

LITURGICAL PLURALISM IN A MIXED-ECONOMY CHURCH: CHALLENGES FACING THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

*Address to the Church Service Society on 26th May 2011
in Greyfriars' Kirk, Edinburgh*

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1. Comparing 1961 and 2011

If we were able to go back in time – and walk into an English parish church at 11.00 on a Sunday morning in 1961 – most of us (even not being Anglicans) would get something of a shock.

What would the service have been like?

- It would probably have been non-Eucharistic (at least if the church was of 'low' or 'central' tradition) – Mattins from the *Book of Common Prayer* – Holy Communion would have been celebrated earlier, at 8.00.
- There would have been hymns (but not worship songs), and the Psalms and Canticles would have been sung by choir and congregation to Anglican Chant.
- The language, with the exception of the sermon, would have been that of the 16th and 17th centuries.
- The service would have been led, almost exclusively, by the (male) priest.
- The congregation would have sat to listen, stood to sing and knelt to pray, but always within the confines of their pews.

If we were then to move the clock forward to 2011, we would be struck by the host of differences between the two acts of worship. And the most significant difference is that, if we were to turn up at a parish church at random, it would be virtually impossible to predict exactly what *would* be on the liturgical menu.

- There would be a strong probability that the main service on a Sunday morning would be Eucharistic (whatever the tradition of the church)

- and that the service would be in contemporary language,

but other than that the possibilities of variety would be considerable.

- It might be an all-age service.
- It might involve the use of projected images and movement around the building.
- It is quite likely that the music would encompass a range of styles and could be led by an informal group of singers and instrumentalists, or by a robed choir, or there might even not be any music at all.
- Those involved in leading parts of the worship might be lay or ordained, male or female.

Within the Church of England (and the C of E is by no means unique) we now have immense variety in our worship, both between one church and the next and also *within* churches.

And so it is not so unusual to find a church where there might be a wide range of Sunday worship on offer, perhaps:

8.00	Holy Communion (BCP)
9.30	Parish Eucharist (<i>Common Worship</i> Order 1)
11.15	Parish Praise
6.00	Evening Prayer (<i>Common Worship</i>) / Evensong (BCP) / Taize Worship / Healing Service – depending on the Sunday of the month
8.00	(monthly) ‘The late service’

to say nothing of what might happen during the week, on or off-site as a ‘Fresh Expression.’

We have travelled a vast distance during the past fifty years, and the rate of change has been increasing all the time. In terms of our worship, we have become a self-consciously ‘mixed-economy’ church.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, has said ‘...there’s no one kind of church life that captures everything, that does every kind of job.’ [In an interview for BBC local radio, March 2008]

One of the most encouraging developments within the Church of England in recent years (across all traditions) is the increasing focus on mission, and a growing realization that there is a vital link between mission and worship. It’s a link that works two ways. On the one hand we need forms of worship which are sufficiently accessible to the de-churched and unchurched. On the other, we need engaging, transformative worship which holds, nurtures and challenges those who are growing in their faith.

We have realized that, where worship is concerned, ‘one size will not fit all’, and that to serve up a uniform diet is to fail to provide for people at different stages of their faith journey and with differing personality types and learning styles. A broad and diverse church needs variety.

2. The importance of liturgy for Anglicans

But why does liturgy – the form and content of worship – really matter (or should matter) for Anglicans?

Unlike some of our sister churches, we do not go in for confessional statements – either of the catholic or the reformed variety. We have the thirty-nine articles, but these are seen very much as a snapshot of where the C of E was in the mid 16th century – and as one of the ‘historic formularies’ which bear witness to a faith revealed in the scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds.

Instead, we have traditionally pointed to our worship as the place where Anglican doctrine may be found.

As Bishop David Stancliffe has said, ‘if you want to find out what Anglicans believe, worship with us, and you’ll find out.’

The deposit of liturgy cited as the *locus* of Anglican doctrine is the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) – now authorized in its 1662 form – and authorized by Parliament (not Synod) until the coming of our Lord!

There (in what is essentially a revision of the Elizabethan Prayer Book) we can see a clear concern to balance Catholic and Reformed emphases.

But all subsequent Anglican liturgy which has received synodical authorization is judged according to a standard set by the BCP. When a new piece of liturgy is considered – if it is alternative to something in the BCP – it is subject to the most rigorous debate and revision by the Synod and its committees.

