

Future Directions in Liturgical Development

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In 1969 Massey Shepherd wrote in an article titled, “The Dimension of Liturgical Change”:

Our inherited liturgies miss so many of the concrete daily concerns of our material existence, with its hope and its fears. It is not an easy task to rewrite them or to compose them afresh. Our vision of hope outstrips our capacity to articulate it. Such new liturgies will need the vast contextual grandeur of God’s loving purpose and the abyss of man’s frustration born of his finitude and selfishness—pointedly given reference to his concerns with hunger and poverty, work and leisure, war and peace, shelter and open space, ambition and contentment, friendship and love, and a meaningful, purposeful, and abundant life.¹

Almost forty years have now passed since the introduction of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. In that time we have seen the collapse of the Soviet empire and the rise of the “non-religious” as the fastest growing religious group in the United States. The nearly irrefutable results of climate change have painted a future landscape potentially fraught with danger, destruction, and desolation. We have witnessed the rise of a cultural and technological renaissance that has literally reconfigured the nature of the human mind and has reframed all that is meant by the word “communication.” Through economic, cultural, and technological globalization the world has grown much smaller, and we have all grown much more conscious of the butterfly effect and how it is that prayers said or actions taken in Mozambique or Sri Lanka, Mali, or Algeria may concretely impact the lives of Anglicans across the globe. We now know we live in a global community, and the great majority of human beings on the planet live in an age when

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¹ Massey Shepherd, “The Dimension of Liturgical Change,” *Anglican Theological Review* 51, no. 4 (October 1969): 249.

that swirling blue marble of beauty and life we have come to know as Planet Earth is a visual image of home that has shaped our spiritual identities since birth.

Massey Shepherd wrote about the difficult task of composing prayers and rites for one's own day and that difficulty is as real for us today as it was for late-twentieth-century liturgical designers. We design new rites, engage in liturgical development if you will, not to thumb our noses at our predecessors or because we want to be seen as avant-garde and trendy by outsiders to the church, but because we believe, as all liturgical reformers before us have believed, that worship is a shared communal activity done most profoundly through the "fully conscious, and active participation"² of all its participants. When we renew the liturgy, it is to make the deep riches of our heritage clearer, more accessible, and more apprehendable to all members of the faith community and those who might seek to join us.

Anscar Chupungco wrote in *Liturgies of the Future* about this necessary perpetual process of liturgical development, outlining what he believed to be the next steps for the Christian church following Vatican II and its Protestant counterparts.

In a sense history must repeat itself. By bringing back the Roman rite to the classical form it once possessed the council started off today's process of cultural adaptation. In other words, the liturgical renewal envisaged by [the Constitution on the Liturgy] consists of two phases: the first is the restoration of the classical shape of the Roman liturgy, and the second, which is dependent on the first, is adaptation to various cultures and traditions.³

In the early 1970s Anglican liturgical scholars, thinkers, worshippers, and writers produced the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, an extraordinary liturgical document designed to bring the spirituality, piety, and communal prayer life of Episcopalians into the modern context. They did so by returning the eucharistic rite to its early Roman form, a form that has historically been described as imbued with the "simplicity, practicality, a great sobriety and self-control, gravity

² For two useful discussions of the meaning of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14 phrase "fully conscious, and active participation," see Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982), 12, and John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2008), 88.

³ Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future*, 7.

and dignity” of classical Rome.⁴ Ironically they were designing rites for the modern era just as the world was sure-footedly moving into the postmodern era.⁵

Chupungco asserts that the work of the modern liturgical renewal movement was only the first stage of a two-stage process. What was uncovered through the work of Vatican II and its Protestant counterparts was the deep structure of our Christian rites as inherited from the Roman church of late antiquity. Twentieth-century liturgical reformers pared back the contextual overlays that had accrued to the Roman Rite, removing medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation accretions so that the deep structure of the rite could be re-clothed with language, symbols, gestures, and images that might make the rite accessible to a contemporary generation of Christians. This can perhaps nowhere be so clearly seen as it is in Anglican rites that have converted the language and ethos of Cranmerian England to liturgical language that is emotionally, intellectually, and corporally comprehensible in our day and age. The fear in doing this conversion, translation if you will, was initially that the loss of this shared language across the Anglican Communion would somehow do damage to what it means to be an Anglican; but nothing has proved further from the truth. The shared deep structure of our rites has been excavated and articulated, and what has also been revealed and illuminated is the omnipresent cultural, ethnic, and theological diversity that sits at the heart of our global Episcopal and Anglican identities.

Chupungco’s challenge to current liturgical reformers is to pick up where our forebears left off. They did the difficult and painful work of restoration. It is now our task to engage in the equally difficult but in some ways perhaps much more imaginative work of contextual enrichment. While the modern era was a time of straight lines, practical sensibilities, and minimalism, our era needs to grapple with how we might elaborate on and supplement the deep structure revealed in

⁴ Edmund Bishop, “The Genius of the Roman Rite,” in *Liturgica Historica: Papers on the Liturgy and Religious Life of the Western Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), 12. See also Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future*, 26.

