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Praise God: A New Service Book

SINCE 1960 when *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship* by Dr. Ernest Payne and Stephen Winward was first published, Baptist ministers and others engaged in leading free church worship have owed an incalculable debt to the authors for the inspiration, foresight and diligence with which they prepared their book. It was carried into the life of our churches on the tide of liturgical renewal and experiment which was then approaching its highest mark. It helped to root the changes that were then taking place in the firm ground of holy scripture and to provide an invaluable resource for those who sought to lead the people of God into a deeper experience of worship.

By 1977 the book was fast running out of print facing the Publications Department of the Baptist Union with a difficult decision—whether to revise it or commission an entirely new book. The committee chose the latter alternative and asked Alec Gilmore, Edward Smalley and myself to undertake the task. The standard set by the earlier work and the ever-changing face of Christian worship were to prove a formidable challenge to our own resources and our ability to read accurately what would be needed for the next ten to fifteen years if our work was to cover the same life span as its predecessor. A great deal had changed since 1960.

Firstly, our churches now use a greater variety of gifts and methods in public worship. Folk groups, drama groups, sacred dance, dialogue sermons, open prayer, audio-visual aids, these and other ways of worshipping are to be found in many of our churches. Each of them demands specialist skills and insights and each is shaped by the character of the local congregation and the building within which it worships. *Praise God* (the name by which we eventually entitled our book) recognised the existence of such ways of worship and aimed to provide those responsible for shaping them with another source for material. It was a modest aim in an area given to rapid change in tastes and styles.

Secondly, no aid to worship could ignore the advent of the charismatic movement and its influence in a number of our churches. At its most extreme, charismatic worship of the totally unstructured, *ad hoc* variety will find no place for a manual of worship of any description. However, the experience of some Catholic and Anglican churches, such as St. Michael-le-Belfry in York, indicates that liturgy can provide a structure in which freedom and joy can be channelled into what is both dynamic and beautiful. Charismatic worship at its best, such as this is, involves all the people in the adoration of God,

recognises that we dwell in bodies to which the senses of sight, sound and touch are as important as the gift of speech, and recaptures the joy of Sunday as a day in which we celebrate the mighty acts of God in Christ. In *Praise God* we endeavoured in such structures as we have suggested to do justice to these emphases. We acknowledge their worth and have sought to enrich them by tradition, by suggestions for corporate participation and by the fulness of the Christian kerygma of which public worship is an annual proclamation.

The third factor we took into account was the way in which the liturgical movement of the sixties has developed. Certain features of it are now an accepted part of the life of many of our churches. For instance, the Lord's Supper is more central than it was, no longer an addendum to the "main" service. Conversion, baptism and admission to church membership are more clearly seen as a unity and, even where baptism, reception into membership and communion are not celebrated in the one service there is at least the recognition of a sequence and the fact that the events, though separated by time, nevertheless hold together. On the other hand, responsive prayers in which the congregation repeated a versicle at intervals seem to have been less popular among us. At a late stage of our work we received a suggestion that we might prepare a book suitable for use both by the minister and the congregation, containing as it would prayers to be read by both. We felt that this would have been a departure from our original assignment, we were not confident that it would be widely acceptable at this stage and we believed that such a book should be prepared quite separately. Instead, in our handling of the sacraments and ordinances we started from the same assumptions as *Orders and Prayers*, whilst among the prayers we included a few with responsive versicles.

Fourthly, our work was complicated by changes in the translations of the scriptures used in our churches. At the outset of our work in 1977 we relied largely on the *New English Bible* for our selection of scripture passages. During the course of our work we agreed that the newly published *Good News Bible* was clearly gaining ground in many churches and it would be unwise of us to ignore this fact. However, when we came to alter our N.E.B. verses for the G.N.B. we found that the latter did not always have the same "ring" as the former. The situation was even more complicated in the passages we used from the Psalter. In addition to the N.E.B. and the G.N.B. there was Gelineau's superb *Singing Version*, introduced in this country by The Grail and published by Collins and, again after we had started our book, Collins, in conjunction with the Church Information Office, also published *The Psalms: A New Translation for Worship*. Our discovery that a call to worship in one version sounded like a flat invitation to nothing in particular in another version decided us to draw our material from all four sources. This involved subjective assessment on our part and, doubtless, not everyone will agree with the choices we finally made. Given an embarrass-

ment of riches however, it seemed to us better to put them to use rather than stick doggedly to one translation simply for the sake of consistency.

