

## Common Prayer: A View from North of the 49th Parallel

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Although I have lived uninterruptedly in British Columbia longer than any other place in my life, I am not a native-born Canadian. I was born in England, raised in the United States, and emigrated to Canada in 1987. In some respects I am an embodiment of what is becoming the Canadian reality: an immigrant who has found the Canadian context to be life-giving and, if I may use the term, “natural.” But Canada is my home if not my “native land” because it is here that I have spent twenty-eight of the thirty-one years since my ordination to the transitional diaconate in June of 1981.

We Canadians treasure our connections with Anglicans throughout the world yet we are consciously North American, valuing the wisdom of our neighbors to the south while, at the same time, valuing our Commonwealth ties. Perhaps it is these two characteristics that make me feel so at home here, the son of a mother from England and a father from the United States.

So, what is common about common prayer in Canada, eh?

### *Re-visiting the Sources*

If one wants to know what is “common” about “common prayer” in the Anglican tradition, a good place to start is the Prayer Book of 1549. Archbishop Cranmer used the Preface and a concluding editorial, “Of Ceremonies Omitted or Retained,” to articulate a number of principles which have shaped Anglican worship for the past four hundred and fifty years.

- 1) *Liturgy is the product of human activity and thus susceptible to decay and distortion:* “There was never anything by the wit

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of man so well devised, or so surely established, which (in continuance of time) hath not been corrupted: as (among other things) it may plainly appear by the common prayers in the Church.”<sup>1</sup>

- 2) *Regular and thorough reading of the scriptures is a norm for Christian worship*: “[The ancient fathers] so ordered the matter, that all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once in the year, intending thereby . . . that the people (by daily hearing of holy scripture read in the Church) should continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God.”<sup>2</sup>
- 3) *Liturgy is to be conducted in the vernacular rather than a hieratic language*: “And moreover, . . . Paul would have such language spoken to the people in the church, as they might understand and have profit by hearing the same.”<sup>3</sup>
- 4) *Simplicity and clarity rather than complexity and obscurity is a characteristic of authentic worship*: “Moreover, the number and hardness of the rules called the pie, and the manifold changings of the service, was the cause, that to turn the book only, was so hard and intricate a matter, that many times, there was more business to find out what should be read, than to read it when it was found out.”<sup>4</sup>
- 5) *Worship should unite people of a common culture*: “And where heretofore, there hath been great diversity in saying and singing in churches within this realm: some following Salisbury use, some Hereford use, some the use of Bangor, some of York, and some of Lincoln: Now from henceforth, all the whole realm shall have but one use.”<sup>5</sup>
- 6) *Bishops are called to exercise pastoral stewardship of the liturgical life of their dioceses*: “And forsomuch as nothing can, almost, be so plainly set forth, but doubts may rise in the use and practicing of the same: . . . the parties that so doubt, or diversely take anything, shall always resort to the Bishop of the Diocese, who by his discretion shall take order for the

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<sup>1</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, Everyman's Library, no. 448 (London: Dent, 1968; New York: Dutton, 1968), 3 (spelling modernized).

<sup>2</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 4.

<sup>5</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 4.

quieting and appeasing of the same: so that the same order be not contrary to anything contained in this book.”<sup>6</sup>

- 7) *English is not a privileged liturgical language; if the people understand another language, then it is suitable for worship (see number 3 above):* “Though it be appointed in the aforewritten preface, that all things shall be read and sung in the church, in the English tongue, to the end that the congregation may be thereby edified: yet it is not meant, but when men say Matins and Evensong privately, they may say the same in any language that they themselves do understand.”<sup>7</sup>

Cranmer reiterates these principles in an editorial afterword, “Of Ceremonies, Why Some Be Abolished and Some Retained.”<sup>8</sup> Here he categorizes the kinds of ceremonies that have entered into the liturgical life of the church.

