
‘Down to Earth Worship’: Liturgical Inculturation and the Anglican Communion

Addressed to all those who worship God throughout the Anglican Communion; and for the special consideration of bishops, teachers of liturgy, and members of Liturgical Commissions.

Circulated at the request of the Primates’ meeting of April 1989 to the ACC and Primates, for forwarding to the Churches of the Anglican Communion

1. Introduction
From many parts of the world, we discovered afresh at York that liturgy to serve the contemporary church should be truly inculturated. Two of the Resolutions of the 1988 Lambeth Bishops encouraged us in this respect, and we begin from those Resolutions. We do not believe they have yet been sufficiently grasped in our Churches. But as we believe them to express the mind of God for Christian worship to-day, we underline and expand them here, and look and pray for their implementation.

2. Lambeth Conference Resolutions (each passed without dissent):
   22 Christ and Culture
   This Conference (a) recognizes that culture is the context in which people find their identity; (b) affirms that … the gospel judges every culture… challenging some aspects of the culture while endorsing others for the benefit of the Church and the society; (c) urges the church everywhere to work at expressing the unchanging gospel of Christ in words, actions, names, customs, liturgies which communicate relevantly in each society.

   47 Liturgical Freedom
   This Conference resolves that each Province should be free, subject to essential universal Anglican norms of worship, and to a valuing of traditional liturgical materials, to seek that expression of worship which is appropriate to the Christian people in their cultural context.

3. First Principles
The incarnation is God’s self-inculturation in this world, and in a particular cultural context. Jesus’ ministry on earth includes both the acceptance of a particular culture and also a confrontation of elements in that culture. When Jesus in turn commissions his disciples with ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ they too are to pursue the mission which the Holy Spirit gives them by relating to their society incarnationally. They are to adapt themselves to different cultures (‘as a Jew to the Jews, as a Greek to the Greeks’) but also to confront the culture where it is contrary to the good news of to God’s righteousness. Thus, just as language forms changes from one place or time to another, so the whole cultural appropriateness of styles and expressions of worship should be ready to vary similarly.
4. **Anglican Starting Points.**

Distinctive Anglicanism arose from the Church of England’s break with Rome in the sixteenth century. The imposition then of a new and reformed liturgy contained both a principle of common prayer (which was appropriately expressed in the culture of its own times, not least in the use of Tudor English) and a general assertion of the freedom of Churches and Provinces in different places to develop their own distinctive forms (Art. XXXIV). We add that it is often the seeking of organic union or co-operation with other Christians which brings home to us our need to belong to our local culture for the sake of our mission.

5. **Worldwide Anglicanism.**

The style of English Anglicanism, and even the actual wording of the 1662 BCP, have been frequently treated as necessary features of being Anglican at all. But the weight of such a particular traditional Anglican culture (both of text and style) has also come to lie heavily upon the Churches in both urban England and rural Africa, in both South American cities and Asian villages. Even the modern revision of texts has often left styles unaltered, and has had its own dangers of undue weight being attached to Western formulations. Our lack of inculturation has fostered both the cultural alienation of some Christians and an over-ready willingness of others to live in two different cultures, one of their religion and the other of their everyday life. Other Christians again have left our Churches because of this cultural insensitivity. Similarly non-Christians have found the foreignness of the church a great barrier to faith. The Lambeth 1988 Resolutions quoted above are designed to correct this situation.

6. **Implementation.**

Inculturation must therefore affect the whole ethos of corporate worship, not only the texts but also, for example, the use of buildings, furnishings, art, music and ceremonial. From one aspect it means cultural de-colonization of worship, from another it requires recognition of the special needs of an ethnic or other minority, which may be culturally distinct from the prevailing ethos of the Province. True inculturation implies a willingness in worship to listen to culture, to incorporate what is good and to challenge what is alien to the truth of God. It has to make contact with the deep feelings of people. It can only be achieved through an open-ness to innovation and experimentation, an encouragement of local creativity, and a readiness to reflect critically at each stage of the process – a process which in principle is never ending. The liturgy, rightly constructed, forms the people of God, enabling and equipping them for their mission of evangelism and social justice in their culture and society.

For a Province or smaller unit to be creative and to adapt a received worship tradition with confidence and sureness of touch, it is greatly dependent upon both the liturgical scholarship and expertise of its leaders and teachers and the willingness of ordinary Christians to give and to receive in the inculturation process. We for our part long to see a better provision of well-equipped teachers and creators of liturgy through the Anglican Provinces, both in Colleges and in diocesan life, and a closer and more trusting
relationship between bishops and synods on the one hand and well-equipped imaginative liturgists on the other.

