCSA 1985:93–108). In 1987, a proposal to search for a new hymnal was instigated as there was no mention of a vernacular hymnbook (PCSA 1987:217).

From 1988, the issue of vestments took up the attention of General Assemblies. It was almost impossible to achieve consensus but there was a concern regarding possible division on the issue, but agreement was achieved regarding 'the place of the PCSA within the Reformed tradition and recognises the principle inherent in the adoption of a form of dress synonymous with the authority to expound the Scriptures' (PCSA 1988:172). Part of the divisive issue here may have been that the 'The issue of *adiophora* (non-essentials) has to be taken seriously. In view of the aforementioned, vestments can only be considered an aid to worship and spirituality' (Duncan 2006:14). Clearly, the 'evangelicals' favoured everyday wear while the 'catholics' preferred vestments. But this was a potential source of division.

The matter of producing vernacular services was never attended to with any serious intent. The Black Leadership Consultation was in 1990 tasked with the formation of a Translation Committee from the Worship committee to proceed with the work of translation (PCSA 1991:69) but this did not produce any positive results. For the most part the previously discerned need for aids to worship for lay persons remained unmet.

In 1995, the General Assembly received and approved eight services prepared by the Church Unity Commission (CUC). However, they rejected the order for baptism as it did not conform to Reformed requirements (PCSA 1995:30, 314). There appeared to be considerable mutuality except for the order for the entry into the membership of the church.

Because of the proximity of union, in 1996, a report was given relating to vernacular hymnbooks and liturgies as these were used exclusively by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (RPCSA). A new Service Book was anticipated. Reviews of three non-African service books were taken (PCSA 1996:275–277) but no attention was given to the RPCSA's English draft of its proposed service book. It is also strange to notice that while the PCSA had its own recently published service book, attuned to the South African context, it should commend Scottish and American books. Perhaps this was because of a greater concern of international Presbyterianism that the rich offerings of the African context or to a desire to make available additional resources?

In 1998, a severe critique of the worship life of the PCSA was made at the General Assembly: 'For some decades there has been an ongoing interest in the renewal of worship which has been creative at points, mediocre at others and disappointing at yet others' (PCSA 1998:375). This would be normal in a context where constant experimentation was taking place as was the case here. It was at this time that the impact of the rapidly spreading Pentecostal Movement was beginning to be experienced.

African Presbyterian worship

It was generally assumed that worship in African congregations would follow the patterns established within the European congregations. However, what emerged was a blend of charismatic and Pentecostal worship with substantial freedom of expression and joy:

[E]specially of movement through music and dance as well as maximum participation ... For a black person a sense of belonging is what constitutes identity [which is] communal and collective demonstrating a strong sense of solidarity. (Duncan 2003:396)

Although during the sacraments, especially, worship became extremely formal and dignified, such was the high view of Holy Communion with its attendant ritual. Music played a significant role within the African congregations and within the Evangelical tradition (Spinks 2008:252). As a result, the

African congregations appeared to blend the two traditions in worship within an 'inclusive, humane and communal' framework (Gathogo 2022:3) rather than an individualistic approach to common worship in European congregations. African worship as an expression of the holistic nature of African life:

[B]uilds on relational theology, which necessitates a deeper dialogue between people's experiences and indigenous resources of the African peoples, as the hallmark of authentic Christian faith. (p. 4)

They dance their faith. However, Gathogo (2022:6) is quick to remind us that 'there are times when joy to one is not always joy to all, as is commonly seen in the African heritage' and this is certainly true in the South African context. But there is another latent threat to African worship:

[U]nless the churches founded by the European missionary societies are able to adapt their worship, hymnody, clerical dresses, liturgy, and most importantly, their attitudes to the cultic and psychological needs of Africa, they may suffer the same fate as the churches of North Africa in the early centuries of the Christian era. (Idowu 1965 in Gathogo 2022:11)

They died out. Sadly, the process of change in this regard has been predominantly from the African to the European forms of worship, except for the occasional inclusion of a brief hymn or song in a vernacular language, which may be treated as a concert item. There was a great deal of untapped scope for development here. Yet, worship provided a fertile field for the inculturation of the Gospel in the culture of African worship.

Within the PCSA there is little information regarding the worship of African congregations. The development of segregation throughout the 19th and 20th centuries might account for the fact that there was only minimal contact between white congregations and the missions they developed and in which they imposed alien forms of worship. There certainly was a failure to understand the communality inherent within African life and, not least, its worship, while European congregations worship primarily as a group of individuals within a sanctuary. The reports of the Worship Committee emphasise their European background and over a period of time tended to follow and develop European trends with little attention being devoted to their black brothers and sisters. They believed that simply translating liturgies was the equivalent of Africanising them.

Yet, perhaps it is the African context that points the way forward. They are evangelical in their enthusiasm for freedom, immediacy, and a strong personal faith combined with a sense of community as Africans. They are 'catholic' or liturgical in their love of ritual, ecumenicity, holism in worship, and link of all of life as worship. A greater coming together is possible with the right spirit in which care of the environment and issues of social justice are key factors.

Conclusion

The official standard of worship in the PCSA was liturgical, although this was by no means the only standard. At the other extreme was extemporaneous evangelical worship followed in particular by the more conservative ministers and congregations. By the end of the 20th century there was a great diversity of contemporary worship resources but not all were helpful and inspiring. Therefore, distinctions have to be made between what has the power to endure and be integrated and what lacks the power to enthuse, the genuine and the trendy, what is creative and durable, and what is merely contemporary. Presbyterianism has never promoted or insisted on one correct way of doing things that is universally appropriate; worship was and remains contextually determined. Yet, it can be both evangelical and catholic and always in the process of reforming. Based on experience and resources, worship can enable us to gain insights into eternal truths and mysteries, which culminate in a vision of the kingdom of God.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interest exist.

Authors' contributions

G.A.D. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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