- “Some at the first were of godly intent and purpose devised, and yet at length turned to vanity and superstition.”<sup>9</sup>
- “Some entered into the Church by indiscrete devotion, and such a zeal as was without knowledge, and for because they were winked at in the beginning, they grew daily to more and more abuses, which not only for their unprofitableness, but also because they have much blinded the people, and obscured the glory of God, are worthy to be cut away, and clean rejected.”<sup>10</sup>
- “Other there be, which although they have been devised by man: yet it is thought good to reserve them still as well for a decent order in the Church (for which they were first devised) as because they pertain to edification.”<sup>11</sup>

Cranmer also tackles the thorny question of whether abuse prohibits use (*abusus tollit usum*). He comes down firmly on the side of “abuse

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<sup>6</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 5.

<sup>7</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 5.

<sup>8</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 286–288.

<sup>9</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 286.

<sup>10</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 286.

<sup>11</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 286.

does not prohibit use” when one has clear principles as to why a particular ceremony or practice be retained.

Furthermore, such shall have no just cause with the Ceremonies reserved, to be offended: for as those be taken away which were most abused, and did burden men’s consciences without any cause: So the other that remain are retained for a discipline and order, which (upon just causes) may be altered and changed, and therefore are not to be esteemed equal with God’s law.<sup>12</sup>

Cranmer ends his afterword with what can be considered the charter of Anglican liturgical unity in diversity.

And in these all our doings we condemn no other nations, nor prescribe anything, but to our own people only. For we think it convenient that every country should use such ceremonies, as they shall think best to the setting forth of God’s honor, and glory: and to the reducing of the people to a most perfect and Godly living, without error or superstition: and that they should put away other things, which from time to time they perceive to be most abused, as in men’s ordinances it often chanceth diversely in diverse countries.<sup>13</sup>

So, how have these principles been lived out in the Dominion of Canada?

### *Common Prayer in the Canadian Context*

On the third of September 1578, Robert Wollfall, a priest of the Church of England serving as a chaplain to Martin Frobisher’s fleet, celebrated the first Anglican eucharist on the shore of Baffin Island in what would become Canada’s Arctic frontier.<sup>14</sup> Although Frobisher was disappointed in his efforts to find gold in the Arctic and returned to England in mid-September, the die was cast and soon other explorers and colonizers would return to the vast territory now known as Canada and bring with them the worship of the Church of England.

<sup>12</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 288.

<sup>13</sup> *The First and Second Prayer Books* (1968), 288.

<sup>14</sup> *For All the Saints: Prayers and Readings for Saints’ Days According to the Calendar of the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1994), 270.

For more than three hundred and fifty years the only form of worship authorized for use by Anglicans in Canada was the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. As a British colony Canada was viewed primarily as a mission field and was served by clergy from various missionary societies. The first bishop consecrated for service in Canada was Charles Inglis in 1787. Inglis had been a priest in Delaware and New York City before the American Revolution, but his loyalist views forced him into exile in England. After the Scottish bishops consecrated Samuel Seabury, the English bishops rapidly sought the necessary legislation to ordain bishops for service outside of England and Inglis became the first beneficiary of this initiative.<sup>15</sup>

Inglis and most of the Anglican bishops who followed him in the decades and centuries following 1787 realized that the Prayer Book of 1662 was not flexible enough to meet the needs of the church in Canada. Bishops began to issue instructions to their clergy as to what constituted faithful adaptation of the Prayer Book rites in the Canadian context. So, for a significant period in Canadian history, there was little impetus to create a prayer book for the Canadian churches.

This began to change in the mid-nineteenth century as the shape of a distinctly Canadian Anglican church began to emerge. It was Canadian bishops who, in response to the Colenso Affair, requested that the Archbishop of Canterbury invite the bishops of the Anglican Communion to gather and to take counsel on issues of common concern, a request that led to the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, the same year as Canadian confederation. In 1893 the bishops and representative clergy and laity gathered in Winnipeg for the first General Synod of "The Church of England in the Dominion of Canada." Among their actions was the approval of the "Solemn Declaration" which, among other things, pledged the new church's determination "to hold and maintain the Doctrine, Sacraments, and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in his Holy Word, and as the Church of England hath received and set forth the same in 'The Book of Common Prayer' . . . and to transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity."<sup>16</sup>

But the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth saw a movement toward the revision of the

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<sup>15</sup> *For All the Saints* (1994), 240.

