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Trends in Common Worship

David Phillips

The Church of England is in the process of revising all its modern language liturgy. This article explains the current state of play and then attempts to identify some of the more significant trends that are emerging.

The Current State of Play

The *Alternative Service Book* is authorized to the end of the year 2000, after which it will be replaced by new services, many of which are not yet ready. These new services will be known collectively as *Common Worship*. It is expected that there will be several books; in particular a *Sunday Services* book, an occasional offices book and a book of additional texts and readings. Various options regarding electronic publishing are also being considered.[1]

At the time of writing only two items have been fully authorized. These are The Calendar, Lectionary and Collects (not including the daily lectionary) which were authorized from Advent 1997 and the Initiation Services (baptism, confirmation etc) which were authorized from Easter 1998.

Currently under consideration by General Synod are Holy Communion (but not yet the Eucharistic Prayers), the Lord's Prayer, and Extended Communion and Service of the Word. Synod has also authorized a revision of the Psalter which it must then approve.

Still to come before General Synod are Catechumenate Rites, Daily Office, Eucharistic Prayers, Funerals, Marriage, and Ordinal and Reconciliation. Draft proposals for Eucharistic Prayers, Funerals and Marriage have already been 'road-tested' by around eight hundred parishes.

Contemporary language liturgy is seen by many as essential to ensure that the Church appears meaningful and relevant in the modern world. Indeed, 'the momentum for the revision of the *ASB* springs from a desire to have the best possible liturgy to meet the new evangelistic opportunities and pastoral challenges'.[2] It was this mission-mindedness that led many

1 The strategy for *Common Worship* is set out in *GS 1268 Publishing the New Liturgy: First Progress Report to the Synod by the Liturgical Publishing Group* (General Synod 1997).
2 *GS Misc 459 Liturgical Revision 1995-2000* (General Synod 1995) p 1

Evangelicals to embrace the new liturgy in the 1960s and 1970s. However, liturgical revision has involved change to both language and theology,[3] for the services of the *Alternative Service Book* 'represent a much needed response to the developments of language and theology in British society since 1945'.[4] In embracing revision Evangelicals either did not see or simply could not prevent the momentum initiated by the liberal-catholic hierarchy of the Church. Peter Cornwell, from a catholic perspective candidly noted:

> Judge the new services in terms of the updating of language in order to entice the man on the Clapham omnibus into church, and you will be hard put to mount a convincing case. The language is often banal and pitiful, and there is as little evidence that it attracts the crowds as there is that the language of the Prayer Book attracts them. The case to be made out is that the new services express better theology.[5]

These words, written shortly after the *ASB* appeared, also show that there was soon pressure for further revision because the *ASB* was deemed inadequate.

Despite the fact that various groupings misused the *Book of Common Prayer* (including some Evangelicals), it did a remarkable job in holding together an otherwise divided Church. In producing *Common Worship*, the Liturgical Commission has faced the unenviable task of allowing diversity of local practice and preference whilst re-enforcing and promoting unity. Their approach is set out in *The Renewal of Common Prayer*. Their 'concern has been to define and build a strong "evolving common core" in Anglican worship that will still leave some room for legitimate variety, experiment and local decision'.[6] This principle has clearly been followed in the services so far unveiled.

Each service seeks to have a clear structure and, wherever possible, a 'clean text', that is to say that alternatives and options are not in the main text. The number of rubrics and options in the *ASB* made it quite difficult to follow. *Common Worship* has more opening notes but generally fewer rubrics, although both contain a liberal scattering of the word 'may' referring to supplemental material including that yet to be produced for seasons and special occasions. 'In addition to the places where they are

3 Radical theologians, such as Don Cupitt, would not accept that language and theology can be separated; they see truth (and indeed God) as simply a construct of language. Such a view fails to recognize that God is utterly distinct from us and that he has made both us and our ability to communicate in language.
4 *GS 1115 Language and the Worship of the Church* (General Synod 1994) p 8
5 P Cornwell *Church and Nation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1983) p 90
6 Michael Perham 'Introduction' *GS Misc 412 The Renewal of Common Prayer* (London: CHP/SPCK 1993) p 6

printed in the service, traditional versions of texts may be used.'[7] This mixing of traditional and modern, which is very postmodern, will allow a congregation to use, for instance, just one version of the Nicene Creed at all their services.

