



Old Testament Module
Assignment 2
Reflective Learning Journal

Steve Johnson
Spring 2021

Session 2

Date: 26/04/2021

To Do in Church This Week Forum Post:

Reading the liturgy carefully there didn't seem to me to be any mention of God as the Creator. Looking deeper in some of the prayers we are all praying to God, recognising, respecting and worshipping a higher deity. Thanking Him for providing for us.

The Lords' Prayer begins with: 'Our Father, who art in heaven'. God as 'Our Father' infers that just as we are born of our biological fathers, so we accept God as our father, our creator. He is Holy and over us in Heaven. At the end we say 'For thine is the kingdom' – if the kingdom is to be here on earth, we are saying to God 'yours is this creation with everything on it'.

Our church is a Grade 1 listed building. It feels as though the architects created a contemporary structure, just as the ancient temples, as a house for God in which to dwell. Their inspiration led them to create such designs to reflect their understanding of the environment in which they believed God desired His people to worship.

All the features are of an old Anglican Church – Alter, lectern, pulpit, stained glass windows featuring biblical scenes, pews, candles, crosses, etc. In addition there are resources for aid organisations and charitable causes. In this I see its' purpose is to sustain worship of God, whilst maintaining the teachings, principles and examples set for us by Jesus. In doing so we accept new life in baptisms, progression through life and learning, and finally death, returning our physical forms back to the earth. There we see creation and re-creation before God.

Date: 22/06/2021

Reflection:

I can recall the introduction of the ANE and the mythical legends of creation being very challenging to understand. Having always believed in God as creator, struggling to identify this in the worship with this new information was also a challenge, but one which now on reflection is more obvious given the OT references such as in the Psalms and the books of wisdom.

Session 3

Date: 04/05/2021

To Do in Church This Week Forum Post:

Psalm 22.25-31. This poetic verse refers to God in awe and fits the Elohistic (E) style of source criticism. This psalm complements the mythological writings as we journey through the latter books of Genesis and look forward to Exodus. The writing style is reflective, both encouraging and reassuring the reader/listener to be aware that God will provide for His chosen people. It speaks of the God of creation, who created the nations that existed at the time of writing, historicizing the events of God's deliverance of the Hebrews.

We say a version of the Apostles Creed, from the First Council of Constantinople (381). Given the analysis we have been applying to the early texts, within the opening lines, some words stood: "I believe **in one God the Father** almighty, **maker of heaven and earth**, and of all things visible and invisible". Whilst the Creed was compiled, revised and altered many times, it was originally created a just about 300 years after the crucifixion, yet re-affirms a very basic fundamental doctrine; there is ONE God who made heaven and earth, (as opposed to several Gods?), however we are reminded in the Creed that actually there is ONLY one. Further into the Creed: "And in one Lord Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father **before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God...**". Invoking a very Genesis/ creation / Enuma Elish background to our belief in ONE God, the Father of everything.

Hayes' point that the biblical narrator wrote how God made successive attempts at creation and the relationship between God and Humankind, there is a distinct nurturing and guidance from God, and His desire for us to experience that which he desired for us in the beginning. As a parent, we nurture our own children, trusting we make the right decisions for them for growth and development; one day be able to make their own choices. There are many times when we are frustrated about how they do or do not react when we have expected them to behave a certain way.

I also thought that perhaps God placed Abraham in a very challenging, but similar situation, having to balance relationships with a son Ishmael who was 13 by the time Isaac was born. Loving his son Ishmael all this time, and fearing for his future when Isaac, the promised child, the only one who can fulfil God's will but who is then to be sacrificed by Abraham himself. The fatherhood dynamic here is extremely complicated, and one which God himself intervenes.

Date: 22/06/2021

Reflection:

Identifying the differing writing styles whilst understanding the motives for authorship altered my reflective perspective on the lessons and The Creed. The demonstration of the affirmation of faith in every service our services is confirmation of our need to maintain a healthy relationship with God through obedience and righteousness. Attempting to place myself in the position of Abraham when faced with God's instruction to sacrifice him was more difficult than it had been before. I'm reflecting on whether I think that the author is historicizing retrospective predicaments of God and humanity.