So if, for Anglicans, our worship is the place where we do our theology and express our identity – how can we effectively provide liturgy for a diverse, mixed-economy church? It is a challenge, and one which we are still trying to work through.

Cranmer's vision was of a 'single use' for the whole of England – at a time when liturgical pluralism was rife. And despite the fact that Catholics and Evangelicals have interpreted and even manipulated that 'single use' to emphasise their own positions, by and large until about 1960, there was at least a single form of words which united the C of E in prayer. The BCP really was the Book of Common Prayer. But the world – and the church – has changed...

3. The advance of pluralism (1960-2000)

The fifty years from 1960 saw an immense amount of activity in the field of liturgical revision, both within the Church of England and ecumenically. From a time when the *Book of Common Prayer* was the only authorized text for Church of England worship, we have moved through successive waves of revised and new texts.

- The 1960s and 1970s brought us Alternative Services: Series 1, 2 and 3.
- Series 1 moved little beyond the changes of the proposed Prayer Book of 1928, but those in Series 2 and 3 broke significant new ground.
 - Services began to mirror developments in structure and text taking place in other Christian churches

- and (in Series 3) for the first time, contemporary language broke onto the liturgical scene: God, hitherto addressed as 'thou' became 'you.'

The Alternative Services led to the *Alternative Service Book 1980* (ASB), authorized initially until 1990 and then until 2000. This drew together the revisions of the previous two decades.

Then followed other resources for worship:

- *Ministry to the Sick* (1983)
- *Lent, Holy Week, Easter* (1986)
- *The Promise of His Glory* (1991) which introduced the joys of seasonal worship to parts of the church which had never previously experienced them.
- Further new material arrived in 1995 in the shape of *Patterns for Worship* (PFW), published shortly after newly-authorized provision in *A Service of the Word* (ASOTW).
- Highly significant in that it was the first liturgical text to be produced in 'directory' format: a series of structures and banks of resources with which to populate the structures.
- With the authorization of the ASB due to end at the Millennium, the wholesale revision of the Church of England's liturgy was now in full spate.

And we had now arrived at a situation where there was not only a culture of liturgical pluralism but also an officially sanctioned culture of liturgical pluralism.

PFW and ASOTW grew out of the desire to enable local congregations to plan and devise their own forms of service which, while adhering to Anglican structural principles and containing Anglican core texts, were essentially local.

4. Common Worship: A New Concept

So what of *Common Worship*? It is a vast collection of material.

The first volumes saw the light of day in 1997 – though the official date of

launch of the main volume was Advent 2000 – and the last text was published in February 2008. (And there have been further compilations since then.)

And there are moves towards some supplementary material

- Eucharistic prayers for use when a significant number of children is present
- Alternative baptism material

It is fair to say that, when the first volumes of CW appeared in 2000, not everyone realized the quantum shift that had taken place. Because, although there were similarities with what had gone before, CW was not simply a revision of older material.

There were those who, in 2000, declared ‘CW won’t affect us’ and went on to make their services as close to those in the ASB as they could! But they had totally missed the point.

CW enshrines a new concept for a new era. Whereas the ASB reads very much as a product of the modern age, CW is more a product of post-modernity. We can see this in a number of ways.

1 Multiple media

The first is that CW is much more than simply a library of books. The texts of CW are published in three ways, and in a variety of media:

1. in printed form
2. electronically, on the Church of England’s website: (www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/texts)
3. as part of the *Visual Liturgy* worship-planning software (www.vislit.com)

and, while the printed texts are widely used for reference, a great many people prefer the electronic versions for preparing service booklets and sheets or PowerPoint slides.

With the advent of *Common Worship*, many churches decided to move away

from having a 'service book' to using a series of locally-produced seasonal booklets for their worship. Some opted to create one-off sheets for each service, and others have gone down the 'paperless' road of projecting liturgical texts onto a screen. The fact is that we now inhabit a 'download, cut and paste' culture, in which choice, selection and the availability of a range of options are the norm.

2. Designed for a 'mixed-economy' church

The possibility of 'cutting and pasting' from within *Common Worship* means that it is a resource designed to serve a church in which worship flourishes across a range of traditions and in an ever-growing variety of situations. As the Preface to *Common Worship* puts it (CW:MV p ix), 'The services provided here are rich and varied. This reflects the multiplicity of contexts in which worship is offered today.'