⁵ Baldwin, *Reforming the Liturgy*, 90. See also *Claiming the Vision: Baptismal Identity in the Episcopal Church*, a video series produced by Bloy House, Episcopal Theological School at Claremont, in cooperation with the Evangelical Education Society and the Episcopal Church Center, 2011, especially Dan Stevick in video 2, “The History and Theology of the Baptism Rite in the 1979 Prayer Book,” sections 12 (“Christendom”) and 13 (“A Rite for a Post-Christendom World”); http://www.bloyhouse.org/video_2.html.

our rites by attending to unfolding cultural realities facing the church in today's world. The modern liturgical renewal movement sketched the lines of our Anglican rites. It is now our work to color the sketch that has been given us in ways that reflect the spectrum of worship sensibilities and sensualities that make us the Anglicans we are today.

I will focus the remainder of this article on three issues that particularly beg for our attention as liturgical reformers. The first is the development of an expansive imagery of God that more clearly reflects the lived reality of contemporary Anglicans. The second is a renewed anthropology which reflects our growing awareness that humanity exists within a greater cosmic context of God's whole created order, and which reaffirms our role as creature and caretaker of creation rather than master and lord. The third challenge is the largely still unmet need for ethnically and culturally responsive rites that speak to particular cultures within the Anglican Communion and do not assume a hegemonic westernized Anglo-centric worldview.

Culturally Conscious Expansive Language for the Divine and the Human

The image of woman as leader and king is nothing new to Anglican sensibilities. Even in America where Elvis is King and John Wayne is the Duke, a new generation of Americans can imagine a world where a Hillary might one day sit in the role of Commander-in-Chief. Our churches are frequently led by women priests and bishops. Archaic barriers that kept women from serving on vestries, serving at the table as eucharistic ministers, or serving as acolytes are now the stuff of lore. And yet, when one opens our American Prayer Book and begins to speak our rites, we are forced back into a world of male dominance, a world where outside of a few allusions sprinkled across the psalms and lections, one might not see or hear an image of God *sans* male clothing for decades of one's life. *Enriching Our Worship I* was a valiant attempt to bridge this cultural divide. Surely it was meant to be the beginning of a conversation and not just a largely unknown and under-utilized experiment of the church. Do we have any reason to believe that as the world grows in its openness to all genders and all expressions of human sexual identity we will be well served by language and imagery that equate power, privilege, dominion, sovereignty, and divine love exclusively with masculinity? Part of what will make our common worship common in the years and decades

to come is our commitment to expressing within our worship the full palette of our humanity and God's divinity so that all are included, all are invited, and all share together in a common celebration of both God's humanity and God's divinity made incarnate in each of us.

In an exciting new book to be released this year, the Korean scholar MyungSil Kim asserts that our current deeply limited and literalized masculine metaphors for God run the risk in this diverse, complex, technologically-driven, global, cultural milieu of becoming "dead" or "frozen," losing their meaningfulness for a community. Building on the work of Janet Martin Soskice, she warns of the dangers of so literalizing and concretizing our masculine images of God that they cease to be able to do what metaphors are meant to do: namely, to open up the hearts and imaginations of a culture and a society so that that community is able to explore the most complex questions of human existence and seek answers to life's deepest paradoxes and conundrums. To resurrect these dying metaphors we need to once again pair them with their natural metaphorical twins. Every living metaphor bears within it shadows of a different metaphor, a complementary and contradictory metaphor, and our rites most successfully invite "fully conscious, and active participation" when they express the rich diversity of imaginative meaning-making to which our metaphors lead us.⁶

Ecologically Conscious Liturgical Language

In the same *ATR* article in which Massey Shepherd describes the dimension of liturgical change, Shepherd points to a growing awareness of the ecological crisis facing contemporary people.⁷ One sees within the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* the first green shoots of a modern awareness of our ecological selves, and yet our prayer book also often frames the world anthropomorphically, suggesting repeatedly that the earth is here for us to use as we will. In much of the prayer book our relationship with the created order is a vertical relationship in which we rule over nature rather than being subject to it. For several decades now there have been conversations taking place within Episcopal and Anglican communities (as well as other

⁶ MyungSil Kim, *Female Images of God in Christian Worship: In the Spirituality of TongSungGiDo of the Korean Church*, Liturgical Studies (New York: Peter Lang, forthcoming), chap. 1.

⁷ Shepherd, "The Dimension of Liturgical Change," 249.

