BEING ANGLICAN IN A LITURGICALLY ECUMENICAL SETTING: A CASE STUDY FROM KENYA

Rev. Joseph Wandera

Introduction

As a newly appointed lecturer at St Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, an ecumenical seminary in Kenya, my wife and I went to worship at the old College Chapel[1]. The Kiswahili service is the second after the English service. The congregation was composed of people from the surrounding community, some of whom work with the college and some students. The first service which is an English service is attended mostly by students from the seminary. The seminary also has a midweek service for students and staff conducted in English in addition to the daily Morning Prayer. The Kiswahili service was conducted by an ordained Anglican Priest, a student pursuing his bachelor of Divinity degree.

The Chapel was full to capacity and anybody coming in late would be sure to miss a place to sit. The lively singing in the church was accompanied by vigorous dancing led by a youth dance group. Everybody in the church was dancing, save for mothers who had to remain seated and hold their babies. The woman seated next to me gave ululations as the music went on and on. I tried to join in the dance but felt this was an unfamiliar Pentecostal territory as I was not used to it. I had just returned from Europe after my studies where services did not have as much singing. In my earlier theological training, I had been taught to follow the liturgy strictly. We were hardly challenged to consider "other ways". The service was quite participatory, with young people leading the singing, dancing and involved in other aspects of the service. Having just returned from a context where at a Communion service, the gospel was always read by a priest, it was refreshingly different at this service to see a young girl read the gospel as the rest of the church stood in reverence.

The Holy Communion liturgy was familiar, even though the written service was followed with a lot of flexibility. The Priest picked and chose what was, to him, relevant and

[1] The origin of St Pauls can be traced back to the early years of missionary activity in East Africa. In 1875, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) founded a settlement for freed slaves at Frere Town, near Mombasa. In 1888, the Rev. E.A Fitch began a Divinity class to offer practical skills and Christian leadership training to these freed slaves. In 1903, the Rev. H.K Binns

contextual. The service concluded by the Holy Communion led by the Anglican Priest using the 1662 service but in Kiswahili. The service had lasted three hours in total.

The sermon had its theme based on the book of Romans: "If God is for us, who can be against us". It was repetitive and simple and without much exposition of the text. The main theme of the sermon was that despite what the faithful may be going through in their lives; God is on their side, as the bible promised and that they should not be worried.

2. In What Way does This Service Convey the "Anglican Way"?

As I went away from the Church service, I began to reflect on it. I was reminded of the course I attended as a seminary student on the topic of Anglican Spirituality in August 2001 in Canterbury, United Kingdom for three weeks. Together with other Anglican seminarians from other parts of the world, we were exposed to Anglican Spirituality through daily lectures on Anglican Spirituality. We had morning and evening prayers at Canterbury Cathedral using the Anglican liturgy. We recited the Psalms and the music was led by different choirs. There was also the Holy Communion in the context of the word.

The course I attended in Canterbury and my experience of Anglican worship in an ecumenical context at my seminary in Limuru Kenya where Anglicanism is taught has made me reflect on the question of being Anglican in an ecumenical setting or being Anglican away from the seat of Anglicanism (Canterbury). The things that I reflected upon in the area of liturgy or worship although specific to the Anglican Church can also apply to other Churches who are products of the missionary enterprise and still share communion with their mother churches.

At theological College and at the short course I attended in Canterbury, I was taught that Anglican forms of worship are offered in forms of daily prayer (divine office) and the Eucharist. According to Richard Giles on Anglican approach to worship, "these are forms of liturgical (as distinct from unstructured) prayer, in which an unchanging given framework is enlivened by variable features – readings, prayers and songs – which reflect the church's liturgical year and respond to events of the day"[2] However, my observation of worship in the service under consideration, portrays a different reality on the ground. Here, there is "no

[2] Richard Giles, *How to be an Anglican,* Canterbury. Canterbury Press. 2003 p.64.

unchanging, given framework" to use Gile's words. How then is Anglican worship reflected in Africa, in a different context – other than Canterbury?

When Anglican tradition(s) is passed on from Europe to Africa and in this case Kenya, it undergoes transformation. This transformation is also a dynamic process in attempt to make liturgy contextually relevant. However, there is always a tension between Anglican tradition as passed on to us from the northern hemisphere and the local context. The following section offers an analysis of the Anglican service that I attended and which reveals both transformation and tension in liturgy.

