

Myth or Reality? An Introduction to Common Prayer

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When I was growing up in the Episcopal Church in Colorado during the decades of the 1950s, the 1960s, and the 1970s, I knew that I was part of a global family that spoke a common language. This common language linked us spiritually, spatially, and temporally. Our dictionary, our grammar, our thesaurus had but one name: *The Book of Common Prayer*. Wherever the Anglican tradition went, the Prayer Book followed.

Then I grew up and went to seminary. There I lost my “first” naïveté and learned that the myth of *The Book of Common Prayer* that had shaped my childhood and adolescence was just that: a mythical narrative that created an identity which was both true and untrue, a narrative that did not always bear up under closer scrutiny.

To be sure there was, and continues to be, a recognizable liturgical and spiritual tradition that bears the name “Anglican” and that shares a common practice of producing liturgical books that bear the name *The Book of Common Prayer* or something similar. But that tradition, despite its shared characteristics, also had real and significant differences that went beyond how we spelled the words.

We are living in the midst of what some commentators call the “third” liturgical movement. The “first” liturgical movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century helped us recover a “usable” past. The “second” liturgical movement of the postwar period took that past and developed rites that reenergized our communities and connected us to traditions and practices that predated the conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The “third” liturgical

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movement must now engage the implications of culture and provide leadership in shaping an Anglican approach to worship which addresses both the virtues and the vices of our times and societies in our own idiom. Some have called this putting old wine into new skins.

For that reason the editorial leadership of the *Anglican Theological Review* made a decision more than two years ago to devote this issue to the question, "What is common about common prayer?" These ten essays written from a variety of perspectives should provide grist for the mills of our Communion-wide exploration of the meaning of Anglican identity and how our worship contributes to shaping that identity. We do not imagine that this issue will be the last word on the question of Anglican identity and how that identity is expressed in worship. But we do intend to contribute to the conversation that goes on every week in Anglican congregations throughout the world when they gather to proclaim the Word and break the bread. Despite the temptation to institutionalize the *via media* that has shaped us as a Christian tradition, that "middle way" still has much to contribute in a world where extremisms of the left and the right, of the secular and the religious, threaten "this fragile earth, our island home."

The Lead Articles

The first lead essay explores the practice and theology of Christian initiation in the Anglican Communion. **John Hill** and **Rowena Roppelt** suggest to us that the waters of baptism are stormy ones and that the sacrament of unity might be more divisive than we think. Hill and Roppelt identify some key tasks in what they call "a post-Christendom quest for 'common baptism'": a recovery of the paschal and vocational meaning of initiation, a restored sense of the dignity of adult baptism, a recovery of catechumenal formation as a normal element of initiation, a restored sense of the conversion of life enacted in baptism, and a practice of confirmation that does not separate baptism from initiation.

Hill and Roppelt believe that the quest for a common baptism will find in the recommendations of the 1991 International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC) a roadmap to guide the journey. These seven recommendations describe the characteristics of a post-Christendom approach to Christian initiation in the Anglican Communion. With these recommendations in mind, Hill and Roppelt

briefly examine the most recent baptismal rites of five provinces of the Communion: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and England. It is perhaps little surprise that they determine that the quest for a common baptism is very much a work in progress.

A consequence of the second liturgical movement was the restoration of the eucharist as the normative Sunday celebration in many Anglican congregations throughout the world. This development has brought with it a number of other questions, such as the admission of baptized infants and children to the eucharistic meal, and debates over whether non-baptized persons should be admitted to the table as well.

Ron Dowling's article on the eucharist begins by summarizing the historical development of the eucharistic liturgies of the Anglican Communion and then focuses on a key nexus in the liturgical discussions of the Communion: the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC). Dowling points to the important work of the Dublin consultation (1995) and its assertion that Anglican unity will find liturgical expression in a common approach and structure to eucharistic celebration. This assertion has proven to be true, as more and more Anglican provinces adopt a fivefold structure (gathering, proclamation, prayer, communion, sending forth) for their eucharistic liturgies.