7. **Examples.**
We have discovered the need to illustrate these principles by examples.

a) **Language:** is Tudor English anywhere appropriate today? Have countries developed local vernacular styles for liturgy? Are metaphors appropriate to the locality? Does the language exclude or demean any people on ethnic or gender or intellectual or other grounds? Are the kinds of book and the demands of reading them such that worshippers relate easily to them?

b) **Music:** are English hymn-tunes universally appropriate? Do local musical styles provide a better cultural medium? Are local settings encouraged? Are the words of hymns, even if in translation, drawn from another culture? Is the organ all-pervasive, or are other instruments in use?

c) **Architecture:** has Gothic nave and chancel been over-valued worldwide? Can existing buildings be imaginatively adapted?

d) **Ceremonial:** are choir-boys to wear surplices even on the Equator (and sit in those Gothic chancels)? Should robes be imported, or can they be locally designed with local materials? Are there ways in which people’s existing practices can be incorporated? We heard of African dances in procession, of North American native peoples’ smoking the pipe of peace at the Peace, or workers in Sri Lanka bringing their union concerns and symbols into special eucharists, and the instances could be multiplied.

e) **Sacramental elements:** here there are special problems, needing more work. Should wafer bread be as dominant as it seems to be – even to the point of being imported? Should local staple food and drink supervene? How can variations be allowed? *(Scully note: see IALC 2005 Report on Eucharistic Elements)*

f) **Rites of passage:** we note the long-standing Christian Jando ceremony (male circumcision at the onset of puberty) in the diocese of Masasi, Tanzania, and its combination with confirmation and first communion. Is this a model to be copied or adapted elsewhere? Or are there other ways in which Christian initiation can be inculturated in different places? Equally, we sought examples of where local marriage customs have affected liturgy – but found few. Can such customs be more fully assimilated into marriage liturgies? The variety of culturally distinct styles of funerary customs is in process of re-discovery round the world, whether it be a Caribbean-style funeral in multi-ethnic parts of England or the Maori blessing of a house after a funeral in New Zealand.

g) **Political and Social Context:** at times Christian suffer or are oppressed, or are caught up in wars, or need to identify with the oppressed. This kind of stance, because it is the context, *becomes* their culture, and, if truly infusing their worship, in turn reinforces their public stance.

h) **Agapes:** Christians have gathered for meals from the start. The growing revival of agapes in our Communion we welcome, not only for the breaking down of walls between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’ nor simply for the fellowship aspect, but also because both these factors enable people wherever
they are to be themselves with their own customs, and to be free to bring those ways into the heart of church life. We would not want to suggest that some purely ‘tokenist’ inclusion of a single local practice into an otherwise alien liturgy will suffice. Nor is it necessary for a whole liturgical event or series of events to be culturally monochrome: good liturgy rows and changes organically and always has rich marks of its stages of historical conditioning upon it, and in addition has often to serve truly multicultural congregations to-day.

In each Province and diocese Anglicans ought to examine their degree of attachment to ways of worship which are required neither by the gospel itself nor by the local culture. We do not think that these criteria should be set aside by a loyalty to some supposed general ‘Anglicanism,’ for every expression of the gospel is culturally affected, and what is viewed as general Anglicanism, if it can be identified, grew in a very specific Western culture.

8: Implications
Thus we believe that the Lambeth Resolutions (and the relevant parts of the Lambeth ‘Mission and Ministry’ section reports (paras 180-186)) call in question attempts to identify Anglicanism, whether locally or world-wide, through any common liturgical texts, ethos or style. We believe the ‘essential Anglican norms’ of Lambeth Resolution 47 are largely those contained within the Lambeth Quadrilateral and described within Lambeth Resolution 18 – i.e. the Bible, creeds, sacraments of the gospel, and episcopal ordination. We believe the use of vernacular language to be foundational to inculturation, and within that value highly the ‘traditional liturgical materials’ to which Resolution 47 also refers. Our common liturgical heritage in items such as the Lord’s Prayer promotes common prayer, sustains a dialogue with the scriptures, and conserves an element of the universal amid the particulars of inculturated worship.

The differing cultural styles of worship which are demanded by the above principles as between different Provinces and different parts of the world may also, on the same principles, be requisite within individual Provinces. Special encouragement should be given to minority groups, whether or ethnic or other composition, to develop their own culture in worship – and we applaud attempts made in various places (such as in the 1989 New Zealand Book) to bring minority cultures into the liturgical consciousness of majorities also.

We gladly acknowledge that true cultural expression in worship has in some places gone far ahead of official provision. Sometimes this is to be found in the ‘official’ liturgy, sometimes outside of it; sometimes the desire to be untrammelled springs from the joy of charismatics or the fervour of East African revival, sometimes from more measured and careful introduction of truly local colour. In conformity with our main inculturation principles, we believe such ways should be welcomed, not wholly uncritically, but with a strong prejudice in their favour.
Our danger lies in inertia and in failure to recognize, understand, or value our own cultural contexts aright. Provinces should be ready both to treasure their received ways and also to reflect critically on them in the light of their own cultures. They should be wary lest sheer conservatism in liturgy, or an over-dependence upon uses from elsewhere, in fact become a vehicle of cultural alienation, making Anglican worship a specialist cult, rather than a people’s liturgy. Let us hold fast to the essentials, and follow the cultural adaptability of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus in everything else.

9: Further Stages.
We also believe that some monitoring and reporting of the more general inculturation process could assist the whole Communion. Thus we request the Primates to report individually to the Steering Committee on positive progress made in inculturation in their Provinces. Particular examples will be greatly welcomed, and the Consultation itself has taken steps to promote circulation of such examples, together with a further discussion of the issues. In addition, we hope that an overall report, to encourage the implementation of the Lambeth Resolutions, will be sent to each Province once a reasonably full set of replies has been received.