2.1 Analysis of the Service

2.1.1 *Music*: One clear distinctive feature in this service was the expressive and celebrative aspect of the worship especially as expressed through music. This was different from the traditional Hymns that would normally be sung in a traditional Anglican church. In this service that I attended, music was contextual and touched on issues that people are struggling with such as power, sickness, alcoholism and poverty. The choruses may not be different theologically from the traditional hymnals which had similar theology for example war e.g. *Onward Christian soldiers*. It was clear that the context and much less the liturgical calendar determined the songs used in the church. The role of Music in Africa is educational and teaches for example, morality. Music is also empowering and challenges people as well as warning them. Unlike the services I attended in Canterbury, dances were an important part of church music. Listening to the songs mainly sang in Swahili and led by young people I could easily pick out the words. The following two songs sang in Kiswahili but for which I have provided an English translation will illustrate my observations:

Song 1.
Simba wa Yuda ananguruma (The Lion of Judah is roaring)
Simba wa Yuda ananguruma- Simba (The Lion of Judah is roaring – The Lion)
Akiguruma wagonjwa wanapona (When he roars, the sick get healed)
Akinguruma vipofu wanaona (When he roars, the blind see)
Simba wa Yuda akinguruma Simba (The Lion of Judah roars- The Lion)
Akinguruma viwete wanatembea (When he roars, the lame walk)
Akiguruma walevi wanaokoka (When he roars, those who take alcohol get saved)

Simba wa Yuda anaguruma – Simba (The Lion of Judah roars- The Lion)

Song 2.
Pale Kalvari yote yamekwisha (At Calvary all was finished)
Pale Kalvari magonjwa yamekwisha (At Calvary sickness was finished)
Pale Kalvari vipofu wanaona (At Calvary, the blind see)
Pale Kalvari mapepo yamekwisha(At Kalvari, the demons were finished)
Pale Kalvari vijana waokoka(At Kalvari, the youth get saved)
Pale Kalvari yote yamekwisha(At Kalvari all was finished)

There was generally a jovial mood in the service. It is probably for this reason that Esther Mombo has spoken written about African Christianity as having created its own unique flavour of religion and has assumed a more charismatic character[3].

2.1.2 *Sermon*: The sermon was simple to follow and straight forward. There was less of exposition in the course of the sermon but more of repetition of a particular text in applying to concrete life situations. The preacher used a number of stories from real life situation to illustrate his points. The sermon addressed the daily challenges which people faced in life such as poverty, disease and hunger. I do not remember seeing the preacher refer to any sermon notes. Nevertheless, the congregation was very attentive and responsive as could be seen, for example, with their interjections of shouts of "Amen" in the course of the preaching.

2.1.3 *Liturgy*: Although this was a Holy Communion service, the only Anglican identity I saw there was the pastor's attire- the traditional Anglican vestments composed of a black cassock, a white surplice and a black stole and the Kiswahili Anglican liturgy tailored along the 1662 Book of Common prayer which the pastor used very sparingly in the service. The pastor also used the familiar Anglican form of blessing at the end of the service. The rest of the Holy Communion liturgy was flexibly followed.

[3] Quoted by Matthew Davies, Anglican Women in Africa: ' the priority is for life' in The ANITEPAM Bulletin August/September No. 51 August/September 2006, p.9

Being liturgically Anglican in the African context means that we consciously integrate the experiences of the local context in the liturgy. As one scholar on spirituality has lamented , " a detached, and a priori, approach to doctrine gave birth to a similarly structured theory of the spiritual life which was separated from the core of human experience…"[4] However, in the case study above, the Anglican liturgy seeks to address people' s experiences such as poverty, sexism, disease, illiteracy and so on. This is evident in the songs, the sermons and the involvement of all people in the service. It would be totally inappropriate from the Kenyan experience to insist on judicially following the traditional Anglican liturgy if that does not provide space for the people to worship God through their lived experiences. Yet in some parts of the liturgy one could still feel being part of the global Anglican community.

My experience of Anglican liturgy in this service in Kenya indicates that spirituality is dialogic, meaning that the theory and practice of liturgy operates on the frontier between contemporary experience and the tradition and the latter is not simplistically applied as the measure of the former. Thus, the contemporary challenge of defining who an Anglican is in the context of liturgy in Kenya is that there is no single trans-cultural category but rather such a definition is rooted in the peoples lived experiences of God's presence in history – a history that is always specific.

