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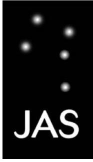

From the Editor

Modern Anglican Liturgy after Fifty Years

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Fifty Years of Liturgical Modernity

A fuzzy but important jubilee is slipping by without much notice in Anglicanism. For fifty years or thereabouts, a new liturgical paradigm has been at work, with a variety of intended and unintended consequences that go far beyond the resulting forms and words of common prayer.

The year 1967 is hardly the only possible date on which to land for such an anniversary, which is more about a movement than a single event. The liturgical movement had already been in motion for decades; the Lambeth Conference of 1958 had set down principles for change in member Churches of the Communion. In 1967, however, the moves for change became public in ways that impacted the lives of many Anglicans beyond the realm of scholarly and episcopal debate. The 1967 General Convention of The Episcopal Church approved trial use for the experimental rites that would form the basis of the 1979 Prayer Book.[2] The Alternative Services Second Series ('Series II') of the Church of England appeared across 1966–67. Beyond Anglicanism, in October 1967 the complete draft of the new form of Mass for the Roman Catholic Church was presented to the Synod of Bishops, and celebrated for the first time in the Sistine Chapel. Ideas that had long flowed about in the quieter channels of expert and elite conversation now burst their banks, and have changed worship and Church ever since.[3]

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2. 'The Episcopal Church' here adopts the preferred if problematic self-designation of the Church that includes the USA, a number of Central and South American countries, Taiwan and others; there are of course various other 'Episcopal Churches' in the Anglican Communion.

3. Colin Buchanan chooses the same date as a turning point; see 'The Winds of Change' in Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the*

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Outward Bound: Ecumenism, Mission, and Modernity

Earlier moves for liturgical change in the Anglican Communion, going back to and beyond the failed revision of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England of 1928, had tended to focus on structure and certain issues of theology, mostly tending in a more catholic direction. The revisions of the 1960s continued some of these themes but added others, not least an unmistakable emphasis on contemporary language, and hence on accessibility of worship to a Church and community whose vernacular and thought-world seemed to be moving away from traditional forms. The changes to words were not the only ones; liturgical dress, art, and music were all caught up in what Pope John XXIII had famously called the *aggiornamento*, the updating, of the Church.

There was considerable support for these changes, but from quite different and sometimes incompatible perspectives. Evangelical Anglicans, whose Church of England constituency held the first of a series of important national gatherings in 1967,[4] were discovering a new enthusiasm for cultural adaptation, and moving from being defenders of an old low-church approach to liturgy to adopting forms and words less indebted to Cranmer, or sometimes just leaving behind liturgical practice as previously understood. Changes to language were the necessary tools of evangelizing a changed world.

On the other hand, liberals were testing the limits not merely of archaic English but of the symbol system inherent in the traditional liturgy. J.A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God*, published a few years before, spoke of the need for the reiteration of faith in 'fresh and intelligent contemporary language',[5] implying not merely translation of archaic English but critical adaptation of mythological assumptions. While Robinson did not see himself as doing anything wildly different from his evangelical contemporaries, they certainly did. While he and other 'theologians of the secular' wanted to embrace the thought-world and not just the language of a new era, others believed the old-time religion merely needed better public relations and simpler texts.

Adoption of the vernacular in liturgy thus meant more than bringing things up to date. The English of the old Prayer Book and of the King

(F'note continued)

Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 236.

4. Andrew Atherstone, 'The Keele Congress of 1967: A Paradigm Shift in Anglican Evangelical Attitudes', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 9.2 (2011), pp. 175–97.

5. John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. xiii.

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James Bible had never exactly been street-talk; their cadences always suggested that the language of the divine realm was a hieratic idiom. Sometimes the modern voices of the new rites attempted to maintain poetry and a dignity of expression thought worthy of the subject. At other points they sought, or were pushed, merely to communicate the ideas (real or supposed) of previous liturgy or of doctrine in the simplest terms, driven by ideas such as the theory of 'dynamic equivalence', which subsumed form to content. This shift was exemplified in the NT translation of *Today's English Version*, later the Good News Bible, first published in 1966, which was driven by the need for a translation for non-native speakers of English but became an implicit benchmark for liturgical language in some quarters.

