

COMMON ORDER

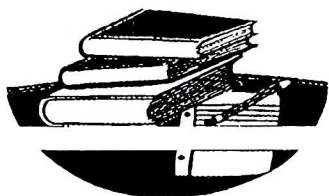
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To review a book of material for worship hard on the heels of its publication is an upstart thing to do. It is like commenting on a piece of new music after reading it on the page and before hearing it performed. A proper assessment of Common Order will be possible only after the material in it, or some of it at least, has been heard in the context of worship and ideally also used in worship by the reviewer.

*Bright is the ring of words
When the right man rings them*

wrote Robert Louis Stevenson. Many a ring of words may acquire luminosity when a man or a woman or a congregation is right with God, worshipping in spirit and in truth, caught up in the action of worship where heaven and earth intersect, where the action of persons and the action of God interpenetrate. Or else because of the moment or because of the circumstances words may suddenly ring true with a strange cogency or urgency.



For some of us, of course, the abandonment of traditional prayer-language makes us nervous. In *Common Order* that abandonment appears to be complete. This is regrettable. A salute to the traditional could easily have been made, as has been done by the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England, who have laid

commendable stress on the unique linguistic beauty of the *Book of Common Prayer* and urged liturgists to treat the traditional service as a precious religious

inheritance which, they say, should still be at the heart of Anglican worship. The "translation" of traditional prayers into modern speech is not always happy. As is well known, traditional prayers make frequent use of a relative clause after the invocation of the divine name and before supplication. Making these relative clauses into principal clauses and then adding supplication alters the balance completely. The invocation of the divine name belongs properly to the supplication. The principal clause, complete with full stop, is an intrusion, whereas the relative clause, a subordinate clause, often little more than adjectival in effect, in its incompleteness carries the thought forward (and the voice forward) in expectation of completion. These translations are not now traditional prayers: the tradition is gone. These are a planned alternative and, if the inherited through-patterns are to be used, more imagination is called for in sentence construction. The Collects for the Day provided at the end of the book, mostly prepared by the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Canada (as we learn from the Acknowledgements) are on the whole successful however.

Before passing to other aspects of the question of language a comment must be made on a passage in the Introduction to *Common Order*. In the first full paragraph on p.xix Charles Robertson tells us that the *you* and not the *thou* form is used for addressing God. There follows some strange logic: "an inevitable consequence of this was that a real attempt had to be made to ensure that all the language is simple, fresh, and relevant, and that it is not too doctrinal in tone or unreal in expression". One must suppose that *thou* and *you* are shorthand here for prayer in traditional language and prayer in modern speech. The next sentence could be construed to mean that traditional prayers had all the merits he mentions and therefore effort had to be made to reproduce these merits in modern prayers. I suspect that that is now what was meant in which case it is hard to avoid the implication that none of these merits is found in traditional prayers or in prayers written in traditional style or language. I am sure that sentence could have been more happily phrased!

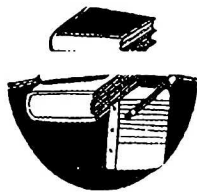
In fact, with or without the impulse of doubtful logic, it is clear that a real attempt has been made to use language that is simple. Inevitably in such a mass of worship-material as is found in *Common Order* the simple expression will not always manage to avoid being pedestrian or even banal. In my view this happens only infrequently in this book and then mostly in passages based on modern translations of Scripture. The criticism is therefore of the latter rather than of the authors and compilers of the prayer material.

The language is simple in the main and only occasionally is the meaning elusive. In the Order for the Blessing of a Civil Marriage, for example, it is not clear what

the Declaration (10) is saying: "A..... and B..... you are husband and wife according to the witness of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church". Does this mean that their marriage has acquired a new status? Is the implication that this is a new kind of marriage? But, as the Panel on Doctrine emphasised and the General Assembly accepted, marriage is a gift of God. The couple's civil marriage was a gift of God. What they asked for was a blessing. What they can be promised is all the enhancement that Christianity can bring to this relationship and the model of Christ's love can inspire in their love for one another. The report of the Panel on Doctrine says at one point: "we do not wish to endorse a two-tier theology of marriage".

Without doubt freshness of language is also achieved in this book, not least in those passages where the Celtic influence is represented. The danger with "Celtic" phraseology is that it will occasionally verge on the whimsical but that is a risk worth taking. Sometimes the freshness of language in this book takes one's breath away. The word "vulnerable" for example, is a fashionable word and used of Christ in the desert (p.433) it is telling: used as an adjective in addressing God, used cold as it were in a General Collect (p.517) it is too fresh, attracting too much attention to itself and distracting from what follows. In Easter prayers on p441 the first item of an original selection of things in our lives that should rightly die is "redundant relationships". Presumably this means sinful relationships since we are made for relationship. "Redundant" is therefore a euphemism, fresh perhaps but maybe only curious.