The fifth factor in our preparation was the changing face of worship in other churches. The mutual influence of denominations upon one another and their ways of worship, already greatly influenced by the ecumenical movement and its offspring the liturgical renewal movement, has been given added momentum by the charismatic movement. The mysteries of Catholic worship, enshrined in Latin and liturgical remoteness, were unlocked by Vatican II. The Anglican church has wrestled with Series Two and Three. The streams of Presbyterian and Congregationalist worship have come to a water-shed in the United Reformed Church. The Anglicans and the Methodists have had their abortive flirtation and inevitably both have been affected by it. There cannot have been two decades in which the liturgy of the people of God has changed so dramatically as it has since Payne and Winward wrote *Orders and Prayers*.

It was against these ever-changing back-cloths that we did our work, endeavouring to read the direction of the wind of the Spirit, *Praise God* is in three sections, the Christian Year, Sentences and Prayers, and Sacraments and Ordinances.

(1) *The Christian Year*

The great annual Christian festivals provide the opportunity to re-tell the story that underlies the kerygma and, in so doing, to celebrate God's saving acts in history. *Praise God* covers the ten major seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Passiontide, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity and All Saints'. The advantages of following this pattern of celebration become obvious to all who adhere to it. It gives light and shade to the church's worship; there is a sense of progress and pilgrimage as the story unfolds and the people of God relive the salvific events of Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, followed by the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. It also gives balance to the teaching ministry of the church. The temptation to dwell on those things of personal interest to ourselves as ministers to the detriment of the wholeness of the Gospel is ever with us. The Christian Year places us under the discipline of teaching and celebrating the whole Gospel.

Each festival is introduced by a paragraph explaining its significance. There is a wealth of meaning that can elude us if we fail to learn the origins of the festivals. For instance, Advent is too often treated as simply an extension to Christmas. Certainly it is a prelude to Christmas, but the advent to which it initially refers is the advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ in final glory when all things are consummated in him. Thus it is in the light of the Christ of faith and hope, the coming Saviour, that we recount the story of the Christ of history. Advent rescues us from sentimentalising Christmas, for in worshipping the Christ who came at Bethlehem we worship him who is to come in judgment and salvation. Another casualty of our incomplete grasp of

the meaning of the Christian year is the imbalance between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter worship of the church. The long haul of Lent, leading to Holy Week and the remembrance of the passion of Christ, reaches its climax in the one, glorious and all too brief celebration of Easter Day. In fact, in the Christian Year the forty days of Lent are balanced by the forty days of Easter. The First Sunday After Easter should never be permitted to become Low Sunday!

The introductory paragraph is followed, in some cases, by suggestions for celebrating the festival. These suggestions have drawn from the resources of Christian tradition rather than from contemporary experimental material. As we have already observed, the latter is largely shaped by the needs of the local congregation and is quickly dated. In drawing on tradition we have not limited ourselves to the traditions of our own denomination, originating as they do in part in the world of the seventeenth century, and even more that of the nineteenth. We believed it was legitimate to draw on the earliest traditions of the church as they developed in the first five centuries of its history and, before that, the liturgical experience of the New Testament church, not only in such influential passages as 1 Corinthians 14, but also the Johannine literature, the Gospel with its underlying Jewish liturgical themes and *Revelation* with its picture of the worship of the redeemed in heaven, and *Hebrews* with its Christian re-statement of the sacrificial worship of Israel. We were thus led to include forms that are not part of our Baptist tradition but to which we nevertheless have right of access by our place as joint heirs with all other Christians of the spiritual wealth of the pre-medieval church.

The most obvious example of what this has meant in practice is our use of candle-light as a symbol of the light of Christ. Why candles? Because they are natural, they do not have to be wired up or plugged into the mains, and they convey both light and warmth. The use of candles in the passiontide and Easter celebrations of the church is also an extension of what already a number of churches do at Advent and Christmas. Many, since the sixties, have used the four Advent candles, lighting one on each of the Sundays of Advent. An even larger number of churches have Christmas candlelight services, investing the candlelight with no theological meaning whatever and resorting to it for no apparent liturgical purpose. What we have suggested for passiontide and Easter is not of our own inventing but carries the weight of the tradition of the church in the early centuries, together with a clearly recognizable theological meaning.