It is anticipated that to avoid constantly turning to other parts of the book, or other books, congregations will print the service as they use it or print a full service, or part of it, every week, to take account of the options. Computer technology will play a key part in this.

It remains to be seen if the 'evolving common core' approach will work. Many will see the freedom to swap texts as a freedom to change the core. Evangelicals are often guilty of this but they are not the only ones. In the Final Approval debate for the Initiation Services, principled Protestants objected to the services because of the doctrinal shift. By contrast one non-Evangelical stated that whilst she would not vote against them, neither would she use them as authorized:

> I find myself in a situation, however, where I will need to do a pick-and-mix. There are some good prayers here which I want to use; but for liturgical, linguistic and pastoral reasons I still want to be able to use some of the services from the *Alternative Service Book*. I find I need to make a separate baptism service in most cases, for all sorts of pastoral and practical reasons.[8]

Those who had spent years producing what they hoped was an acceptable and coherent text were visibly alarmed by the prospect of it being barbarized by every parish priest in the land. It should also be a concern that clergy will spend more and more time in mixing and printing services, to the neglect of other aspects of ministry.

When, in the preface to his first prayer book Cranmer said that there should be 'but one use' he gave no reasons, but there can indeed be clear benefits:

• Firstly, a strong common core protects a congregation against the whims and emphases of their particular minister (or worship leader).
• Secondly, worshippers are reminded that they belong to something bigger than their local fellowship. There are certain things that are not simply for local custom but which should be a custom in all the churches. (See 1 Corinthians 11:16 – though most in the Church of England do not follow the custom Paul describes here).

7 *GS 1211A The Eucharist (As Revised October 1997)* (General Synod 1997) p 5
8 Canon Bernice Broggio *Report of Proceedings Vol 28 no 2 (Nov 1997)* (General Synod 1998) p 715

• Thirdly, common liturgy is more portable. Laity visiting a different church will find it familiar and less threatening. Clergy, especially bishops, will find it easier to lead worship in other churches.

• Fourthly, 'if there is no common prayer, there is a danger of a loss of common doctrine'.[9] Sadly, this sounds like shutting the door after the horse has bolted. Moreover, Anglican Evangelicals often share close fellowship and common doctrine with Evangelicals in other denominations whilst having very different patterns of worship. Many will see the new liturgies as undermining, not safeguarding, basic doctrine, and will therefore see the 'evolving' core, as part of a drift away from the truth.

Language

The *Alternative Service Book 1980* reflects the age that gave it birth. Like much 1960s and 1970s architecture it is bland. It represents the near climax of modernism in the theology of the Church. The new liturgy is emerging against a different background, that of postmodernism. For the dedicated followers of fashion this has involved a theological shift. Issues of language are particularly important in this new environment.

Some of these issues surfaced when in February 1996 General Synod debated and rejected six additional Eucharistic Prayers. One speaker warmly welcomed the new texts:

> There is something in these new Eucharistic Prayers which resonates with the spirit and with image. When in the Gospels Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God he does not give us a three-line definition, he gives us a picture, an image, and then we are left to get on with it. He does this repeatedly. The Bible is not full of the language of proposition: it is full of creative language and poetry which does something which propositional language does not do.[10]

It is presumably Jesus' parables of the Kingdom that are referred to here. This is curious since Jesus' explanation of parables implies that they create a barrier to understanding which caused people either to turn away or seek to learn more (see Mark 4:11-12). An example of 'creative language' might be 'a sower went out to sow', but when Jesus is called to explain this he uses 'propositional language'; 'the sower sows the word...' (Mark 4:3, 14). Moreover, much of the rest of the New Testament consists of 'propositional language'.