<sup>16</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the Use of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1962), viii.

Prayer Book of 1662 in England, which inevitably had an effect on the Canadian church. South of the border, the American Episcopal Church had revised its Prayer Book in 1892. Canadians moved cautiously toward revision and toyed with the notion of simply issuing an appendix of authorized services and alterations to the Prayer Book of 1662. However, with the advent of the First World War and its accompanying growth in Canadian nationalism, the idea of a Canadian prayer book gained momentum and a conservative revision of the Prayer Book of 1662 was issued in 1918 (with final approval in 1921).

The Prayer Book of 1918/1921 sustained the Canadian church as the country weathered the Depression and the Second World War. Yet even as the world underwent the trauma of the war, the General Synod of 1943 authorized work toward the revision of the Prayer Book. This work progressed through the war years and into the late 1940s and early 1950s with a draft Prayer Book submitted in 1956. This draft was revised and became the proposed Prayer Book of 1959.

In the Preface to the 1959 Prayer Book the revisers renewed their commitment to the prayer book tradition as “designed for the reverent and seemly worship of Almighty God.” However, they wrote that “through the lapse of some three hundred years many changes have taken place in the life of the Church in its outlook upon the world.” In their work the revision committee was guided by the following principles, which the committee believed “governed those who first gave to the Church its Book of Common Prayer”<sup>17</sup>:

- the order should be “agreeable with Holy Scripture and with the usage of the primitive Church”;
- the order should not involve or imply “any change of doctrine of the Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer”; and
- the order should be in accordance with Resolution 27 of the Lambeth Conference of 1908 and Resolution 78 of the Lambeth Conference of 1948.<sup>18</sup>

The result was a prayer book that built upon the English proposals of the 1920s as well as other influences from the wider Anglican

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<sup>17</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (1962), vii.

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conversations regarding the shape of worship. But it was the wrong book at precisely the wrong time.

The Prayer Book of 1959 received its final authorization by General Synod in 1962. In England and the United States Anglicans were busily starting processes for the revision of their own liturgical rites. In Rome the Second Vatican Council had begun and would issue the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* in 1963. By 1965 the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Canada could see the writing on the wall and referred a motion approving in principle the preparation of a prayer book in contemporary English to the Committee on the Revision of the Prayer Book (soon to become the Doctrine and Worship Committee). In 1967 General Synod, meeting in the year of the centenary of Canadian confederation, authorized the production of a booklet containing “experimental liturgies and services now in use” with an introduction on the principles of worship and the process of experimentation.<sup>19</sup>

Events then moved relatively quickly. In 1971 General Synod directed the National Executive Council “to initiate a process of revision of Church Services without delay, which will produce alternatives to services now offered by the 1959 Canadian *Book of Common Prayer*; and which will provide guidelines for their use throughout the Anglican Church of Canada.”<sup>20</sup> Between 1974 and 1978 the Canadian Anglican Liturgical Series (CALS) began publication with rites for (i) Christian initiation, (ii) eucharist, (iii) institution and induction, (iv) thanksgiving for birth or adoption, and (v) marriage. In 1980 the General Synod was presented with a new collection of liturgical texts including (i) a new eucharistic liturgy, (ii) the lectionary, (iii) the calendar, (iv) an alternative ordinal, and (v) rites for Holy Week. These rites were published over the course of 1980 to 1982 and were joined by a new form for marriage in 1982.<sup>21</sup>

More importantly, the General Synod of 1980 made two decisions which were to have a lasting effect for the next three decades. First, General Synod rejected a proposal to prepare a revised *Book of Common Prayer*. Second, the Synod directed the Doctrine and Worship Committee “to proceed with the development of a book of

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<sup>19</sup> *Experiment and Liturgy* (Toronto: The Anglican Church of Canada, 1969).