If the West was struggling with secularity, in African and other post-colonial settings Anglicans were negotiating their places in new political structures, and coming to grips with national identities as much as or more than applying them to ecclesial life.[6] Rituals that were not only or not so much outmoded as culturally alien needed to be recast or simply replaced. There had been something of a false start with *A Liturgy for Africa*, which arguably belongs to the story of Western liturgical reform more than to Africa's own, having been created by colonial bishops in English.[7]

Something closer to an African representative of the processes under discussion is the much more recent Kenyan *Our Modern Services*, published in full in 2002 after appearing in drafts and sections from the late 1980s, which reflects a livelier and more authentic interplay between indigenous and colonial voices.[8] *Our Modern Services* also reflects the reality of communities that share worship and prayer both in eucharistic and in other forms, with 'Morning Worship' and 'Evening Worship' rites that are not so much intended as a breviary as a form of principal Sunday service.

In the West in the 1960s however, reformers found common ground in use of contemporary English (or other vernaculars), and in simplified rites which tended to assume a new centrality for the Eucharist, a move which again did not include every Anglican opinion yet reflected

6. Maimbo Mndolwa and Philippe Denis, 'Anglicanism, Uhuru and Ujamaa: Anglicans in Tanzania and the Movement for Independence', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 14.2 (2016), pp. 192–209.

7. See Esther Mombo, 'Anglican Liturgies in Eastern Africa', in Hefling and Shattuck (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 277–86.

8. Anglican Church of Kenya, *Our Modern Services* (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 2002).

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a consensus that has continued to prevail in many parts of the Communion. After half a century these rites, or those that succeeded them still more recently, have become the everyday shape of Anglican liturgy. The 1662 Book of Common Prayer has retained some formal status in some national churches, but apart from the singing of Evensong in certain cathedrals and college chapels it is more likely to be used as a reference point for specialized discussions of historical liturgy or of doctrine than actually employed for worship.

This points to one immediate consequence, namely that a certain commonality of worship, not just for the Church of England but for the Anglican Communion, was lost. Anglicans had become accustomed to claiming that 'across each continent and island' some sort of liturgy resembling the Book of Common Prayer could be found by strangers and sojourners. The colonial assumptions of such observations were of course being weakened in other ways far beyond the liturgy or the Churches. Lambeth conferences had typically spent considerable time on these issues, and had long been walking a line between exhorting unity in forms of prayer and urging caution in revision on the one hand, while acknowledging local autonomy and missional need on the other. The Lambeth resolutions of 1958 exhibited a measure of cloaked anxiety, or at least of wishful thinking, about how else such a commonality might be achieved. They welcomed 'movement towards unanimity in doctrinal and liturgical matters by those of different traditions in the Anglican Communion', and acknowledged 'parallel progress' by Roman Catholic and Reformed scholars.[9] The optimism with which liturgical change went forward into the 1960s was thus ecumenical as well as pan-Anglican; increased differences in local form were expected to be variations on a theme whose scope and depth of unity would be greater than that being relinquished along with the old Book.[10] Stunningly, however, after decades of overweening concern, the resolutions of Lambeth 1968 do not mention common prayer or liturgy at all. The preparatory papers attempted a survey of the revision processes underway, but the bishops were being carried along on a tide they could not claim to control.[11]

9. *The Lambeth Conference 1958: The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops, Together with Resolutions and Reports* (London and Greenwich, CT: SPCK and Seabury Press, 1958), p. I.47.

10. It was also during 1967 that three meetings preparatory to the new Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) were held in Italy, the UK, and Malta.

11. *Lambeth Conference 1968: Preparatory Information* (London: SPCK, 1968), pp. 35–70.