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9 Michael Perham 'Introduction' *GS Misc 412 The Renewal of Common Prayer* (London: CHP/SPCK 1993) p 5

10 Revd Nicholas Baines *Report of Proceedings Vol 27 no 1 (Feb 1996)* (General Synod 1996) p 99

Common Worship contains more poetry and imagery than the *ASB*, although the failure of the six additional Eucharistic Prayers appears to have led to a reining back in some of the intended developments. For example, in the second prayer are the words 'from the beginning, you have created all things and all your works echo the silent music of your praise'.[11] In drawing on Psalm 19 this is language that is best appreciated as it stands; once the question is asked as to its meaning, something of the power of it is lost. Indeed to ask questions about meaning appears very modernist. In contrast, postmodern worship is not concerned so much with meaning but with the response it induces in the worshipper. This is what is meant by saying that 'creative language and poetry... does something'. Worshippers are not supposed to analyse the words, rather they should be immersed in the drama of liturgy and respond to that drama.

There are grounds here for serious concern. The Apostle Paul would rather utter five words with understanding than a thousand in a tongue (1 Cor 14:19). Public worship is not about disengaging the mind or understanding, neither is it just about understanding. In the Third Exhortation in the Prayer Book the worshipper is presented with propositional truth which, like putting a match to kindling, should light the fires of repentance, self-examination, thanksgiving, remembrance, diligence and holiness. These things are not induced by creating a mood but by presenting the worshipper with truth. Indeed it is truth that is at issue here, for propositional language assumes that there is objective truth, and that assumption is under assault today.

What is the ethos of language in postmodern liturgy?

> In literary criticism there has been a shift away from the assumption that a text has a meaning which can be objectively stated to the recognition that it may be heard in a variety of ways: the hearer or reader has a part in making the meaning. Interest in 'authorial intention' gives way to 'reader-response'.[12]

In the debate on the additional Eucharistic Prayers the diversity of 'reader-response' was very evident! One reader stated, 'I particularly welcome the stronger emphasis on creation'.[13] Whereas an earlier speaker lamented, 'here in some of these prayers there are signs of equally soppy and arty creation theology beginning to creep in'.[14] The speaker quoted earlier felt that the new liturgy 'does something' whilst another likened it to the

11 *GS 1138B Additional Eucharistic Prayers* (General Synod 1996) p 6
12 *GS 1115 Language and the Worship of the Church* p 2
13 Revd Tony Higton *Report of Proceedings Vol 27 no 1 (Feb 1996)* (General Synod 1996) p 100
14 Canon Paul Nener *Report of Proceedings Vol 27 no 1 (Feb 1996)* (General Synod 1996) p 98

writing on a cornflake packet and explained 'the language is informative, it is everyday and ordinary, but there are no rolling cadences. There is a huge and significant gap. There is no sense in the language itself of the sacred'.[15] The two speakers quoted who were negative identified the chief problem with 'reader-response'; 'the prayers singularly fail in many respects to lift our hearts up to the glory of God and to the saving acts of Jesus Christ' and 'our texts now have their eyes not on God but on the congregation'. This is inevitable, because the 'reader-response' model requires that the focus be on the individual and how they perceive truth, not on the objective, eternal truth of God.

It would be wrong to think that *Common Worship* has gone far down the road of 'reader-response' but whilst the fad lasts there will be pressure to embrace it more wholeheartedly in liturgy.

Gender-Inclusive Language

The 'reader-response' approach has made some people feel 'excluded' by the liturgy. The *ASB* was formulated before the issue of inclusive language came to the fore and was soon felt to be inadequate. The Liturgical Commission addressed this in its 1988 report *Making Women Visible*, acknowledging that 'at certain well-known points in the *ASB* its language is felt by many to be insensitive to the presence of women'.[16] By 1994 the concern was wider than just the gender issue: '*Making Women Visible* assumes that "inclusive language" is language which simply refers to male and female. It is well to note, five years on, that … forms of language may be heard to be exclusive in areas other than that of gender: age, race and ethnicity among them.'[17] They recommended that 'all new texts by members of the Commission and those with whom they work should as far as possible be written with a sensitivity to gender, race and age'.[18] However, in 1997, with hopefully a hint of humour, it was noted that 'not all contemporisation is appropriate: there is no call to follow New Zealand in changing Zion to Jerusalem out of respect for Arab Christians'![19]

Of primary concern in this article is gender-inclusive language. Three stages will be identified, the first being to replace words such as 'men' and to reduce the use of male pronouns in relation to God. The second stage

15 Bishop of St Albans (Rt Revd Christopher Herbert) *Report of Proceedings Vol 27 no 1 (Feb 1996)* (General Synod 1996) p 10
16 *GS 859 Making Women Visible: The Use of Inclusive Language with the ASB* (General Synod 1988) p 1
17 *GS 1115 Language and the Worship of the Church* p 12
18 *GS 1115 Language and the Worship of the Church* p 41
19 *GS Misc 504 A New Psalter for Liturgical Use in the Church of England* (General Synod 1997) p 7

involves removing all masculine language referring to God. The third stage addresses the way language functions as a tool of power.