Now given the rate of change in much of the church's worship, it is inevitable that many of the contexts in which worship is offered in 2011 were not necessarily envisaged in 2000. Developments such as the flourishing of Fresh Expressions has in some cases led to a robust dialogue between those who wish to push the frontiers of Anglican liturgical expression and those who wish to maintain the *status quo*.

Nevertheless, the intention of CW is that it should serve the 'mixed economy' Church which we inhabit – a church which balances Evangelical and Catholic insights, liberal and conservative emphases, and traditional and fresh expressions of church.

3. Something old, something new

Another important concept in CW comes out of the realization that we now inhabit a post-modern culture in which old and new exist side by side. The ASB was, by and large, a contemporary language 'alternative' to set alongside the traditional language of the BCP. This led to more than a degree of polarization. The formation of the Prayer Book Society in 1972 grew out of concerns that, in jumping on the bandwagon of liturgical progress, the church was in serious danger of leaving behind a body of liturgy which had nourished – and was still nourishing – generations of Anglicans.

In the run up to CW, the Liturgical Commission was anxious to engage with advocates of traditional language. This was reflected in the appointment of the novelist Baroness James of Holland Park, a Vice-President of the Prayer Book Society, as a member of the Commission from 1991. And when CW was produced, a conscious decision was taken that it should include ‘treasures both old and new’. There are two orders for Holy Communion, each of them in modern and traditional language, with one of those traditional options being essentially the text of the 1928 Prayer Book service. BCP Mattins and Evensong, and 1928 Compline are included, as are the Collects in traditional language. The 2nd edition of the *Pastoral Services* volume (2005) also includes the Series 1 (traditional language) Marriage and Burial services, both of which stand firmly in the BCP tradition.

But what is perhaps most significant is that in CW, no intentional wedge is driven between the old and the new. And so it is now quite possible to move between the two within the context of a single act of worship. This is not to deny the importance of liturgical linguistic integrity, but to recognize the variety of our culture and enable that to be expressed within our worship. The phrase ‘ancient-future worship’ was scarcely known in 2000 but CW in a sense anticipates a trend for worship in which the contemporary and the time-honoured sit cheek-by-jowl.

So *Common Worship* is quite different from what came before: with traditional and new material side by side, published in several forms, it is designed to serve the mixed-economy church of today.

But what would Cranmer have said?

To what extent does CW provide for Common Prayer in the C of E?

5. Common Prayer?

As I have already said, Cranmer’s aim was to provide a single liturgical use for the whole of England. And so Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer* was able – largely through the technological advancements of the time (William Caxton’s printing press of 1476) – to bring about a culture of ‘common prayer’ throughout the whole church, despite party differences within the church.

The BCP is a book of services, which reads continuously and – apart from a very few options (e.g. a choice from two post communion prayers, selections of Scripture sentences and a handful of Proper Prefaces) – without variation. It is possible to pick up a BCP, start at the beginning of a service and read it to the end.

Despite having been written four centuries later, the ASB was not a million miles culturally from the world of the BCP. The language was (largely) modern, and some variation was permitted (e.g. in the provision of a range of Eucharistic Prayers and some seasonal texts) but it was still a book in which the services read continuously.

(Many Anglicans will remember all too well that Holy Communion Rite A began on page 119 of the ASB!)

This perpetuated a sense of ‘common prayer’ through the text of the service: the same words being prayed in churches across the land.

The run up to CW saw changes in the understanding of ‘common prayer’ in the Church of England. A crucial publication was *The Renewal of Common Prayer: Unity and Diversity in Church of England worship* (CHP / SPCK, 1993). In this collection of essays, members of the Liturgical Commission discussed what ‘common prayer’ might mean in the light of growing freedom and variety in worship. In particular, the writers argued a rationale for a common prayer rooted less in liturgical text than in liturgical structure.

Michael Vasey wrote, ‘It has been an important insight of modern liturgical study that it is shape rather than particular texts that provide the common core, the ‘deep structure’, of the major acts of Christian worship’ [ibid, 90]. The authorization by the General Synod in 1993 of *A Service of the Word* gave a clear signal that it was in this direction that the future of common prayer was to lie.

And so, in CW, it is, above all, *structure* which acts as the unifying factor across the entire range of material, together with the common use of certain key texts.