Christian denominations) regarding the virtue of developing within the long green season of the liturgical year a period of emphasis upon the created order.⁸ Throughout the country there has been an explosion of commemorations of the Feast of St. Francis that celebrate both “Brother Sun and Sister Moon” and that also offer an opportunity for blessing of the animals. Prayers for the earth have become a part of many congregations’ intercessions. Voices within the church have called for a deeper commitment to the restoration of the planet and an end to the deeply self-destructive patterns of consumerism and exploitation of natural resources that stand as some of the greatest sins of our era,⁹ a call which finds its first pronouncements in the Ash Wednesday litany created by Massey Shepherd for the 1979 Prayer Book.¹⁰

In this eco-conscious culture of post-modernity where global warming can be witnessed, where human, plant, and animal lives are lost as a result of desertification and rising sea levels, where we are able to see with our own eyes the melting of the polar ice caps and the poisonous gray clouds of pollution rising up over industrializing nations, do our rites speak to these momentous and potentially cataclysmic human and cosmic realities? If not, how might twenty-first-century liturgical development respond to this cultural and spiritual need? When Anglicans gather in prayer, they share in deep vulnerabilities that have entered our lives across the planet as a result of irresponsible human action. The lived reality of our common predicament binds Anglicans across the globe, and indeed all of humanity, to one another in ways that our rites often no longer can. Might new prayers for this earth and for all its creatures help create for us new bonds of kinship grown out of our commitment to repentance and healing for “this fragile earth, our island home”?¹¹

⁸ General Convention Resolution 2009–D001, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), 796.

⁹ Sylvia A. Sweeney, *An Ecofeminist Perspective on Ash Wednesday and Lent* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 173–174.

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal, 1979), 268: “For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us, *Accept our repentance, Lord.*”

¹¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 370.

Cultural Responsiveness in Liturgical Design

This week I had another in a growing list of conversations with an Episcopal priest serving a community for whom American Western culture is not the primary culture and English is not the primary language. The purpose of our conversation was to discuss together the deep structure of our Anglican liturgies and to examine respectfully the many places where adaptations of our rites to fit the local language, music, imagery, gestures, decorum, and culture of a given ethnic Anglican community might allow for fuller, more conscious, and more active participation on the part of both current worshippers and potential worshippers for whom our current deeply Roman Anglicized rites seem anachronistic, hegemonic, and/or opaque.

Bi-cultural scholars and practitioners within our Anglican tradition have been warning us for decades about the cultural disconnects that arise from literal translations and rigid rubrical interpretations imposed upon leaders when the proposed rites are being prepared for use in multicultural and/or non-Anglo communities.¹² For decades we have left many Anglican leaders in the wrenching position of having to choose between obedience to the demands of their denomination and obedience to the internal demands they receive from the Spirit to minister to their own people in ways that are empowering, enlivening, and affirming of the cultural and ethnic character of their communities.

Clergy and lay leaders of communities that want and need to be responsive to the cultural needs of non-white and non-Anglo Anglicans must find creative, theologically sound, culturally rich means to engage in right practice within their worship communities even when the Episcopal Church and other churches in the Anglican Communion have not always grasped the depths of this need. They must find ways to commemorate saints and religious figures, pietistic practices and religio-cultural traditions that our church has not yet even begun to address through any of our authorized resources. They must design liturgies that speak to the musical, visual, and tactile sensibilities of those they serve. They must work with liturgical designers whose design work focuses on the majority culture of their dioceses

¹² See, for example, Louis Weil, *A Theology of Worship*, vol. 12 in *The New Church's Teaching Series* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 2002), 53–81, and Juan Oliver, *Ripe Fields: The Promise and Challenge of Latino Ministry* (New York: Church Publishing, 2009), 51–60.

so that occasions of shared celebration move from tokenized insertions of cannibalized ethnic cultural elements into liturgies that speak to the varied worldviews, predispositions, power dynamics, aesthetic sensibilities, and spiritual needs of an entire community—not just its majority members. Forming local clergy, musicians, and liturgical leaders in ways that offer them an in-depth understanding of the deep structure of our Anglican rites is one of the most exciting and demanding challenges facing theological educators of our day.

Conclusion

What will liturgical development look like for Episcopalians and Anglicans in the coming decades? If current practices are any indication, the breadth and diversity of the Episcopal Church and her sister churches in other parts of the Anglican Communion will require us to find local adaptations of our rites that speak to the particular cultural milieu of our neighborhoods, our dioceses, and our regions. At a different time in the history of the church it was possible to gather Episcopalians from many congregations across the Episcopal Church to produce a common, shared *Book of Common Prayer*, though even then our prayer was perhaps not as commonly shared and equally able to be appropriated as we often told ourselves it was. Both the efficacy and the feasibility of such a task in our own day seem to be in serious doubt.

As we move deeper into a new era of liturgical development within our tradition(s), we would benefit from a liturgical parallel to the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. If we were to gather theologians, liturgical scholars, church leaders, and practitioners not for legislation but for deliberation, might we be able to identify fundamental structural elements that, in a spirit of unity and collegiality, we might all embrace together as the guiding principles for liturgical development within our church today? Liturgical development remains as real and pressing an issue for the church today as it has for the past two millennia. May we be as courageously responsive to that challenge as was the generation that came before us.