The English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC) in its 1988 report *Praying Together* states that 'sensitivity should be shown to the need for inclusive language'.[20] The report unfolds this to mean what has been described above as stage one.[21] In July 1994 the General Synod agreed that 'the ecumenical texts produced by ELLC ... should be adopted in all subsequent services authorised for use in the Church of England',[22] but with four provisos.[23] The new General Synod, elected in 1995, has been less favourable to ELLC by opting to retain more *ASB* texts:

• 'and was made *man*' where ELLC has 'was made truly human' in the Nicene Creed.
• 'I believe in Jesus Christ, *his* only Son...' where ELLC has '... *God's* only Son...' in the Apostle's Creed.
• 'It is right to give *him* thanks and praise' instead of '... *our* thanks and praise' in the Sursum Corda.
• 'peace to *his* people on earth' where ELLC has '*God's* people' in the Gloria.
• the repeated use of 'He' at the start of each line in the Magnificat, where ELLC has carefully removed them. (This has yet to be formally considered and may be a printing mistake.[24])

In addition, consideration is being given as to whether 'was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary' is an adequate English translation. Therefore *Common Worship* will stop short of the first stage of gender-inclusive language. Many welcome this reining back, but it also means that the issue will not go away, there is more to come.

ELLC itself does not move onto the second stage and notes that 'male-oriented language referring to God presents greater problems. ELLC considered that the removal of all masculine forms would take the texts beyond the process of translation and into the realm of theological reinterpretation. Very few respondents urged ELLC to go as far as this'.[25]

20 English Language Liturgical Consultation *Praying Together* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press 1988) p(xi)
21 See for example *Praying Together* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press 1988) p(xii)
22 *GS 1115 Language and the Worship of the Church* p 42
23 Of the four provisos two relate to the Lord's Prayer now under consideration as *GS 1271 The Lord's Prayer* (General Synod 1998), one to the line 'his only Son' in the Apostle's Creed, and one to the ELLC translation of ἐνάθρωπήσαν 'became truly human' in the Nicene Creed.
24 *GS 1280 A Service of the Word/Affirmations of Faith/Prayers for Various Occasions/ Canticles at Morning and Evening Prayer* (General Synod 1998) p 45
25 English Language Liturgical Consultation *Praying Together* p(xii)

Therefore phrases such as 'Our Father...' and '...Son of God...' are safe for the time being, but even in 1985 there were clearly some who pressed to alter them.

One liturgist engaged in producing such gender-inclusive texts is Janet Morley. She describes how she 'began to campaign for more inclusive language in liturgy' because 'theologically, I could see how inappropriate it was to identify God with actual maleness'. At first this meant leaving out male pronouns but, because she realized that this might mean losing a sense of God as 'deeply personal', she therefore 'began to feel that it would be a good idea ... to think of God in the feminine as well as the masculine'.[26] It will only be a matter of time before there will be pressure to incorporate such texts into the liturgy of the Church of England.

Liturgy and Power

In the essay quoted above, Janet Morley also says 'there was a felt coherence between the greater authority and value I was encouraged to give to men than to women (including myself), and the authority I gave to God'.[27] This leads into the question of liturgy and the language of power. The feminist critique is noted in the Doctrine Commission report *The Mystery of Salvation*; 'the use of masculine language for God has functioned to legitimate male dominance and oppression of women. The masculine God is the heavenly counterpart of patriarchy on earth'.[28] Earlier it had been noted that 'there would be widespread agreement that much of the Bible and of the later tradition of the Church contains material which assumes male supremacy'.[29] This moves beyond feelings of exclusion and even the idea that male language about God makes men more valuable than women. Rather, it is beginning to be claimed that language in doctrine and liturgy has served as a vehicle of power. Don Cupitt suggests that dogmatic theology is 'an ideology of actual absolute spiritual power'.[30] For Cupitt, the solution is to break free from this power by means of mysticism, deconstructionism and his own radical theology, all of which are seen as protest movements against the rigidity of dogma and traditional liturgy.

