

## BOOK REVIEW

Andrew-John Bethke *Anglican Ritualism in Colonial South Africa: Exploring Local Developments and Practice 1848-1884* (Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023) ISBN 978-1-5275-1517-8. pp. viii + 119. £66.99.  
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In this short and significant contribution to the history of the Church in South Africa, Andrew-John Bethke, Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, examines a 35-year period in the life of the colonial extension of the Church of England, which became the Church of the Province of Southern Africa. Bethke's question concerns ritualism – how it was understood, how it entered into the early phases of Anglican life in South Africa, how it was received among lay people and how it fared after the mid-1880s when his examination ends.

At the outset, Bethke imposes three sets of limits. The first is temporal: 1848 marked the arrival of Robert Gray as first Bishop of Cape Town. By 1884, the church had become autonomous and clergy were more confident about proceeding with 'ritualist' initiatives. By this time, documentary records were also more prolific and systematic. The earlier period must largely be reconstructed from correspondence and press reports. The second limit is geographical, and the book covers only the Dioceses of Cape Town, Grahamstown, Natal and the Orange Free State. A third limit restricts the study to parishes. Mission stations were often run by clergy who brought 'ritualist' practices with them, but the evidence is more scattered, and little or any of it represents the voices of the indigenous converts who worshipped in these places.

An opening chapter is largely concerned with developments in the Church of England in the nineteenth century. Bethke traces a line from the Oxford Movement, into Tractarianism, the emergence of aesthetic concerns through the Ecclesiologists, towards Ritualism. Along this spectrum, he places High Churchmen, loyal to the Book of Common Prayer, and wary of State interference in the life of the Church, but not extrovert in their approach to ceremonial. The bishops who were ordained for the Churches of the Colonies, partly because they were financed by the High Church Colonial Bishops Fund, brought that theological and ecclesiological mindset to their new positions, along with a high doctrine of episcopacy. They and the clergy who came out to serve in their territories tended to be graduates who had absorbed the vibrant discussions in Oxford and Cambridge in the mid-1800s. The lay people they encountered often came from a very different and less educated social background but

held a democratic view of local church governance. This scene-setting is perhaps misleading in suggesting a linear progression and in some of the labels it applies to individuals. Where it is useful, is in distinguishing between two categories – those who kept firmly to the Prayer Book but implemented its rubrics fully, thus being accused of introducing novelties when they were merely restoring usages which had been in abeyance; and those who introduced practices that were certainly not envisaged by the Prayer Book. A basic list of six non-Prayer Book practices was provided by the English Church Union (eucharistic vestments; eastward-facing celebration; candles on the altar; mixed chalice; wafer bread; and incense). More could and would be added.

Bethke divides his study into three phases, beginning with a period led by ‘Tractarian’ clergy and manifested more in ideas than in ceremonial changes. They upheld the independence of Church from State, but also encountered local conflicts of authority, especially in the matter of voting rights at vestry meetings. Entitlement to vote was viewed differently by clergy and lay people, the latter resisting regular communicant status as the main criterion. In the next phase, complaints about ‘ritualism’ and even ‘Puseyism’ began to be heard, often in response to the use of gestures, symbols like the cross and decorative features in church buildings. The authors of these criticisms appear not to have had an exact sense of what they meant, and prejudice against Roman Catholicism played a part in their protests. The Colenso affair of the 1860s occupied the Church’s attention in other ways, raising concerns about liberal biblical interpretation on all sides. In the view of one South African church historian (Peter Hinchliff), it turned the local church in a Catholic direction. In 1870, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa was formally constituted as an autonomous part of the Anglican Communion. From this point onwards, Bethke suggests that clergy were more confident about introducing and sustaining ‘ritualist’ practice, the six previously mentioned items amplified by reservation, veneration of the saints, plainchant and intoning of services, robed choirs and acolytes and a three-hour liturgy on Good Friday. Not all lay people found this congenial, but their clergy were not deterred from proceeding.

The kind of South African Anglicanism of the parish in which I grew up represents the phase that lies beyond the book’s reach. It began in one of the towns that sprang up east of Johannesburg with the discovery of gold. By 1910, a tin-roofed church had been replaced by a stone structure with apse, choir stalls, well-defined sanctuary and high altar and an organ gallery. A succession of Anglo-Catholic clergy maintained a sung eucharist with vestments, candles and incense on Sundays and feast days, daily eucharists, sung evensong into the 1980s, reservation, Benediction and a strong choral tradition. A daughter church opened in 1961 to serve new suburbs and while a little simpler in liturgical style (incense less regularly and no evensong) maintained the principal elements. Some of that remains, but these days without strong claims of Anglo-Catholic identity. A new generation of clergy and congregations who represent the ethnic mix of the local area have simply embraced what is there.

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