Dowling makes two further observations of particular importance. The first is that Anglicans continue to exhibit diversity in the structure and thematic content of their eucharistic prayers, either following the 1662 pattern with its emphasis on the words of institution or the more trinitarian approach that focuses on "consecration by thanksgiving." His second observation asks the question of the impact of technology on eucharistic praying. What are the implications of living in a culture where real liturgical authority lies in the hands of "the one who controls the computer"?

From the eucharist we turn to the daily office. **Paul Bradshaw**, a well-known scholar of the office, provides an excellent summary of the development of the daily office in the Anglican tradition. Bradshaw points out that Anglican revisions of the office have tended to be based on a principle that the orderly recitation of the whole Psalter and a systematic reading of the Bible is fundamental to the office.

However, this principle can be challenged in the light of recent research into the development of the office. Early Christians based their daily prayer on praise on behalf of all creation and intercession

for the salvation of the world. Recent revisions of the office have begun to take this other dimension of daily prayer into account, but there is much that still can be done.

Practicing Theology Essays

The three lead essays are complemented by seven essays written from the experience of common prayer in particular contexts: Canada, England, Japan, and the United States. While several are written from the perspective of specific congregational contexts, others offer observations on common prayer in the Anglican tradition as that tradition has been inculturated in specific national and cultural contexts, as well as Communion-wide.

As noted by Dowling above, the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC) emerged in the late 1980s and has become a nexus where Anglican liturgists can meet to discuss and develop principles that describe what is common about Anglican common prayer. **Eileen Scully**, the Director of Faith, Worship, and Ministry of the Anglican Church of Canada and Chair of the Consultation, offers her personal perspective on the work of the Consultation and its role in the ongoing work of liturgical revision. She notes how the Consultation has evolved from an informal gathering of mostly academically-based Anglican members of *Societas Liturgica* to a more structured consultative body of academics, practitioners, and provincial representatives relating to the Anglican Consultative Council.

Although the Consultation has published a number of important statements, there is still work to be done and challenges to be met. Among the challenges are the continued dominance of English in a multilingual Communion, the debate as to whether liturgy is *theologia prima* or *theologia secunda*, the reality of liturgy as a point of conflict within a conflicted Communion, and the question of how the work of the Consultation can filter into the liturgical life of the provinces of the Communion.

Priscilla White, a presbyter of the Church of England, begins her essay with a description of a particular deanery within one diocese of the Church of England. Its diversity within a relatively small geographic area points to the challenges of common prayer in the twenty-first century. White suggests that the prevailing liturgical environment of the Church of England has shifted from the more uniformative principles of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* into the more flexible

character of *Common Worship* (2000). She points out the use of the term “authorized” in *Common Worship* to indicate texts where flexibility is limited to particular alternative texts (affirmations of faith, confessions, absolutions, eucharistic prayers, and words of administration) and the term “suitable” to indicate liturgical elements where liturgical planners have greater freedom to select texts from sources other than *Common Worship* or to compose new texts.

White echoes Ron Dowling regarding the influence of digital technology in contemporary liturgical performance. For her, the Anglican ethos is shaped less by text than by liturgical form, setting, and leadership. She writes, “The true commonality of worship comes in discovering a God with an open door whose welcome is for all.”

Two essays come from writers whose ministries are centered in the Episcopal Church in the United States. **Sylvia Sweeney** is Dean and President of Bloy House in the Diocese of Los Angeles. She describes the significant cultural, social, and political change that has occurred in the almost forty years since the authorization of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. She draws on Anscar Chupungco’s observation that the gift of the first liturgical movement was the restoration of the deep structures of Christian worship. The second movement, Chupungco suggests, is the contextual enrichment of those deep structures.