In liturgy this affects language that expresses an ideal of power because traditionally 'it is not just that God is imaged as male, but as male warrior

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26 Janet Morley 'I Desire Her with My Whole Heart' *Feminist Theology* Ann Loades ed (London: SPCK) p 158ff

27 Janet Morley *Feminist Theology* p 158

28 *GS 1155 The Mystery of Salvation* (London: Church House Publishing 1995) p 47

29 *GS 1155 The Mystery of Salvation* p 17

30 Don Cupitt *Mysticism after Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell 1998) p 55

élite. God is not imaged as black male garbage collector either'.[31] Therefore:

> the contemporary debate is focussed generally on images which are commonly used to describe or address God (eg King, Lord) and on the male pronouns... Phrases which speak of God as being part of a male hierarchy are simply unacceptable today in some English-speaking communities (notably in the USA and New Zealand) but are a *sine qua non* within many black congregations world-wide.[32]

In producing *Common Worship* the voices calling for the removal of words such as 'Lord', 'Almighty' and 'King', on the grounds of them expressing a one-sided view of God, appear to have been as faint as those calling for inclusive language when the *ASB* was produced.[33]

Changing the language of power is about 'primarily trying to wrest the "ownership" of God away from a discourse of dominance and on to the side of "co-operation among people"'.[34] This means looking for language and imagery which express concepts and ideas in contrast to the traditional male, hierarchical images of power. These other associations 'include weakness [God is almost inevitably addressed as almighty], sexuality [it is rare these days to value God as lover] and, as it were, the "dark" side of human nature, with its chaotic and mysterious emotions [God is always presented as a God of light, order and stability]'.[35] A further development is to use verbs rather than nouns to describe God:

> For people in power, an eternal substantive, an eternal noun, an eternal object has a clear purpose, because an eternal object – however constructed – obviously stands over against transformation and radical change. Women, with other oppressed groups, need to relate to God as verb, as process, as act because we see the need for that transformation – we have felt it in our own experience. The God of the Hebrews is not only 'the Lord of Armies' but also 'I AM', a

31 Rosemary Ruether quoted by Sara Maitland 'Ways of Relating' *Feminist Theology* Ann Loades ed p 153
32 *GS 1115 Language and the Worship of the Church* p 41
33 A related issue concerned the congregational words after the signing of the cross in baptism. The *ASB* words, 'Fight valiantly... and continue his faithful soldier...' were at first left out but when protestors asked for their return, the Revision Committee, 'aware of objections to military imagery of "fight" and "soldiers"', suggested that candidates should 'strive valiantly as the disciple of Christ... and remain faithful to Christ...' After due battle in Synod a truce was won and the authorized text now reads 'Fight valiantly... and remain faithful to Christ'. See the *ASB 1980* p 245, *GS 1152* p 23, *GS 1152Y* p 28, *GS 115A* p 7 and *GS 1152C* p 7 respectively.
34 Sara Maitland 'Ways of Relating' *Feminist Theology* p 153
35 Janet Morley *Feminist Theology* pp 159-60

pure verb of being-ness.[36]

Any critique of these assertions seems to involve falling back on the language and tools that are under assault. However, the primary weakness is that it is all too human, too earthly, too 'me'. This is abundantly plain in the writings of Cupitt, whose whole framework assumes that God is simply a human projection or aspiration. Cupitt seems to suggest that biblical religion arose as a tool of the state:

> The suggestion is, then, that the old easy commerce between the human world and the supernatural world was brought to an end by the rise of the first law-governed State societies. The gods withdrew to Heaven and became fearsome and remote. Henceforth they communicated with humans only via the Law and the great officers of the State.[37]

Cupitt can only assert this because he assumes his premise, namely that biblical faith evolved and that the Bible distorts history. In contrast the Bible presents to us a nation formed by the initiative of God, *not* a god formed by the initiative of the nation. The critics of the language of power are propagating a language from below which has to distance itself from any concept of revelation. Instead they appear to be constructing their own gods, in their own image.

