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# Review Article

CHARLES READ

Church of England Liturgical Commission, *The Promise of His Glory: Services and Prayers for the Season from All Saints to Candlemas*, Church House Publishing 1991, 420 pp, £16.95.

ISBN 07151 3741 7

This publication from the Liturgical Commission is another supplement to the ASB like *Lent, Holy Week and Easter*. A draft version of *Promise* appeared in 1990 but now we have the final version, commended by the House of Bishops and able to be approved for use in individual dioceses. There is not much change from the report version and this final product is available in a hardback minister's edition or a softback people's edition. The final section (calendar and lectionary) is emphatically not authorised for use in the Church of England — of which more later. Clergy should check with their dioceses about the status of *Promise* in their own diocese. Most bishops will have authorised the material in this book for use in their dioceses, but if not, clergy are free to make use of the material anyway.

Unlike the ASB, this is not a series of services which can be used 'straight' — though there is much material in here which can be used in this way. Parishes will need to examine the material carefully and use it to construct their own forms of service. There is, however, more in this book that looks like a straightforward order of service than in *Patterns for Worship*.

The book aims to provide worship material for the period from All Saints' Day to Candlemas, including Advent, Christmas and Epiphany on the way. Each section has an introduction which sets out the thinking behind the material provided. It is important that worship leaders read this since doing so should help them to avoid errors in using the material and will help them to understand how the material might be used effectively.

The first section is entitled 'The Service of Light' and is meant to provide material which could be used at any time during the season, or indeed at other points in the year. The Early Church developed a custom of lighting lamps at the beginning of evening prayers. They may have taken this custom from Judaism (though there is a division of scholarly opinion about this). The Service of Light in *Promise* is designed to be used flexibly and may form the introduction to an evening service which then continues with a straightforward evensong, praise and prayer or a service of readings and reflection on the Word. The Service of Light itself centres on the lighting of lamps or candles and the section in *Promise* also includes some suggestions for readings, Psalms and canticles to form a reflective Word service. In addition, there is a Gospel proclamation which may also be used to highlight the Gospel reading, if there is one at such a service. The patterns of readings, etc. include suggestions for most of the principal services in the season, so that the Service of Light can be used easily throughout the period from Advent to Candlemas.

The book continues with sections on All Saints' Tide, Advent, Christmas, Epiphanytide and Candlemas. In amongst these sections there are suggestions for services of remembrance of the dead, a service for Remembrance Sunday (which is the one already commended for use by a number of British Churches), carol services and Christingle services, services around the crib and suggestions for a non-eucharistic Epiphany service.

There then follows a section of canticles and prayers which may be used at appropriate points in the season. It would be good if some enterprising musicians could set some of the canticles to suitable music. The prayers are drawn from a variety of sources and deserve to be used widely.

The most controversial part of this book is the final section on calendar and lectionary. This is an attempt to provide a framework into which the material in the rest of the book would fit. The ASB calendar begins with nine Sundays before Christmas, but does not make much of All Saints' / All Souls. This part of *Promise* is not authorised for use in the Church of England. The fact that it is explicitly labelled as being illegal will probably mean that many parishes will use it, thus forcing the powers-that-be to think about authorising it anyway. In our parish we have made use of it (as an experiment, of course!) and have found it very beneficial.

The calendar suggests starting the season with All Saints' Day and transferring this to a nearby Sunday (which becomes All Saints' Sunday). This will enable more people to reflect on the All Saints' Day themes. There then follow three Sundays of the Kingdom where the themes are 'prophetic, apocalyptic, and eschatological'. There is also a course of readings from the books of Maccabees, reflecting the occurrence of Hanukkah with its messianic connotations. Sufficient choice is given in the lectionary so that you do not have to use the apocryphal readings if you do not wish to. The rest of the calendar runs conventionally from the first Sunday in Advent through to the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas) on February 2nd. Both Epiphany and Candlemas may be transferred to a nearby Sunday. The readings and themes from Advent through to Candlemas provide material 'which prefigures or reflects the Incarnation'.

Candlemas is made into a pivot of the Christian year and this is worked out in the liturgical material provided earlier in *Promise* for the festival itself. At Candlemas we are encouraged to look back to the Incarnation and forward to Jesus' Passion. There are many evangelical congregations which would benefit from paying closer attention to the Christian year and the scheme suggested in this book brings out many biblical themes which churches may otherwise miss.