<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 7.

<sup>21</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* (1985), 7.

alternative services, comprised of the commonly used services in the present Canadian Anglican Liturgical Series, revised where necessary, together with similar other services, for presentation to the next General Synod.”<sup>22</sup> This work was done and the General Synod of 1983 received a draft *Book of Alternative Services* and authorized the National Executive Committee to publish the subsequently revised and edited draft for use, “where permitted by the diocesan bishop,” until 1989.<sup>23</sup>

By 1989 it was clear that the *Book of Alternative Services*, published in 1985, was here to stay for a longer period of time. The *Revised Common Lectionary* replaced the *Common Lectionary* in 1998. Supplemental liturgical materials containing two services of the Word, three new eucharistic prayers, and a revised form of Compline were published in 2001.<sup>24</sup>

The dawn of the new millennium brought a renewed interest in the revision of the contemporary-language liturgical resources of the Anglican Church of Canada. In the Church of England the *Alternative Service Book* of 1980 gave way to *Common Worship* in 2000. The Episcopal Church in the United States began the publication of the *Enriching Our Worship* series. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada had been involved in their own revision of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* from 1978, beginning with a study series, *Renewing Worship*, and the publication of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in 2006.

### *Old Wine in New Skins*

For more than a century the Canadian Anglican church has been engaged in a revision of its liturgical rites that embodies the influence of Cranmer’s principles first articulated in 1549. With the authorization of the report “Liturgical Principles: Principles to Guide the Revision of Contemporary Language Common Worship Texts of the Anglican Church of Canada” by General Synod in 2010, the Anglican Church of Canada has put Cranmer’s “old wine” into “new skins.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* (1985), 8.

<sup>23</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* (1985), 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Eucharistic Prayers, Services of the Word, and Night Prayer Supplementary to The Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: ABC Publishing, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Faith, Worship, and Ministry Committee of the Anglican Church of Canada, “Liturgical Principles: Principles to Guide the Revision of Contemporary Language



- 1) *Liturgy is the product of human activity and thus susceptible to decay and distortion*: Early in “Liturgical Principles” we read that “whether self-consciously or not, the development of authentic Christian worship has always given witness to the communion (*koinonia*) between scriptural revelation and the contemporary voice of Christian discipleship of the church in every age and place.”<sup>26</sup> Principle 1 of “Liturgical Principles,” on liturgy and culture, builds upon Anglican and Lutheran sources, especially *Renewing Worship*, to articulate the fundamentally trans-cultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural dimensions of Christian worship.<sup>27</sup>
- 2) *Regular and thorough reading of the scriptures is a norm for Christian worship*: With the publication of *The Book of Alternative Services* in 1985, the Canadian church was given access to three new ways to read the scriptures regularly and thoroughly: (i) an ecumenical three-year lectionary became an alternative to the one-year Prayer Book lectionary; (ii) a two-year “Weekday Eucharistic Lectionary” was introduced; and (iii) the American Episcopal two-year “Daily Office Lectionary” was adopted. Principle 3 of “Liturgical Principles,” on the proper of the Christian year, affirms that “the public reading of the Holy Scriptures is an indispensable part of worship, constituting the basis for the public proclamation of the Gospel.”<sup>28</sup>
- 3) *Liturgy is to be conducted in the vernacular rather than a hieratic language*: Although the Prayer Book of 1962 continued the use of Tudor English, the *Book of Alternative Services* of 1985 chose contemporary English as its medium. The Doctrine and Worship Committee stated that “the use of vernacular language was . . . an important principle among all the Reformers and the use of archaic English is increasingly antagonistic to their teaching.”<sup>29</sup> General Synod’s creation of a Liturgy Task Force in 2010 to oversee the revision of the contemporary-language liturgical resources of the

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Common Worship Texts of the Anglican Church of Canada”; <http://www.anglican.ca/faiht/files/2010/10/Liturgical-Principles-and-Agenda.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> “Liturgical Principles,” 3.