Sweeney believes that the contextual enrichment of those deep structures requires the development of (i) culturally-conscious expansive language for the divine and the human; (ii) ecologically-conscious liturgical language; and (iii) cultural responsiveness in liturgical design. She argues there is a need for the Communion to develop a liturgical equivalent of the Lambeth Quadrilateral to guide us in this second stage.

From Saint Paul’s Chapel in New York City come the voices of **Marilyn Haskell**, **Jacob Slichter**, and **Clay Morris**. Amid the devastation of the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, Saint Paul’s became a haven of prayer and has remained a continuing place of pilgrimage as people visit the site of the tragedy. Consequently, the 10:00 a.m. eucharist at Saint Paul’s often has as many visitors as congregants. This has led the liturgical team of Haskell, Slichter, and Morris to develop a series of principles to guide their liturgical interpretation of the Anglican tradition: (i) create a liturgy reflective of the Anglican tradition that is sensitive to other traditions; (ii) extend hospitality in all aspects of worship; (iii) engage

the congregants and the visitors in face-to-face and tactile interactions throughout the liturgy; (iv) allow authority to flow between the liturgical leaders; and (v) observe and listen to the experience of all worshippers.

These principles have led the team to consider the importance of the liturgical environment, liturgical materials which are easy to navigate, a liturgy that involves the congregation in liturgical movement, and “music that makes community.” The authors note that gathering as a community can lead to an experience that has the potential to create belonging.

During the twentieth century Canada has emerged as what some call a middle power, welcome at the table of the greater powers such as the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union, yet conscious of its connections with so-called developing states. What is true politically is also true liturgically. In my own contribution to the Practicing Theology section of this issue, I have tried to describe what I consider to be common principles emerging from Cranmer’s work on the first prayer books and how these principles have been embodied in the development of Anglican liturgy in Canada.

In my conclusion I point out what I believe to be the ongoing challenges for Anglican liturgy in Canada in the early twenty-first century. Among these I name the risk that digital technology can lead to a new form of “clericalism” and the need for genuine inculturation among the First Nations and other cultural communities.

In light of these concerns, I am therefore very happy that we have been able to include two essays from **Paul Sneve** and **Shintaro Ichihara**. Sneve is a presbyter of the Diocese of South Dakota who has been working for a number of years on the inculturation of worship among the Lakota people. At the heart of his thesis is the old saying that “all translation is a lie.” Genuine inculturation cannot be based upon a translation into Lakota of English theological and liturgical perspectives, but rather the development of a Lakota theological and liturgical reflection on the good news of God in Christ. Sneve points to the understanding of time in Lakota culture, an understanding more akin to *kairos* (“the right time”) than *chronos* (“measured time”). This temporal thinking leads to a cultural environment of the eternal present where physical and spiritual matters are concomitant.

In a similar vein Shintaro Ichihara, a presbyter in the Diocese of Tokyo of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai, explores the concept of *aimai*

(“ambiguity”) as it has an impact on being Christian in a society in which Western cultural and technical elements have been interpolated but not integrated into the fabric of a traditional Asian society and culture. In such a society the catechumenate takes on new meaning due to the fact that adult baptism is the norm rather than the exception. The latest Japanese Anglican prayer book represents a shift from an individual and penitential perspective on Christian life to one of thanksgiving and mission in the context of a baptismal ecclesiology.

So, whether you receive this issue while you are on holiday or hard at work, read it and read it through. Perhaps some of the content will be familiar and some will not. But one thing is certain: the conversation about what is common about Anglican common prayer has not ended, nor will it end until we all gather at the table in God’s promised reign of justice and peace.



As this issue was going to print, we learned the sad news that the Rev. Dr. Ron Dowling had died unexpectedly. Dr. Dowling was a passionate advocate for the people of God and their vocation as agents of God’s redemptive love. His colleagues will mourn the death of a insightful scholar, a wise presider and a proud Australian. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