There is obviously some new lectionary material to go with this new calendar. This is labelled lectionary 1 in *Promise* but there is also lectionary 2. This other lectionary gives thirty sets of readings from different parts of the Bible. They are in effect the bones of thirty sermon series. Now it has long been the case that evangelical parishes have often ignored the calendar and lectionary provided by the Church of England and have produced sermon series of their own with readings to go with them. This has led to odd practices such as having the Collect for the Day, which reflects the Sunday theme from the ASB, in a service where everything else is geared to the

sermon topic for that service. Evangelical clergy seem blissfully unaware that you might actually compose your own Collect to go with the readings you have chosen.

What is now being suggested is that there should be 'open' and 'closed' seasons for lectionaries. During the closed seasons, everyone should stick to the official provision (and this would include Easter and Christmas and the attendant parts of the Church's year such as Epiphany). The open seasons might include Lent, September to All Saints' and the period after Pentecost. In these open seasons, churches would be encouraged to produce series of readings and sermons drawn from suggestions made in books like *Promise* or of their own composition. This seems to me to be a very good suggestion for it combines the strengths of both approaches. Evangelicals (and other non-observers of the calendar) would be encouraged to discover the Christian year and we might avoid the ludicrous situation in one noted evangelical church this year which failed to keep Pentecost or Trinity Sunday at all (except for using — you've guessed it — the Collect of the Day). Other churches might discover the advantages of thematic teaching.

The calendar and lectionary material in *Promise* are not authorised for use in the Church of England and a note on page 369 makes it clear that the use of such material is illegal. This is the best way to ensure that the material will be widely used. If enough people use it and like it, perhaps the idea of open and closed seasons can be made official and the good ideas in this part of *Promise* be used above board. Meanwhile, they could be used as an experiment and you would be advised to tell your bishop that you are conducting such an experiment.

### Using the Material

What can be used straight away from this book?

a) Eucharistic 'proper' material — i.e. proper prefaces, introductions to the peace, post-communion prayers, blessings and forms of intercession can all be used with Rite A eucharists without the need for the congregation to have any new texts in front of them. Much of this material can also be used in non-eucharistic services.

b) Non-eucharistic services, usually special occasions such as Remembrance Sunday and All Souls' Day services for remembering the departed. There is a fair amount of such material provided for Christmas and it may enrich services you are already holding at such times of the year.

c) Some material can be used at home — the Service of Light can be adapted in this way and the Advent section includes some material 'for church and home' which includes Advent wreath ceremonies and an adaptation of the Christmas tree — it would be interesting to see how these work in the home. On paper they look quite imaginative.

d) The material in *Promise* can easily be used to make more of Epiphany and Candlemas so that the themes associated with these festivals are not lost. There is a good non-eucharistic service for Epiphany which could include three teaching spots based on the readings connected with the Epiphany themes of the visit of the Wise Men, the miracle at Cana and the Baptism of Jesus (see pp 210ff of *Promise*).

e) As indicated above, the calendar and lectionary material is worth experimenting with.

A report such as this provides a bewildering array of choice. How do you actually use it in practice? The short answer is to be selective, using a little at first and expanding the use year by year. In our parish, we used material from the draft version of *Promise* in 1990-1991 as follows:

1. We experimented with the new calendar and lectionary to give a new shape to the season and we had a sermon series taken from lectionary 2 in September and October. This was the first time we had had such a sermon series in our parish and it was well received as an opportunity for continuous reflection on a part of the Bible (we used the set of readings on the life of Abraham). The advantage of this lectionary material is that Psalms and Gospel readings are also provided so that the Ministry of the Word is coherent and integrated. You can find suitable Collects elsewhere in *Promise*, or the ASB if you are prepared to do some digging around.

2. We produced special eucharistic orders for All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, Christingle, Christmas Eve/Day, Epiphany and Candlemas. (Our Sunday morning worship is always eucharistic.) All Souls' Day we kept on a nearby Wednesday morning, which is when we have our mid-week communion, anyway and all the rest (except Christmas) were kept on Sunday. The response from the congregations at both our churches was largely favourable and the eucharists we produced were very similar to Rite A in structure so people did not feel lost.