Another way in which this same stream of tradition has influenced us is in the Easter Eve Vigil. In the early centuries this was the time of preparation for the baptism and eucharist that would take place at the dawn of Easter Day. Not only did the baptismal candidates prepare themselves in this way but those already members of the church used the occasion to renew their baptismal vows. For Baptists particularly, the service provides an annual opportunity for the church

corporately to renew its baptismal vows and, where better than in the midst of the annual celebration of the dying and the rising of the Son of God?

The suggestions for celebration are followed by Biblical passages that we believed would be suitable for the season. The lists are by no means exhaustive but it is our hope that they will provide a rich seam from which leaders of worship can mine the scriptural rock upon which they build their liturgy.

Each section concludes with sentences and prayers. The questions we faced in selecting scripture sentences have already been alluded to. In this part of the book it seemed wise to write most of the prayers ourselves endeavouring to draw on emphases already outlined in the introductory paragraph and the suggestions for celebration. The prayers are, of course, by no means exhaustive. They are meant to form a part of the whole offering of prayer, but it is our hope that they will suggest directions which the other prayers in the service may take.

(2) *Sentences and Prayers*

The sentences we have used follow the same criteria in our selection as those in the section on the Christian Year. The prayers follow the customary divisions of adoration and invocation, confession, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, prayers for the opening and close of worship, benedictions and ascriptions of praise, together with prayers for special days, grouped under the headings of thanksgiving, remembrance, dedication and mission.

We discussed at length the mode of address to God. It seemed to us that "You" is now almost universally used in preference to "Thou". "You" is used in the new form of the Anglican collects and the post-Vatican II vernacular liturgy of the Catholic church as well as in recent Free Church manuals. In the great majority of prayers we preferred to follow this practice. The prayers themselves span the centuries and the various Christian traditions. We have tried to include all the most loved and familiar, as well as a number of contemporary composition. The majority of them are set out in free-form verse, making it easier for them to be read in public. A number of Baptist ministers were approached with the suggestion that they might like to submit written prayers to be considered for inclusion in the book. Our requests met with only one response, that of Bernard Monk, whose excellent prayers we were happy to use. Baptist ministers, it would seem, are not inclined to commit their prayers to paper. A few of the prayers can be used responsively, but the limitations of this mode of congregational participation have already been alluded to.

The sections on thanksgiving, remembrance, dedication and mission are meant to provide resources for a variety of occasions. We recognized that *Orders and Prayers* included a number of suggested Orders of Services for comparatively rare occasions in church life, such as "Ordination of a Minister", "Formation of a Church" and "Dedication of Church Furnishings and Memorials". We felt we could well

dispense with these sections, at the same time providing material from which churches might draw for use on such occasions. These sections will also be found to provide for annual occasions such as Harvest Festival and Remembrance Sunday. Sentences and prayers relating specifically to these events can be found in the thanksgiving and remembrance sections. For example, Laurence Binyon's words "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old", so often used at the beginning or end of the two minutes' silence on Remembrance Sunday are included in the remembrance section.

(3) *Sacraments and Ordinances*

This section begins with a form for Sunday worship. We took it as axiomatic that the norm of worship would include both word and sacrament, the proclamation of the Gospel in the reading of the scriptures and preaching followed by the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is probable that only in a minority of our churches is the Lord's Supper celebrated every week, but it is a practice that an increasing number of ministers would like to see observed. In the liturgy of the Lord's Supper we have included the gracious invitation "If you truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours . . .", as well as the marvellous prayer of humble access, "We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord. . . ." In the prayers following communion we have included the Gospel Acclamation:

Christ has died

Christ has risen

Christ will come again.

This may be set to music in a number of ways and can be sung by the whole congregation.

In the Infant Dedication and Thanksgiving service we acknowledge our debt to Huub Oosterhuis and his book *Poems, Prayer and Songs*, where his service for infant baptism has proved admirably adaptable for our dedication service, blessing being substituted for baptism. The questions put to the parents are, in our judgment, simpler and more direct than the one in *Orders and Prayers*. This rather long and comprehensive question, ending with the stern and searching promise to bring the child up "by prayer, precept and example . . . in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" has been replaced by Oosterhuis' equally searching but simpler questions. Parents promise to be a good father and a loving mother, to bring up their child in the spirit of the gospel, and to remain loyal to the child, come what may.