Moving Away from Reformation Theology

For many, the biggest concern in liturgical revision is the drift away from traditional Protestant beliefs. These have been left to last in this article because they no longer have the high profile they once enjoyed, for various reasons:

• Firstly, to some these debates belong to a past generation and century.
• Secondly, in the era of 'reader-response' endless argument about words and phrases is deemed less important than overall mood (though there is still plenty of argument over individual words such as 'men' and 'He').
• Thirdly, shape is also considered more important than wording. One writer comments that Gregory Dix taught 'that the liturgy is essentially a series of actions, which are interpreted by words. It was a needful insight from which the Church of England could benefit: worry less about "getting the words right" and concentrate more on the inner meaning of the Eucharist'.[38]

36 Sara Maitland 'Ways of Relating' *Feminist Theology* p 156
37 Don Cupitt *Mysticism after Modernity* p 53
38 Kenneth Stevenson 'Anglican Identity and Church of England Worship Today: An Historical Reflection' *GS Misc 412 The Renewal of Common Prayer* (London: CHP/SPCK 1993) p 10

• Fourthly, whereas in the early days of modern language liturgy, Colin Buchanan spearheaded, from within, revolt on eucharistic offering and prayer for the dead, many Evangelicals who have followed in his wake have little interest in these past battles or the issues of salvation that gave rise to them.

• Finally, the lost battles and compromise of the *ASB* have, by vain repetition, ensured that clergy and laity alike have been numbed to the erosion of Reformation theology.

There are some minor changes that should be noted. Many have recognized that more frequent Communions have affected the length of sermons and although, as in the *ASB*, 'a sermon should normally be preached', *Common Worship* allows that 'the sermon may on occasion include less formal exposition of scripture, the use of drama, interviews, discussion, and audio-visual aids'.[39] Preaching has declined because people do not believe they are handling the oracles of God. Thus the Liturgical Commission initially tried to change the response after the reading from 'This is the word of the Lord' to 'The word of the Lord'. The loss of the verb was attributed to translation of the Latin, but everyone knew it was because some people do not think it is 'the word of the Lord'. In contrast, the Sunday Lectionary now allows more parts of Scripture to be read in its three-year cycle and encourages the practice of reading and preaching through a whole book. Finally, in the Calendar, the Protestant martyrs Ridley and Latimer who once warranted Lesser Festivals now have only Commemorations. However, those who most value their witness are least likely to notice the change.

Before considering the more substantive issues it is as well to remember that at the heart of all the concerns is the question 'How can I be saved?' In the past the Church of England could answer 'Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved' (Article XVIII); 'we are justified by faith only' (Article XI) and 'the offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone' (Article XXXI).

In the *ASB* some of the key areas of dispute were fudged by the use of 'studied ambiguity', whereby words and phrases mean different things to different people. Now, however, 'on both eucharistic theology and prayer about the departed the [Liturgical] Commission has had discussions which have taken it from basic biblical principles to forms of words which go beyond the truces of the 1970s in a way that will prove richer and more acceptable'.[40] In reality this seems to mean a movement, by stealth, away

39 *GS 1211A The Eucharist As revised October 1997* (General Synod 1997) p 7
40 *GS Misc 364 The Worship of the Church* (General Synod 1991) p 7

from Reformation concerns.

With regard to 'prayer about the departed', those who felt uncomfortable with the *ASB* 'truces' now find that attempts are being made to slip in more overt intercession for the dead. For example, one of the forms of intercession at Communion contained the prayer 'we *entrust* those who have gone before us...',[41] which was changed, after objections, to 'hear us as we remember...'[42] However, it is the Draft Funeral Services that reveal what is being sought. Before the funeral the minister may pray 'Forgive him/her sins and failings and grant him/her a place of refreshment, light, and peace. Let him/her pass unharmed through the gates of death to dwell with the blessed in light...',[43] and in one of the optional prayers for the funeral 'with confidence we ask him [God] to save all his people, living and dead:... For our deceased relatives and friends and for all who have helped us...[44] Other examples could be cited.