This structure is basically fourfold and is designed to take us on a journey. It reinforces the important point that through taking part in worship we are changed: as we gather, engage with God, respond to him, and are sent to live as his people in the world. With repetition, this structure can become embedded in the psyche and can become a powerful formative influence on the lives of Christians.

Although the titles of the structural blocks vary slightly from service to service, the general pattern throughout the whole of CW is as follows:

- ¶ **We gather....**
.... as the people of God and prepare to meet with him
- ¶ **We hear God's word....**
.... through the reading of the Scriptures
- ¶ **We respond....**
.... to that engagement through some kind of action, e.g.
 - sharing in a celebration of the Eucharist
 - baptizing
 - commending a dead person
 - praying
 - marrying
 - ordaining
- ¶ **We are sent out....**
.... to live the Gospel as changed people

This fourfold structure reflects two basic underlying theological concepts, that, in Christ,

- God shares our life (the doctrine of incarnation)
- and transforms it (the doctrine of redemption)

And so, by taking part in worship with this structure – in journeying through the structure – the potential is there for us to be formed into a particular understanding of how God interacts with us.

It is structure which provides the basis of common prayer within CW.

And within that structure, CW adopts the principle that flexibility within the framework is to be encouraged.

But does common prayer really matter? It could be argued that it is an idea which has had its day and no longer has any place within the brave new world of a mixed-economy, post-modern church? Traditionally, Anglicans believe that common prayer *does* matter, and is vitally important, for two reasons.

- The first is that it is through our worship that we have traditionally done our theology and expressed our identity
- The second is that, although the local church is a crucial part of our life, we are also part of something much bigger. A sense of common prayer reinforces our belief as Anglicans in the catholicity of the church: that the local is a part of, and relates to, the whole. The fourfold structure which undergirds *Common Worship* is a feature which is common to virtually all revised liturgies of the mainstream churches.

In recent years, some local churches within the Church of England have chosen to distance themselves from this structural pattern, and have followed what has in many places become a new standard form of 'praise, preaching and prayer ministry'. In so doing, they are in danger of losing touch not only with their ecclesial roots, but also with the essential theological premises which underpin the structure. There is also the potential risk that, without continual reference to the essential elements of the structure of worship, some important elements might be lacking.

[A colleague of mine on sabbatical visited a large Anglican church in London where, at the main Sunday service, although there was preaching and prayer ministry, no intercessory prayer was offered for the world beyond the church, and the only reading from Scripture was of a single verse from the Old Testament.]

6. The Church of England Today – Patterns of Worship

So what is the C of E like today in terms of its worshipping patterns?

On the whole, traditions of worship relate closely to theological stances. The following is an over-generalisation but, moving from one end of the spectrum (as it were) to the other:

- Traditional Catholic
 - Some might use The English Missal
 - More would use the modern Roman Rite
 - Neither is legal!
- Affirming (Liberal) Catholic
 - Most would use CW HC Order 1 with catholic ceremonial
 - AAW (Eucharistic)
- Central
 - Mostly HC Order 1 with less ceremonial (sung)
 - AAW
- 'Low-church'
 - Mixture of HC Order 1 / Morning Prayer (cong settings / said)
 - BCP Mattins
- Open Evangelical
 - New Wine style (Praise – Preaching – Prayer Ministry)
 - HC Order 1 (said) with songs
- Conservative Evangelical
 - Morning Prayer
 - HC Order 2 / BCP

7. The Challenge of Fresh Expressions

The Fresh Expressions initiative grew out of the Report *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004). It encourages the setting up of Fresh Expressions of Church in parallel to existing parish structures.

Some are offshoots of what a parish might already be doing (e.g. planted congregation on a housing estate / in a school). Others are new, non-parochial ventures. Examples include:

- After-school clubs with worship
- Sunday papers
- Cafe church

- Ancient-Future worship (where the old and new are blended)

Fresh Expressions exist across the theological spectrum – but most have been set up by open Evangelicals and Affirming Catholics.

There is huge liturgical variety. Some (e.g. the collaborative venture *Transcendence* at York Minster) are liturgically legal, others less so! Not all worship on Sundays and many take no notice of the seasons of the Christian year. Some are self-conscious in their aim to effect liturgical formation but many bear no relation to the inherited structures or core texts of Anglicanism.

