

Scott, Hilton 2022. *A Sense of Belonging: Being Church in a Pluralistic Society.* Eugene, OR: Resource Publications. **ISBN: 9781666737462**

The challenges of bridging the cultures and differences of church members are among the most pressing concerns congregations face in urban pluralistic cultures. Add to this a history of oppression and injustice based on race, as one might find in the author's country of South Africa or in this reviewer's home in United States of America, and the work becomes decidedly more urgent. One hopes the common prayer that unites congregations, sustained by the personal spiritual practices of members, might support bridges to cross that divide. But how?

Enter Hilton Scott's study of three denominationally different congregations in Centurion, a diverse, medium-sized metropolitan city between Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa. Through it he seeks to uncover a pattern of 'liturgy in the making – *liturgia condenda* – that joins church traditions of prayer and local cultures so that those participating 'feel inclusively part of the worship service' (p. 13). In such ways the *lex orandi* of common prayer funds a *lex credendi* of shared belief in an inclusive whole, which then yields a *lex (con)vivendi* of intercultural fellowship or *koinonia*. Scott's aim is a liturgical inculturation expressed through Anscar Chupungco's image of a double-wicked candle, by which the flames of liturgy and culture eventually burn together (p. 23). Though reflecting the cultural mix and history of South Africa, cities like Centurion appear in many corners of the globe, opening Scott's contextual reflections to wider application.

Scott's method of analysis places him solidly in the practical theology camp. Though he highlights the interdisciplinary character of his work – ritual and liturgical studies, ecclesiology, the human sciences, and pastoral care – these are organized according to the four-part practical theological schema proposed by Richard Osmer: describing what's happening, interpreting what has been observed, applying theological lenses, and proposing new praxis. Scott applies his method to three different Centurion churches,

one Anglican, one Methodist, and one charismatic. His primary interest is “prayer” in the broadest sense, and he gathers data by attending the Sunday services of all three congregations and by interviewing nine congregants drawn from all three churches.

Scott’s interpretation of data, drawn from his own participant-observation in worship and interviews with members about those services and their personal prayer life, is perhaps the trickiest move in his work. He categorizes “prayer” by type and function (sacrifice, gifting, rites of passage, confession, and healing) through the lenses of ritual studies and liturgical theology and suggests that there is an interplay between congregational and personal prayer, with each influencing the other. Yet at times a reader may wonder if Scott is making apples-to-apples comparisons – always a challenge in interdisciplinary work. Many in the field of ritual studies, for example, would be cautious about applying the concept of liminality to a private prayer (pp. 118–20) or see personal “quiet time” as ritual activity (p. 121). Scott admits these limits and appeals to the language of “popular devotions” to connect them, but even these tend to be celebrated communally. Nevertheless, Scott argues convincingly that “what has been ritualized by the collective has been taken from the worship service and ... adapted for the individual” (p. 122). These personal practices, in turn, suggest adjustments to common prayer.

Though Scott provides a relatively thick description of his subjects, one gap in the data leaps out: For a work interested in reconciling “cultures” through prayer, there is scant reference to the many cultural groups churches gather. Other than brief reference to an “exquisite array of cultures” in the Methodist church (p. 12), the performance of a “traditional African choir” (p. 68) and a baptism of five children of different cultural heritages in that church (p. 148), and reference to one church as *Anglican*, there is little to suggest in detail the local cultural diversity described at the beginning of the project (p. 38).

Scott is not unaware of the diversity at play, noting “financial status, race, gender, sexual orientation”, among others (p. 145), though these are largely absent from his study. He may have good reasons for withholding them – to maintain anonymity, for example – but teasing those differences out, perhaps in later work, might allow him to complexify Chupungco’s binary

two-ended candle into a brighter, even more productive woven candle of many burning ends. All that diversity may never meet “in the middle”, but the many flames might come to burn more closely in a more inclusive *koinonia*, as Scott hopes.

With these limits (or future directions for his work?) in mind, Scott nevertheless charts a course toward a new and inclusive practice that joins both received traditions of church prayer and belief, and the lived prayer of members, who are themselves the creators of new forms of prayer: “[T]he worshippers are the “change agents” ... [L]iturgical inculturation should be a continuous process with the aims of not only developing a new entity, an inculturated and interculturated liturgy, but that such an entity would serve the worshippers in forms of unity and inclusivity” (p. 158–59). Such praxis of prayer would no doubt enrich many congregations.

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