3. At our daughter church we used some *Promise* material to produce a carol service which was different from the usual nine lessons and carols in the King's College style. People had actually asked if we could do something different and I was keen to take the story of the Incarnation from one Gospel and set it out so that the Gospel writer could tell his own story. We used Luke as the basis of this and adapted the material from the Service of Light patterns for readings on p 27 of *Promise*.

4. We produced a Crib/Tree Service for Christmas Eve which was meant to be geared towards children.

In 1991-1992 we continued all these experiments and added:

5. An Advent Service of Light which we used when the Council of Churches came to us for their annual joint Advent service.

6. We replaced the All Souls' Day eucharist with an evening service on the Sunday we designated All Saints' Sunday. This was a service of prayers and readings in commemoration of the faithful departed, using material from pp 74ff of *Promise*. We wrote to the families of people we had taken funerals for in the previous year and invited them to this service, though we made it clear that the service was open to everybody, bereaved or not and whether or not we had been involved in the funeral. This sort of service raises the old question about prayers for the departed and some of the material in *Promise* may need adapting or slight rewording to take account of some people's scruples. The material given in *Promise* has proved very useful in our parish (where we have a lot of funerals) and the provision of this service has met a real pastoral need. I made the thrust of the service thanksgiving for the lives of the departed friends and relatives and, in my sermon, focused on what the

Christian gospel has to say to those who are bereaved. People could put the names of loved ones on a list which was read out in the context of an act of remembrance in this service. If numbers are any gauge of success, then this was one of the most successful things we have done for ages since our regular evening congregation of five or six became 50 or 60 that night.

### Reflections on the Material as a Whole

Certainly there is a lot here which could be used in a variety of settings in homes, churches and in chaplaincy work. It is a collection of material to draw from and worship leaders need to be selective. The following are my random thoughts on some features of *Promise*.

a) It provides richer fare with regard to symbolism and action in worship. Some Evangelicals will still have difficulty with the use of incense or sprinkling people with water (at Epiphanytide) — though when I went to a conference on *Promise* in Liverpool and we tried out some of the services it was the evangelical clergy present who were most excited by such things! (I suspect that many Evangelicals are suspicious of rituals like these because they have only ever heard about them and never experienced them done well and with meaning.) Our worship is often more wordy than it needs to be and there are some pointers in this book for helping us to combine word and action.

b) There is a need for a revision of lectionary and calendar material in the Church of England so that those who sit light to the church year discover its usefulness and those who follow the lectionary slavishly discover the advantages of thematic series of readings. *Promise* could help a great deal in this process.

c) The book meets a number of pastoral needs. This is clear with regard to those who are bereaved but also with regard to the Christmas season when people may come to church who are not usually found there. The suggestions for Christingle, crib services, etc., can be used quite creatively with a congregation including a number of irregular attenders.

d) A book such as this means that worship requires more planning and care/thought than we usually give it. I wonder if worship leaders are prepared for this? I find it significant that, as I travel around the diocese helping with deanery worship day conferences, those parishes where the worship is thoughtless and badly prepared are those which do not attend worship training events. Some of the offenders are large evangelical churches with a lot of potential and resources with regard to worship. On the other hand, the Church of England must be prepared to put resources into the training of worship leaders and raising the awareness of liturgical issues in the parishes. It is no good producing a book like *Promise* without producing help in how to use it.

e) Several people have noted that *Promise* links the All Saints' to Candlemas season with winter feelings and associations (dark nights, cold days, etc.). This makes *Promise* northern hemisphere liturgy. A lot of the material in it would feel ludicrous if used on Bondi Beach on Christmas Day. In one sense, this is not a major criticism, since we are talking more and more nowadays about inculturation — linking liturgy to an appropriate local culture rather

than insisting that there is one culture for worship for everybody. If *Promise* inspires the Australians to produce a sun-ripened equivalent, so much the better.

In conclusion, it should be noted that there are two good introductions and companions to *Promise: Welcoming the Light of Christ* by Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Perham (SPCK) and *Introducing Promise of his Glory* by Trevor Lloyd, Jane Sinclair and Michael Vasey (Grove Worship Series 116).

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