The growth of symbolism is another noticeable feature of *Common Worship*. In the Baptism Service there is the candle, oil and clothing of candidates. At Holy Communion 'taking' and 'breaking'[45] are more developed. In the Draft Funeral Services there is provision for sprinkling with water, covering with a pall and placing a Bible, cross, or anything else on the coffin. So the funeral service may now begin with various symbolic acts, but apparently not with the familiar words of Jesus: 'I am the resurrection and the life'. In an age of increasing biblical illiteracy in the churches and a loss of confidence in the word of God, the flourishing of symbolism is a cause for concern. Because of general ignorance the meaning of symbols cannot be taken for granted and people may easily be misled or deceived. The one exception to the growth of symbolism is the 'giving away' of the bride, which is now consigned to a note at the start of the service and the words 'who *brings* this woman to be married to this man'.[46]

In *Common Worship* it is assumed that most services will take place in the context of Holy Communion, this is true of Baptism, Confirmation,

41 *GS 1211 Holy Communion Rites A & B Revised* (General Synod 1996) p 53
42 *GS 1211A The Eucharist* p 57
43 *HB(97)34(Funerals) The Funeral Service with Services Before and After the Funeral, Prayer, and Other Resources* (Liturgical Commission 1997) p 18
44 *HB(97)34(Funerals)* p 89
45 The Communion service is now clearly shaped around the fourfold action which Gregory Dix set out in his work *The Shape of the Liturgy*. This involves Taking, Giving Thanks, Breaking and Giving. In the *ASB* this was conflated into two so that little was made of Taking or Breaking. It is curious that so much is made of the Dixian shape when it seems to be fairly universally agreed that he read rather more into ancient liturgies than was warranted.
46 *NB(97)34(Marriage) The Marriage Service Draft II* (Liturgical Commission 1991) p 3

Marriage and Funerals.[47] Moreover, some of the services have been shaped like the Communion Service. This is most noticeable with Baptism where the focal point of the service now appears to be the Prayer over the Water, which has the same shape as the Eucharistic Prayers. After the first revision stage this even had its own overt epiclesis (calling down of the Holy Spirit) with the words 'now sanctify this water by the power of your Holy Spirit, that your children may be cleansed from sin and born again'.[48] This makes the sanctified water the agent of new birth. Under protest this was changed to read 'now sanctify[49] this water that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, they may be cleansed from sin and born again'.[50] This is better, but the prayer still appears to be structured to contain an epiclesis and to be the focus of the service. As with the Holy Communion Service this is very different to the *BCP* where the focus is on the moment the candidate is baptized or the communicant receives. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that *Common Worship* endorses the view that God works to physically transform the water, bread or wine. According to the Liturgical Commission 'the way we are used to in the West is a prayer that God, or perhaps the Holy Spirit, will make the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ'.[51]

A further issue of key importance historically has been that of 'offering'. Is there an offering or sacrifice taking place in the Communion service? The *BCP* puts the focus clearly on our offering ourselves, praise and thanksgiving as a post-communion response to God's grace. There is pressure to adopt a more fulsome language of offering:

> One of the values of the word 'offer' is that it reminds us that worship is going upward to God. It is not just a way of securing something from God... we are involved in offering him worship – or, in some words used elsewhere, we are involved in entering into the movement of Christ's self-offering of himself to the Father.[52]

To avoid the language of offering the *ASB* used phrases such as 'we *bring* before you this bread and this cup' and the bread and wine are 'these *your*

47 In his 1552 service Thomas Cranmer removed Holy Communion from the Funeral service to stop people treating it as a requiem mass.

48 *GS 1152A Initiation Services As revised in Committee October 1996* (General Synod 1996) p 8

49 'Sanctify' in this context, as in Scripture and the *Book of Common Prayer*, refers to a setting apart for holy use. It does not imply a change of substance, that is, the water does not become holy water able to bring new life *ex opere operato*.

50 *GS 1152B Initiation Services As revised at a second Committee stage May 1997* (General Synod 1997) p 8

51 *GS Misc 512 Eucharistic Prayer* (General Synod 1997) p 10

52 *GS Misc 512 Eucharistic Prayer* p 15

gifts'.[53] In *Common Worship*, at the preparation of the table[54] and in draft Eucharistic Prayer E this has moved on to 'we *set* before you' and in Eucharistic Prayer B to 'these gifts'.[55] The Liturgical Commission does not appear to be preserving a delicate balance, rather they are gently pushing away from the Reformed position.