Session 4

Date: 10th May 2021

To Do in Church This Week Forum Post:

Seeing if any of the Decalogue was included in the service as a direct quotation, it wasn't. I can't recall the last time any of the '10 commandments' were specifically included, but it is frequently referred to that Jesus gave us a 'New Covenant', enhancing the Mosaic Covenant. In our service we had a Canticle, which very much exalted the God of Israel as ruler over all.

Referencing the Lectionary Deuteronomy and Numbers feature every weekday as readings for the services.

Looking around the building and through liturgies, there is very little reference to the Decalogue in our regular services in the texts reprinted every four-five weeks. Around the building, I don't see anything referencing the Decalogue although as in other churches we have the alter, plates, etc behind a communion rail, creating a 'holier' place within the holy building.

I have had to challenge in my existing beliefs or understandings about the Decalogue. It's development as a series of laws for the Israelites in context of the time in which it was constructed from various sources. I hadn't considered that other laws were written by humans or kings for their people and their culture. The development and revision of the OT laws and the evolution of the Mosaic covenant throughout Leviticus and Numbers, with God as the author and the rules being directly dictated to Moses when considered together with real people in real time, really makes me think about how we (I) easily misunderstand the reason for God creating this covenant in the first place.

Date: 22/06/2021

Reflection :

The Decalogue and Deuteronomic laws are woven into our church, services, hymns and liturgies in ways which are sometimes hidden, until we know what we are looking for. Many, if not all, of the books in the Tanakh revolve around the adherence to the law to keep favour with Yahweh. Considering laws which were created by Kings to control their peoples conflicted with the Mosaic covenant, only now do I understand the relationship that the Deuteronomic writer is describing, and which evolves in the Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

Session 6

Date: 24th May 2021

To Do in Church This Week Forum Post:

Hagiographic Hyperbole(HH)! There's a term I didn't know, let alone use! 'An exaggeration in the writing of history'.

Pentecost readings were from the NT and whilst I tried to examine them for HH, I am struggling to identify the nuances in the writing. It seems that HH is probably something we all do. A story is always more interesting if we include detail or unexpected events. I am sure I have been told of events that occurred when my parents were children that are probably embellished upon even though the core of the tale was true.

From Acts2, perhaps 'Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem' falls in to this category as the author was writing the many years after the event, possibly from memory or from a third party account, and this detail adds weight to the passage. As does the rebuttal that 'it is only nine o'clock in the morning'.

I saw some of the theme of Judges in parts of our Gospel reading: 'And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement'.

Date: 22/06/2021

Reflection:

Whilst I have always taken the OT on merit, as the direct word of God, it having to be written by a human naturally there would be bias and exaggeration. Changing my stance on the authors also helped me understand why certain books or passages are written in a certain genre. Applying the different authors of Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist and Priestly throughout the Pentateuch not only revealed more of the dynamic of the texts studied, but also challenged my preconceived ideas.

Session 7

Date: 31st May 2021

To Do in Church This Week Forum Post:

I think he'd go nuts. That's my first thought.

He's here!!! On arrival, the number (and value) of cars in the car park slightly gets his back up, him being a fiery character anyway. As he enters the porch, hand-sanitizer, just below the out-of-date notice board: appeals for Kids-Aid Tanzania which expired long ago; PCC notices which fight for space in between messages posted by people long gone. **'Does anyone even look as this?'** is his first direct question. He walks into the building, and shivers. It's freezing. He spies our meagre basket of ½ dozen tins and pasta for the food-bank on the floor, and tuts. Looks up' the lights are on full bright; pathetic heaters whimper out squeaky draft of lukewarm air which rockets up into the roof. Looks around, he sits down. In front of him are a liturgy for the service, and an offertory envelope. **'What's this for?'** he asks. 'Err..Donations for the upkeep of the church', we nervously reply. **'And this?'** He picks up the service sheet, scanning it as he talks. We're in trouble; maybe after a while we may be able to placate him...