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While an ecumenical winter has since largely descended at the level of institutional dialogues and expectations of organic unity, the commonality of rite envisaged in 1958 and variously embodied since is one of the places where convergence can be said to have borne lasting fruit. Christians in different parts of the world, Anglicans not least, can find themselves in churches of many different kinds and recognize in eucharistic celebration something owed to that consensus. Yet the Anglican Communion itself has paid a price, however necessary, in the process. The Book of 1662 is no longer the doxological common ground. It is foolish to underestimate the importance of this, both relative to the difficulties experienced in inter-Anglican relations since, and regarding the processes available to address them. The stalled Anglican Covenant process and the more recent attempts by Primates to claim increased authority both represent a shift of energy from the cultural sphere of the common liturgy, now abandoned, to the realm of global Anglican politics.[12] So, too, the emergence of the GAFCON network represents an attempt to create a new confessional commonality for certain Anglicans, even if they are arguably united more by opposition to developments in ethics and human sexuality elsewhere.

Back to the Center: Ancient Models and the End of Christendom

The liturgists and other leaders involved in these processes of change in 1967 were not merely thinking about the niceties of ritual or the cadences of prayer. While their concerns included those already mentioned that suggest a reach outwards, ecumenically and missionally, particularly in the adoption of vernacular and in simplicity of form, the new rites also tended to reflect an ethos somewhat in tension with this, namely a move inward, away from old assumptions about civic leadership and social prominence for the Churches in favor of reclaiming Christian distinctives.

In many cases liturgists of the earlier and mid-twentieth century were also observing and envisioning a changed relationship between the Church and Western society, where the boundaries of what had been Christendom were fraying at the edges. The search for liturgical models based in earlier Christian experience was a form of *rassourcement* from ancient wisdom, a reach backwards in time complementary to the

12. This is not to overlook interesting work done by members of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC); but this group of volunteers is not the representative international Anglican commission on liturgy that had been called for but never established.

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aggiornamento. This became evident in Eucharistic rites, but especially in baptism and in the various if patchy efforts made to revive forms of catechumenate. The Church in the West was becoming a distinct minority again; worship would cease to serve as civic ritual, but would return to being the expression of a royal priesthood whose life contrasted with that of the world for which it interceded. This insight may have been less striking in national settings outside the West, where even the most successful Anglican missions could rarely aspire to a sort of national Church ideal, but remains powerful.

This shift to emphasizing the distinctiveness of Christian witness and worship was reflected in two of the most obvious commonalities across Anglican liturgical reform: the newly reaffirmed centrality of the Eucharist, and the rethinking of baptism as full initiation rather than as a rite of social welcome or of blessing and protection of children.

Increased eucharistic celebration had already resulted from the catholic revival of the nineteenth century, but the forms and functions it took on at this later point owed more to the Parish and People movement in the UK, the Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission in the USA, and similar groups elsewhere, who emphasized not the fact of celebration *per se* but fuller participation and regular communion – principles which were appealing to some, if not all, of evangelical mind too.

Eucharist was now central, but baptism was too. The newer rites suggested a rigor in preparation, and tended to assume celebration in the setting of the Sunday Eucharist. They were often written as though an adult candidate was the norm, instead of the infant brought by hopeful but ill-catechized community members. Private baptisms thus became rarer, increasingly frowned upon by rubric and policy. Yet this theory of baptismal rigor and the reality have often been uneasy companions. The forms of catechesis that the new liturgies assumed were not consistently made a reality. Neither church-goers nor others instantly adapted to views debated in synods and conventions. Adults did not come in large numbers, at least not in the West. There is still an odd disconnect between the appearance and disappearance of families with small children who stand or sit awkwardly through Sunday celebrations, and the rites that describe them and their offspring as fully incorporated into the body of Christ. The redrawing of these boundaries has taken longer than liturgists of fifty years ago might have imagined.

The change from a norm based on Morning and Evening Prayer as principal Sunday services established clearer boundaries around Church membership. Doubtless many of the proponents saw this as a positive, and envisioned a renewal of Christian life that would have

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missional impact precisely by focusing more clearly on distinct forms of life and worship that were empowering to members and attractive to others. There have been and still are significant success stories related to such strategies in many places.