3. Challenge of Teaching Anglican Liturgy In The Context Of Ecumenical Theological Education

3.1 Ecumenical Context

Teaching the Anglican way in terms of liturgy, Music and preaching within the context of theological teaching in Africa is faced with the challenge of having students from various groups of Anglicanism, thus we have high, middle and low Anglicans. This challenge is directly related to the fact that Africa was evangelised by different groups. According to Esther Mombo, in her article the development of Anglican Liturgies in Eastern Africa-Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan – was influenced by different characteristics of two mission societies. The Church Mission Society (CMS) was 'low church', while the universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), was 'high'[5].

[4] Sheldrake, Spirituality and History,pp,32-53

[5] Esther Mombo, *Anglican Liturgies in Eastern Africa in Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006. p.277.

Theological educators in Kenya today and I believe, the world over, must take seriously the ecumenical/intercultural context for teaching theology. One important context for theological education for Anglicans in Kenya is the ecumenical context such is provided for at St Paul's United Theological College, Limuru. Here, Anglican students are not taught separate from other denominations but intermingle with them as part of the learning process. Even though students are also provided with opportunities to learn the "Anglican way" in small separate groups for example during denominational classes, there is still considerable emphasis on learning together with students from other traditions. Also, students are required to spend a considerable part of their training in Anglican parishes where they can observe as well as participate in Anglican Church services.

The opening up of the College Chapel to the community around and within the college enhances ecumenicity and intercultural contacts as we get the students to interact with ordinary Christians from other denominations and experience how they worship God. Ecumenical liturgy therefore becomes an opportunity for training Anglican laity and clergy who will serve God and humanity in an increasingly plural world and globalised world.

Unfortunately, many theological educators in Africa have not developed contextual ways of thinking theologically, liturgically and ministerially in general. I have encountered, for example, some theological educators who simply cannot appreciate anything "charismatic" in liturgy and who speak derogatorily about "Pentecostals". Does this not call for a serious process of decolonizing the mind from exclusivist inclinations? While it is important to be critical of charismatic/Pentecostal ways, for example, their sometimes apparent depth in theological reflection as seen in their repetitive songs, their tendency at Biblicism in interpreting scripture at the expense of serious reflection on biblical texts, their selective use of the bible at the expense of preaching from the "whole" bible, it is also good to recognize the lessons they offer to Anglican liturgy and spirituality. This is especially important because Anglicans, at least in Kenya are increasingly going the charismatic way[6].

The big spontaneity of renewal in Anglican Churches clearly indicates the fact that African Anglicans want to express their faith in "African terms". However the tendency of some African Anglicans to dismiss new experiments in liturgy and rather choosing to stick with the

[6]Rev Dr. Joseph Galgalo in an article observes that "most churches, especially those in the urban areas, are also 'redesigning' their church services to make them as attractive as possible in an attempt to measure up to the Pentecostals' typically colourful services'.

old may be a reflection of the tension which exists between issues of African identity as Anglicans on the one hand and their cultural context on the other[7]. Indeed, it seems to me that the majority of Kenyan Anglicans have no interest in romanticizing tradition just for the sake of it. The Anglicans I saw in the case study I have given are supremely interested in worship that meets their existential needs for wholeness and the supernatural.

Christians are seeking for a different kind of spirituality from one which was passed on to us by early missionaries. In the context of theological education, this may mean creating space for an oral liturgy, a narrative theology and participation by the whole community of God's people in the life of the church. Such spirituality may in-fact be more appealing and holistic to the African world than the older version of Christianity.[8]

3.2 Place of Laity and Young People

While liturgy at Canterbury was exclusively clerical, the Chapel service at St Paul's was not clericalised. The role of the clergy in Anglican liturgy in Kenya is slowly but surely being re-defined, from a position where the clergy is the main focus of attention in the church service to that where clergy are simply part of the leadership of the liturgy. The service at St Paul's is only one example. In rural parishes where the Parish covers a large geographical area, the clergy only comes to do communion perhaps once or so every month and even then the service is quite participatory. Indeed, the association of "spirituality" with the clerical state came into being from the 13th to the 16th centuries. It is during this period that the most frequent usage of spirituality as having to do with the clergy was seen. Only in the 17th and 18th century did the word spirituality become established in France in reference to the spiritual life of laity and ordinary people. In a positive sense it was used to show a personal, affective relationship with God. The Anglican liturgy in Kenya, points in the latter direction. There is now an increasing involvement of the laity in the planning and running of the liturgical life of the churches. This is enriching because the clergy can learn from the laity in terms of what they value in worship as well enhancing participatory Anglican ministry. Also, theological education in the world today must create space for the laity. It is in this regard that writing on charismatization of the mainline churches in Ghana; Cephas Omenyo observes "there is wider participation in worship, sharing of testimonies and words of encouragement by the laity"[9]. In

[7] Esther Mombo, Anglican Liturgies in Eastern Africa,p.283
[8] Anderson, African Anglicans and/or Pentecostals,p.37
[9] Cephas N. Omenyo, Christianization of the Mainline Churches in Ghana, p.13

the Kenyan context today, where the number of ordained priests is limited and the church is growing rapidly at least numerically, the involvement of the laity is inevitable.