There is, however, in this book a missed opportunity of achieving freshness of language in prayer especially in confession of sin and intercession. I refer to the paucity of models of bidding prayers. In fact it appears that only the Third Evening Service ventures to offer such models, but even these are too literary. What is required is a sequence of brief allusions to personal and current social sins and in intercessions to the subject-matter of the week's newspapers and news programmes among other things, and since this is not so easy in a book that is to wear for many years it should be recommended in rubrics. Because the biddings are addressed to the people it is possible to use the



language of the media and to make specific references without inhibition, in bold contrast indeed to the more reverent language of prayer addressed to God.

The compilers of *Common Order*, lacking the courage of the compilers of the *Book of Common Order* 1979, or avoiding their foolhardiness, have not opted for any one order of worship for a morning service where Holy Communion is not

celebrated but it will please many in the Society to note that pride of place is given to the eucharistic pattern, in which the reading and preaching of the Word (what Von Allmen calls the "Galilean" part) leads to the climax of the service in intercession and thanksgiving and other elements proper to the "Jerusalem" phrase, including the Lord's Prayer. It is perhaps regrettable, however, that this fine first service in the book should begin its first prayer (p12:5) with a section of the anaphora of *Addai and Mari* and should make the prayer of adoration so rich and so doxologically expansive as to denude the later prayer of thanksgiving of its glory and its climactic pre-eminence. The introduction of the word "Adoration" into the 1940 *Book of Common Order* was unfortunate and the perpetuation of it in one section of the 1979 book equally so. Elsewhere the heading was Prayer of Approach. Happily this word is used in other models in *Common Order*. Happily, also, briefer prayers of adoration are also offered for the opening position, as are prayers of invocation.

A rubric in the Service of Confirmation in the 1979 book, stating, "Here the Holy Communion may be celebrated", provided the possibility of enormous liturgical enrichment for the Church of Scotland, because thus modestly and inauspiciously was recovered the original unitary character of Christian Initiation - baptism, confirmation and first communion in one service. It works! Sadly this rubric does not appear in *Common Order*. The same rubric might well have been included in the Order for the Ordination and Admission of Elders.

In *Common Order* there are admirable eucharistic prayers, rich in celebration of God in creation where the eucharistic prayers of earlier books have been shy. The most Gallican exuberance of the Second Order is particularly heart-warming. One could have wished that the work of the Holy Spirit had been celebrated, certainly in those anaphoras where Proper Prefaces are not used. The Fourth Order almost manages it. The substance of the Proper Preface for Pentecost (p.188) belongs in all anaphoras. The Holy Spirit should not, in my view, be confined to epiclesis and supplication.

If there is a tendency to do less than justice to celebration of the Spirit there is perhaps a danger of overloading the eucharistic prayer in (a) of the First Order with Christological material. Reference to Christ in the anaphora, in a proper preface and in an anamnesis on p.133 may be overdoing it. And if the Nicene Creed has previously been said, then some slimming down of this eucharistic prayer is surely necessary.

With the one aspect of these, for the most part noble orders, I take issue and that is the inclusion in all models of the narrative of the Institution as a separate item and

the absence of any suggestion that the words of institution can be included in the eucharistic prayer. The 1979 book made this clear in rubrics and actually put the Warrant into square brackets. That may not have been wise but it had good liturgical, theological and pastoral justification.

Liturgically an institution narrative in the thanksgiving section of eucharistic prayer goes back to the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*. The thanksgiving section had also a kerygmatic function. In the developed Roman canon the note of thanksgiving was eventually curtailed to include only the preface, and in the post-sanctus the note of thanksgiving was subsumed under supplication and the institution narrative became the moment of consecration, with unfortunate results. Calvin quite properly restored the proclamatory function of the institution narrative but at the cost of isolating it from the prayer of thanksgiving. And in the prayer of thanksgiving is surely where it belongs. The Second Order in the 1979 book seemed to me to recover the original notes of thanksgiving and proclamation in a wholly satisfactory manner.

Again, it has always seemed to me that Paul's words ending with "You proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" are theologically insufficient for the occasion. We proclaim also his risen life! The use of Paul's words at this point is also pastorally inept. The reference to death reinforces the gloom which has so often enshrouded Scottish Communion and which we are now at pains to dispel.

Common Order is a piece of liturgical work with which to engage seriously and if there are details with which to find fault there is also a very great deal of substance to admire. The provision of material is so generous. This book ought to be an enormous help to ministers and parts of it to congregations. It has a good appearance; the layout of material on the page is pleasing; the rubrics are clear. All in all this is a worthy piece of work. The Society will surely accord it a warm welcome and thank God for it.