Within Rite A Holy Communion in the *ASB* there exists an option of a service 'following the pattern of the *Book of Common Prayer*'. Although this is lacking in many respects and does not follow the *BCP* as closely as many would like, it has been much appreciated in those parishes which wanted modern language liturgy but could not in conscience use Rite A. It was surprising therefore that the Liturgical Commission made no attempt to provide for these parishes when bringing forward new services of Holy Communion. After protest, and in the wake of the failure of the six additional Eucharistic Prayers, a separate service is under consideration and is currently called *Rite 2 in Contemporary Language*. This will follow very closely the order of the Prayer Book, but the language presents a problem. Those texts which are also found in Rite 1, such as the Nicene Creed, will follow the same (modified ELLC) texts. For other texts, such as the confession, there is a dilemma. A modest update of a *BCP* text will be stylistically inconsistent with Rite 1 texts, but any more thorough update inevitably sounds anaemic compared to the original. The alternative would be to produce new texts with the same theology, eloquence and *gravitas* as the *BCP*, but the Revision Committee would not allow this:

> A modern language Communion order reflecting a Reformed theology which jettisoned the Prayer Book's phrasing could be provided. For Church of England people, however, the theological position represented by the 1552 order has been mediated through Cranmer's phrasing as well as by the order of the prayers in the rite. It has seemed to the majority in the Committee that any contemporary language order 'following the pattern of the Book of Common Prayer' will need to demonstrate a clear connection with Cranmer's phrasing to secure authorization as the contemporary vehicle for the Reformed tradition within the total spectrum of the Church of England doctrine and ecclesiology.[56]

This may simply mean that to avoid controversy over words, Rite 2 should

53 See 'Second Eucharistic Prayer' *Alternative Service Book 1980* (Clowes/SPCK/CUP 1980) pp 138-9

54 *GS 1211A The Eucharist* p 67

55 *Six Experimental Eucharistic Prayers in contemporary Language for use by selected Parishes designated under Canon B5A* (Liturgical Commission 1997)

56 *GS 1211Y Eucharistic Rites A and B in the Alternative Service Book: Report of the Revision Committee* (General Synod 1997) p 33

stick to those words which are found in the *BCP*, which are undeniably Anglican. But this means that Rite 2 is constrained in structure and language in a way that runs counter to the general tenor of revision. It is hard to avoid the implication that Reformed theology is permissible in the Church of England today only if it expresses itself in the language of the past.

Conclusion

Compared to what might have happened the present revision is very modest. There is a concern to create a common core for services whilst allowing diversity in local use. Inclusive language has been widely introduced but has stopped a long way short of where it may yet go. The language is contemporary not just in style but also in partially reflecting postmodern concerns about mood and effect. The theological changes represent a general drift away from the Reformation.

As was the case when the *ASB* was introduced, those who find these changes unacceptable have three main options:

• Firstly, to stick to, or revert to the *BCP*. Where this has remained a major part of the liturgical diet this is a viable and sensible response. In churches where modern language liturgy has been used almost exclusively for twenty or thirty years it is not a realistic option.
• Secondly, to seek to achieve reform within the structures, exerting whatever influence is possible via the process of the General Synod. There are gains to be made but when compared to the losses it is small wonder that many are sceptical as to the wisdom of this approach.
• Thirdly therefore, many have abandoned and will abandon the official liturgy, either by significantly altering it, or using unofficial texts such as *An English Prayer Book*, or by dispensing with written liturgy altogether. The dangers are of doctrinal imbalance and of liturgy that is idiosyncratic and often lightweight in terms of poetry, eloquence and memorability. Moreover this 'not in my backyard' approach abandons much of the rest of the Church to unreformed liturgy.

There is a need for a fresh reformation of the doctrine and consequent liturgy of the Church of England. Whether this is achieved within or without the structures, the goals are clear; the liturgy must be doctrinally Reformed and also linguistically eloquent, for it is liturgy to be used in the worship of the God of heaven.

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