Yet there have also been costs to this move back to a center somewhat different from that of comfortable and traditional Western religiosity. Morning and Evening Prayer allowed some negotiation of belief and practice by attendees. The arrival of the parish communion left little space for ambivalence, at least while its rigorous expectations regarding baptismal qualification were adhered to. The recent push in some places, especially but not exclusively in parts of The Episcopal Church, to disconnect admission to Holy Communion from baptism is partly a protest against the removal of such safe spaces for the uncertain and uncommitted. Some suggest the pastoral experience of communion first has led to important experiences of emerging commitment and baptism.[13] Yet the same movement may reflect a difficulty in coming to terms with the changes of the 1960s and their different ecclesiology. The widespread language of 'inclusion' itself seems to appeal implicitly to a world-view rather like that of Christendom, where surely everyone would become some sort of Anglican, if only we were sufficiently welcoming. This is rather different to the return to a distinctiveness modeled after ancient Christian witness.

Last but not least, the focus on eucharistic worship has had some consequences, perhaps not completely foreseen, on homiletics and pedagogy. The new models have often given rise to forms of preaching less expository and more reflective in character, and just shorter. Without the consistent addition of the catechetical processes that the new rites often implied or required, the result has arguably been a decline in serious teaching and reflection, including systematic biblical exposition and apologetics – discourses that once were hardly alien to preachers of more catholic mind too. Evangelicals who resisted the new eucharistic norm, or who in other parts of the Communion were less directly impacted by this part of the reform, have often been an exception, and seem in many cases to have benefitted in vigor from maintaining a different pattern of preaching.

Conclusions and Possibilities

As Anglicans continue to think about their rites, there are lessons to be learned from the experience of the last half-century, not all of which

13. Sarah Miles, *Take this Bread* (Norwich: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2012).

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have so far achieved much prominence in local or international discussions. Fifty years on there does not so far seem to be the same level of expectation or urgency for further liturgical renewal; yet the needs are hardly less great.

Language has continued to be an area of discussion and contention. Issues of gender and inclusion became more well recognized a decade or two after the shifts discussed here, and have had their own impact in a subsequent generation of books and other resources. Still further concerns about the communication of the content of the liturgy have been raised in the growing awareness of cultural diversity, within as well as between Churches. Each of these new vernaculars makes its demands on the liturgy. So too, however, does the question of language as something more than a means for communication of propositions. If the 'modern' outlook of the 1960s suggested only simple language and limited vocabularies, and viewed language as a neutral vehicle for communication of ideas, now there are reasons to ask afresh whether and how form as well as content has theological substance. The relative success of English cathedrals, and the persistence of interest (including among younger converts) in the Tudor-language forms of TEC liturgy ('Rite I') might well have surprised the reformers of fifty years ago. These cases suggest the character of Cranmer's and similar English could have a somewhat different significance, and some continued attention, in post-modernity. They also encourage the authors of new texts to consider how richness or even complexity of language might have some place alongside simplicity.

Second, the capacity of the liturgy to be a place of learning and intellectual challenge is easily affirmed but harder to practice. Preaching is often a wearisome thing to cleric and congregation alike, but this surely points to the need for better education and training rather than to continuation of a spiral downward to where biblical and theological literacy 'bottom out'. There is no inherent reason that the Eucharist cannot be a setting for significant teaching and even for evangelism, as the structure of Word and Sacrament basic to any recent liturgy affirms. Anglicans outside the West whose experience reflects both some local traditions of substantial preaching and some older missionary practices in worship can affirm this readily enough.

Last but not least, the Anglican liturgical tradition does include more than the Eucharist as a means of gathering communities for worship. Evangelicals and religious communities may be the two contrasting groups who have seen the importance of this most readily, with different intents and results. The loss of liturgical settings such as Matins and Evensong as they were known is a given. Other changes,

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however, are possible. The popularity of the Taizé community and its worship, and the revival in some places of the office of Compline with mainly young congregations, suggest that the liturgy of the hours has more to offer, not just to the faithful but to those for whom the Church is not yet that home whose full membership and sacred meal can be shared. This central but neglected Anglican tradition of daily prayer, preserved and celebrated in settings as varied as parish communities in the Global South, monastic houses in the USA, and English cathedrals, could yet be fundamental in the next stages of *rassourcement* and of *aggiornamento*.[14]

14. See Stephen Burns, ' "Learning Again and Again to Pray": Anglican Forms of Daily Prayer', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 15.1 (May 2017), pp. 9–36.

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