The service begins, he seems ok. It's Morning Prayer, and soon his eyes start to role and his face tightens up...

Then, at the end, **'Can I have a word?'** That question we were all dreading. We try and make our excuses, getting in there first, but then....**'ENOUGH!'**

'Did you learn nothing from the book that I wrote for you?' Just loud enough to be heard by most people in there.

'Don't look at other people outside and think you're ok because your inside. Let me tell you, I've seen this all before, and it's not good. Your intercessions are...adequate, but you pray from a position of privilege. Consider the excuses you make for yourself to be a 'comfortable worshipper'. Look outside at your cars! And then inside at this!' (Points to pathetic food-bank).
The lecture begins...

'I've got into trouble for saying these things before, but I don't care. You want my advice – read the book! Do that, and everything here would be a million times better!'

'Remember ', he says turning around at the exit, 'I'll be back, sometime. Oh, and next week my friend, Hosea, is popping down for the service. Good luck!'

Date: 22/06/2021

Reflection:

This was my favourite piece, and I believe this will be relevant for some time to come.

Session 8

Date: 6th June 2021

To Do in Church This Week Forum Post:

NT reading: Mark 3.20-35.

In verse 21, people accuse Jesus of 'going out of his mind'. I am reminded of some of the antics of Ezekiel, in expressing his prophecies in very graphical behaviour.

I then hear the voice of the prophets in Christ's wisdom. **'If a kingdom is divided against itself, how can it stand?'**

There are many angles we can interpret this including:

- ! The division of Israel & Judah.
- ! Israel's insistence of the appointing of a king (Samuel 8), and subsequent problems.

'And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.'

Referring back to the Davidic line and covenant

'And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come'.

The poor behaviour of Israel has in the past brought it to her knees, and into exile.

The rest of the passage has echoes of the prophets, ending with v35: **'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'**, speaks of the family to which Yahweh made His covenant, and the acceptance of people joining the 'cult', together their acceptance of the conditions of the covenant.

Date: 22/06/2021

Reflection:

Listening for the echoes of the prophets still further created depth, progressing through sessions, adding layers all of the time. Interrogating the NT from an OT perspective reveals how influential the Tanakh was on the reception of Christ's teachings and the early church. Multiple authorship and the truth of the messages, together with all of the conflicting accounts of events challenges me to reflect on new discoveries within the texts, and how, as Christians, these are alarmingly still relevant to our lives 3000 years later.

Session 9

Date: 14th June 2021

To Do in Church This Week Forum Post:

Observing the liturgy from a 'Psalmist' perspective we begin with our call to worship. Early into the service, we are reading and responding in stanzas, very similar in format to a psalm - each line complementing the previous one. There is a poetic quality in how it is written and would be classified as praise and worship, rather than lament.

We soon progress to a very psalm like passage:

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Creator and redeemer of all;
to you be glory and praise forever.....

Given the sessions we have previously studied, This draws together many important parts of the OT. This passage begins with praise to God, a reason for the worship, and closes with 'blessed be God for ever'.

We say a canticle which is actually from 1 Chronicles 29.10b-13, 14b, at the very end of this book. Previously, I would have said that this was one of the psalms, and could be classed as one. It is a confession of thanksgiving, and accepting that God is all and gives all and loves us unconditionally. Reading it slower now, it is a powerful passage from the OT embedded in our worship thousands of years later.

I sometimes find the prose and writing styles a bit too intense, maybe because I'm trying to read them too fast, missing the message within. Some are obvious in their intent - prayers for victory (Ps20), complaints dept (Ps109) etc, but I still find Psalm 23 the psalm for all seasons. We travel an intense and meaningful journey with God - incredible these psalms were written so long ago.

Date: 22/06/2021

Reflection:

I remember being amazed at how much the psalms are present in our hymns, formal prayers and liturgy, even just in parts or snippets. Understanding where a piece of liturgy originates from somehow validates its' inclusion, and that the worship is not just some fabricated 'high church' created in the Christendom era. The challenge to me is: read slower, listen for God, these are the words from God, for me.