<sup>27</sup> “Liturgical Principles,” 8–14.

<sup>28</sup> “Liturgical Principles,” 17.

<sup>29</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* (1985), 12.

Anglican Church of Canada further reinforced our commitment to the vernacular in the worship life of Anglicans.

- 4) *Simplicity and clarity rather than complexity and obscurity is a characteristic of authentic worship*: In this regard the developments of the last thirty years may not have been as successful. The relative rigidity of the Prayer Book order led to a “desire for greater flexibility and variety” in terms of ceremonial and texts.<sup>30</sup> A bishop of my acquaintance who is known for his progressive views on a number of issues bemoaned the multiplication of eucharistic prayers authorized for use in the Anglican Church of Canada: one in the Prayer Book, eight in the *Book of Alternative Services*, three in the *Supplemental Texts*, and nine in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (if authorized by the ordinary). That is a total of twenty-one, if one does not count the eucharistic prayers of *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) and other eucharistic prayers from various sources that have crept into use. The Daily Offices in the *Book of Alternative Services* have long been identified as too difficult to use, primarily a problem of layout. In this context it is interesting to note that Principle 15 of “Liturgical Principles” is devoted to rubrics and begins with the directive that rubrics “should make clear what is being indicated.”<sup>31</sup>
- 5) *Worship should unite people of a common culture*: Canadians consider themselves to be a “mosaic” rather than a “melting-pot.” Although the *Book of Alternative Services* is an attempt to provide structures and texts that can reflect local culture and practice, it must be said that “Anglo” culture predominates. Some Anglican First Nations communities have begun to inculturate their liturgical forms, but there is still much to be done in this area.
- 6) *Bishops are called to exercise pastoral stewardship of the liturgical life of their dioceses*: The *Book of Alternative Services* and other rites that have been prepared under the auspices of the appropriate liturgical authorities of the Anglican Church of Canada can only be used with the permission of the diocesan bishop. No such authorization is required for the use of the Prayer Book of 1962. Recent debates over the role of gay and

<sup>30</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* (1985), 11.

<sup>31</sup> “Liturgical Principles,” 30.

lesbian Christians in the life of the church have included debates regarding the liturgical authority (*jus liturgicum*) of the diocesan bishop. The debate continues.<sup>32</sup>

- 7) *English is not a privileged liturgical language; if the people understand another language, then it is suitable for worship (see number 3 above):* Since the publication of the *Book of Alternative Services*, translation into other languages has proceeded slowly. The Comité liturgique épiscopale francophone has completed its mandate to provide French translations of many of the liturgical rites in the *Book of Alternative Services*. Some translation work into aboriginal languages has been undertaken, but funding is almost nonexistent for such efforts. Nevertheless, "Liturgical Principles" states that "the 2001 adoption of the *New Agapé* commitment to work towards healing and reconciliation in relationship with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Canada is a relational context that must inform liturgical revision in everything from language and cultural sensitivities to the articulation of visions of reconciliation and healing, and to tend to justice issues in relationship."<sup>33</sup>

So, what is common about common prayer in Canada? We face the same questions about Anglican identity, authority, and the parameters of legitimate diversity as our sisters and brothers elsewhere in the Communion. We seek a liturgical life whose form "wear[s] the idiom, the cadence, the world-view, the imagery of the people who are engaged [in worship] in every generation" while remaining "invested in [the] gospel, in the reading of the scriptures, in proclamation, in praise, in prayer of deep concern, and in those sign-acts which wordlessly incorporate the believer in the Word."<sup>34</sup> In other words, we are just like every other Anglican—only in a Canadian key.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Geoffrey Leggett, "Liberty or License: A Preliminary Opinion Regarding the Liturgical Authority of the Bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada," *Sewanee Theological Review* 53 (Easter 2010): 185–203.

<sup>33</sup> "Liturgical Principles," 4.

<sup>34</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* (1985), 10.