‘Fresh Expressions of Church’ offer a distinctive challenge to the liturgical status quo. Often ‘on the edges’ of traditional parish structures, these initiatives find themselves in situations in which the perceived needs of worshippers might be seen to be at variance with the official liturgical provision.

Maintaining a balance between effective mission on one hand and faithfulness to the inherited Anglican understanding of worship on the other is proving challenging in some places.

An Appendix to the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 sets out the essential ‘bottom line’ but it is clear that this issue will continue to raise its head well into the future.

Speaking in 2005, The Rev Dr (now Bishop) Steve Croft suggested that common prayer in terms of common texts had given way to common structures, but that this would in turn give way to ‘common values’. This raises the question as to what exactly are ‘Anglican values’ (the Scriptures, the Sacraments...?)

In addition, given the high degree of liturgical flexibility in many Fresh Expressions, it would seem important that pioneer ministers and others involved in their leadership should be exceptionally well-grounded in good liturgical principles, if the worship that emerges is to be genuinely both fresh and Anglican.

8. Formation and Training

The biggest challenge that all this presents is one of formation.

If we believe that worship is one of the biggest single formative influences on people's growth in faith, then it follows that we should invest the liturgical formation of all God's people with far more energy than we do.

And if the liturgical formation of the whole people of God is to be effectively carried out, then the liturgical formation of ministers is absolutely crucial.

The facts that we have moved to a culture of liturgical pluralism, and from a 'book' culture to a 'download, cut and paste' culture have significant implications for liturgical training. No longer is it sufficient for training to consist of a course of liturgical history together with the imparting of a bank of skills in delivering a limited range of fixed services.

Would-be worship leaders (lay and ordained) are in need of a solid grounding in the liturgical principles of structure and flow, based on an understanding of worship as a transformative process. There is greater need for a clear understanding of the times and seasons of the Christian Year, and of the interplay of Scripture, liturgy and theology. The move away from theme-based lectionaries to a greater proportion of *lectio continua* throughout the year necessitates a more systematic approach to the role of the Bible in worship. Ministers need to be equipped to make intelligent choices, to develop the practice of thinking liturgically and, in a 'mixed-economy' church, to engage in practical learning across a range of contexts and traditions.

All this throws up an immense challenge for the liturgical formation of the current and future generations of ordained and licensed ministers – to say nothing of those already in ministry who were brought up on older, more fixed, models of liturgical practice. The challenge stretches across both periods of Initial Ministerial Education (IME): 1-3 (the years of training at college, or on a course or scheme) and 4-7 (the years immediately following ordination or licensing), and beyond into the years of Continuing Ministerial Education (CME) and Development.

And this at a time when the C of E's liturgical training at Colleges, Courses and Schemes is at a lamentably low ebb.

Fewer than half of the residential theological colleges in England now employ a specialist tutor of liturgy and worship. Those who do experience the benefit of having a staff member who not only teaches the subject but is also a core member of the college's worshipping community, thus embodying the link between liturgical teaching and practical experience of worship.

For the growing proportion of those who train for ministry on non-residential courses and schemes, the likelihood of their receiving any sustained input on the principles and practice of liturgy is not great. Here, time constraints are a major problem, with tutors forced to condense teaching into an impossibly tight time-frame.

The result of this situation – which is not new but which has been steadily worsening over the past two decades – is that fewer newly-ordained or licensed ministers have a clear understanding of liturgical principles or an awareness of what resources exist. Many of those in training or new to public ministry are simply unaware of the contents and scope of CW, and even still less how to use it.

Most are aware only of their own tradition – the tradition from which they came and which has nurtured them – and have little experience of anything beyond it.

Some are ordained as pioneer ministers – perhaps within *Fresh Expressions* and sit very lightly to the official liturgical provision of the Church. The problem is that they have no norms from which to depart.

9. Conclusions

We are in a place which is

- Complex
- Confusing
- Exciting
- Challenging

One which we could not have imagined even 25, far less 50, years ago.

The C of E has always expressed its unity and identity through its worship, with

a clear sense of Common Prayer. Some would say that this has already gone: CW provides a norm of common structure, but this is already being challenged / ignored.

The key lies, I believe, in affirming the truth that, through worship, God can change lives.

And that this means that we should invest our worship with the best in every area and across all traditions; but also that we would strive to form our people as worshippers – talk about what we do, and why we do it.

Of course, we can't do that if our ministers have never been formed.