In common with other Christian traditions and following an earlier Baptist practice, we have provided for the child's name to be given. The importance attached to the giving of a name is manifest in both the Old and New Testaments, whilst the impersonality of much of modern life underlies the importance that the church should attach to the name by which we are called. The sense of Isaiah's "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name. . ." (43: 1) and the scriptural symbol of the book of life in which are written the

names of the redeemed are captured in the prayer "May this name be written for ever in the book of life, in the palm of God's hand". The giving of the name is followed by the congregation's acceptance of and commitment to the child.

The Service of Baptism presumes that the norm is baptism, followed by reception into membership and the Lord's Supper. The statement varies in no way from the theology of that in *Orders and Prayers* but is shorter and simpler. The evangelical and charismatic nature of the occasion is recognized in the invitation to Christian commitment that is often given following a baptism.

The order for Christian Marriage is in contemporary language though among some young people today there seems to be an enthusiasm for older forms, the more Elizabethan the better. As these are readily available there seemed no point in re-printing them. Alternative wording for the vows is also provided. The wording we give is simply a suggestion. Some young people want to write their own promises and in this we should encourage and guide them. We have also given as an alternative for the giving and receiving of the ring the beautiful words from the Anglican Series 3:

... With my body I honour you
all that I am I give to you
and all that I have I share with you ...

These words are also used by the woman in either her acceptance or giving of a ring.

The final order is for Christian Burial. In addition to the customary scripture readings, we have included Bunyan's great passage in *Pilgrim's Progress* and its reference to "all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side". We have suggested four different forms for the committal, beginning with the familiar "Forasmuch as it hath pleased almighty God . . ." and gradually simplifying to "We commit the body to the ground (flames), the *man* to God, *his* future and *his* Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life". Among the final prayers is also included the great valedictory prayer "Go forth upon thy journey from this world, O Christian soul. . .".

We have tried to produce a resource book, a book that can be used as a tool in the service of God. This aspect of it is heightened by the numbering of every item in the book, making possible a system of cross-references. Finally, those who are frustrated by the absence of section headings at the top of each page in that other tool of our worship the *Baptist Hymn Book* will be glad to know that *Praise God* does contain them, thus enabling the reader to find any section without constant reference to the contents page.

The book is no longer ours, but given to the service of Christ and his church. May it help to deepen that love for the house of God that all of us would want to share with the Psalmist:

"How dear is thy dwelling-place,
thou Lord of hosts!

I pine, I faint with longing
 for the courts of the Lord's temple;
 my whole being cries out with joy
 to the living God . . .
 Happy are those who dwell in thy house;
 they never cease from praising thee."

MICHAEL WALKER.

The Pilgrim's Progress: A Puritan Fiction

IN his history of the English novel, Walter Allen opines, with reference to Bunyan, that when "reality did enter English fiction it came from the least expected of quarters and in the least expected of forms". Walter Allen is clearly puzzled by the phenomenon of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: he concludes it is inexplicable. The books Bunyan read, we are told, "do not matter in the least. Bunyan was a transcendent genius . . . and his work is as original as anything in literature can be": "The kind of work he wrote was completely unheralded".¹ What so surprised and impressed Walter Allen in *The Pilgrim's Progress* was its fictional realism, its kinship to the novel. Bunyan, of course, did not think he was writing a novel. He was upon the same evangelical and pastoral business as in those other treatises now being republished by the Clarendon Press as his *Miscellaneous Works*. The result is that, as a novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is imperfect. An inhibiting and incongruous didacticism will keep destroying the imaginative consistency of the fable and suspending the narrative for long passages of discourse in which all pretence at colloquial dialogue between human characters is abandoned. Biblical warrant is relentlessly adduced for 'disturbingly confident and minute theological analyses of human experience. This reminds us not of the novel, but of the vast library of Puritan practical divinity to which Bunyan thought he was contributing. For Walter Allen, however, what Bunyan thus owed to earlier divines is not only incidental to the achievement of the book, it has nothing to do with the creation of that achievement. He finds no connexion between what he sees as artistically accomplished and these didactic features. How or why a work of practical