In a context such as Kenya, where the number of young people in churches is sometimes bigger than that of adults, they cannot be treated as passive participants. This is a challenge I find in the curriculum of theological colleges- ministry to and by children. Where the subject of ministry by and to children has found space at all in the curriculum of theological education, it has still remained peripheral. Writing from a Ghanaian context, Omenyo observes "a number of young people have discovered their leadership potentials and gifts, which they try to put to use in the Church, thus giving a practical meaning to the reformation maxim- "Priesthood of all believers"[10].

The involvement of laity at the service included other aspects like reading notices, being treasurer. Being Anglican in this context means being church where there is no discrimination on the basis of creed or gender as indicated in the Book of Galatians where believers are all one in Christ. [11] Theological education should encourage the participation in church affairs of the laity, the young and old .as an important aspect of being Anglican today. The challenge of theological education is to prepare those that are going to be clergy to equip all in the household of God.

As well as the above, theological education should take note of tradition and context. This will help students to connect between tradition and context within the Anglican way. Theological education must encourage students towards being contextually relevant, and to seek harmony among various forms of worship.

3.3 Preaching of the Word

The use of the bible in the service in our case study above was different from what one might find in other churches. Here, the Bible was made alive to issues facing the worshippers. Such issues involve poverty, diseases and lack employment. Also, the reading was not necessarily part of the lectionary readings for that day but was chosen by the preacher himself. This raises the issue on how do we read the bible as Anglicans? For many Anglican congregations in Kenya today, the lectionary readings are not strictly adhehered to during services. Even when readings are

[10] ibid, pp 13,4
[11] Galatians 3:28. (RSV).

taken from the lectionary, preachers have considerable flexibility on what text to preach from on that occassion.

Attending services in many Anglican churches in Kenya today has increased my awareness of the *function* of a text within a specific context. I now recognize the necessity of reading the Bible with honesty to context and culture, and with an eye to the effect of the text on a social group or individual. Theologically, I am convicted that all valuable scripture should elicit a response from the community reading it. In my context, specific things are needed, such as the further validation of women's spiritual experiences, deeper involvement of women in political and ecclesial leadership, greater consideration of the material and political rights of the underprivileged and suffering parts of humanity, and an affirmation of ecological imperatives for sustainable development. For this reason texts that emphasis the need for a praxis response to Christian conviction should be celebrated. Those texts which espouse the opposite message—those that legitimate the subjugation of any group or the earth and its non-human inhabitants—should be carefully and contextually interpreted. Conversely, and the very point of complexity and difficulty, the Bible can bring liberation, transformation, and meaning.

It is a great relief for me to find courses such as " The Bible in Africa", " post- colonial Reading of the Bible" , " Power and oppression in the New Testament" , being offered at St Pauls. This will go along way in mainstreaming issues of marginality not just in the liturgical life of the church but also in her other sectors such as leadership structures.

Conclusion: What is the 'Anglican Way' in the Context of Worship in Kenya?

Being Anglican in Africa today, implies a continuing search for a new world of possibilities, a new future which must be constructed every day. Being Anglican in Kenya offers lessons to the wider communion in terms of its being rooted in experience, being dialogical, for example by accommodating charismatic renewal within the framework of Anglican worship traditions and going beyond clericalism by purposely including all in worship services.

As I settle in the worship life at St Pauls, Limuru, I consider it a wonderful privilege that our students can learn to be Anglicans in such a rich ecumenical context. And I hope that many of them shall take risks to attend such services where the community around them frequent, where authentic experiences of being "Anglican" can be encountered outside the guarded

contexts of normal college worship. I use the word "risk" because such a move entails the possibility of being challenged by other ways. Being Anglican in the Kenyan context and in other parts of the world, must of necessity have an intercultural missionary dimension. This is because we are called to mediate between different cultural orientations, make bridges between people of other faiths, signs and instruments of solidarity, and also be forerunners of a global world.

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The writer is an Assistant lecturer at St Pauls United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya. His contact is wandera@stpaulslimuru.ac.ke.

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