Inclusive Spirituality

Inclusive Spirituality and the Bible

That we have a God who welcomes all people is at the heart of an inclusive spirituality. It recognises that the scriptures reveal a God who seeks to embrace all people. For us to explore an inclusive spirituality is to open our bibles and read about a God who creates all people equally, a God who works to bring about something new in people’s lives.

An inclusive spirituality that is biblical has to live with the very real tension that exists when we encounter biblical material that seems to be ‘exclusive’. It is helpful to, in a sense take a step back, and try to gain an overview of scripture. Although there may be particular texts that seem to be hard to accept from an inclusive standpoint, the sense of ‘who God is’, something of what the character of God is like when we step back from the detail; is of a God whose arms are open in welcome. This is especially true when we read the Gospels. Here Jesus is seen to be a person who goes out of his way to mix with those who traditionally are seen as outsiders.

It is in this context that we can approach scripture and discover a God who welcomes YOU – whoever you are.

An inclusive spirituality would also encourage us to read the Bible with openness to who God is. Much of our traditional reading and interpretation of scripture emerges from a patriarchal and hierarchical view of God, often using masculine images to describe God. (King, Lord, father etc.) An inclusive spirituality encourages us to be open to read our scriptures with fresh eyes and open minds. An inclusive spirituality would encourage us to consider the feminine characteristics of God that can be found in scripture (mother, parent, wife etc).

Inclusive Spirituality and the Church of England.

Inclusion lies at the heart of what it means to be Anglican. The Church of England with its parish church system has enshrined within its very existence openness and availability to all. It is worth noting that

“The word ‘parish’ is never used in the New Testament, but it is, interestingly, an ancient Greek word, which literally means ‘those outside the house’: not the insiders, but the outsiders. So a parish church … is not an exclusive place, but an inclusive place for the stranger.”

Martyn Percy in ‘The Future of the Parish System’. p.4

1 Bob Callaghan November 2011 for Southwark Spirituality Day
Inclusive Spirituality as a way of Prayer

If openness and acceptance is central to what it means to be Anglican; this is powerfully expressed in its main forms of worship, which can assist us as we explore an inclusive spirituality.

The two authorised forms of worship within the Church of England are the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship. The key word here is ‘common’ - in the sense of being worship that is for all people, and a form of worship that can hold the people of God together. An inclusive spirituality would celebrate and encourage the use of the spiritual tools and resources that are available to us within this tradition.

Within this context the use of Morning and Evening prayer (The Daily Office) is a well-used pattern of prayer that is suitable for clergy or lay people. Whether this is in a cathedral, a parish church or alone at home; the discipline of Morning and Evening prayer can link an individual with the worldwide family of Anglicans sharing in something that is ‘common’ to us all.

“For many the spirituality related to Celtic Christianity can be really helpful as they discover more about inclusive spirituality.

Celtic Christians see life as a pilgrimage, use earthy yet poetic prayers, and have a vivid sense of saints, angels and the unseen world. They believe that what is deepest in us is the image of God. Sin has distorted but not erased it. However, the struggle against evil in the human and the spirit world is real. Memorising Scripture, praying daily following the natural rhythm of the sun and the seasons, and working with a soul friend to overcome destructive passions are a means to this. The early Celtic churches were communities of work, prayer and hospitality at the heart of local life, and those with a Celtic vision seek to restore these features to church life today. Many people today see Celtic spirituality as a way to weave together again the separated strands of Christianity, and to heal a fragmented world.”
(reJesus.co.uk)

Fire-borne God,  
before the violence of your passion  
no separating wall can stand:  
may your unseen Spirit  
pour herself upon young and old,  
male and female, gay and straight,  
throw our borders into confusion  
and give us a new language of love;  
through Jesus Christ, the Image of God’s Being.  
Amen.

Suggested reading and resources

The Book of Common Prayer  
Common Worship: Daily Prayer  
Celebrating Common Prayer: The Franciscan Daily Office  
Prayers for an Inclusive Church: Steven Shakespeare  
The Inclusive God: Steven Shakespeare  
Space for Grace: Giles  
www.rejesus.co.uk

2 Bob Callaghan November 2011 for Southwark Spirituality Day