

AFFIRMING CATHOLICISM IN LITURGY

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When all is said and done the ethos of Anglicanism, the Anglican spirit, is best seen and felt in its liturgy, its worship according to the *Book of Common Prayer*, stemming from Cranmer in 1549 with various revisions through the centuries; *lex orandi, lex credendi*. What we believe is to be found in how we pray. The *Book of Common Prayer* aimed to keep a balance in theology between what we might describe as 'Holiness' and 'Homeliness', between the majesty or mystery of God and the homely love of God.

An exclusive concentration on mystery may cause worship to degenerate into magic and superstition. An exclusive concentration on homeliness may cause worship to degenerate into a kind of 'chummy' attitude to God. The liturgical genius of Cranmer is shown by the manner in which he took the old Latin services, translated them into English, purified them from unscriptural and unprimitive accretions, thus preserving liturgical continuity with ancient times. In a masterly blending of reverence, homeliness and congregational participation he fashioned in unsurpassed liturgical style and content the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*. This sense of proportion has for generations stamped itself on the character of Anglicanism, a character which rejects intolerant extremes of every kind and commends instead the virtues of moderation and unity in diversity. The *Book of Common Prayer 2004*, containing alternative services, old and new, sets out to make worship more relevant and adaptable by correcting what was in the past "amiss or lacking" in the light of contemporary religious knowledge and experience in a rapidly changing world. But the offering of so many alternatives can cause confusion and uncertainty in the pews. It also gives the minister such latitude in the conduct of worship that the liturgy is in danger of losing any predictable shape.

Too many alternatives or "mays" often result in liturgical "may"-hem. There is also the opportunity for any minister to indulge his/her particular theological infatuation and to use "other suitable prayers" in doing so. These so-called "suitable" or "appropriate" prayers often replace the well-trying devotional occasional prayers of the Prayer Book by a meandering concoction either made up by the minister or taken from some source with no idea whatever of liturgical language, which is in essence devotional, memorable and with economy of words. In Holy Communion Two there are three choices of the consecration prayer or canon. Would one alternative not have been sufficient? The rubric for the Intercession states – "will normally include....Prayers *may* be focussed....*may* be in the form of open prayer etc" (emphasis mine).

At least in the A.P.B. (1984) one of two forms of Intercession *had* to be used and both, for example, included commemoration of the faithful departed, praying "to

share with them the joys of your eternal kingdom" and "rejoicing in the fellowship of your holy apostles and martyrs". Where mention of the faithful departed by some, especially in Northern Ireland, savours of a relapse into popery, such commemoration in the new B.C.P. may be entirely omitted or received with scant attention. The result is that in some churches we hear little or nothing of the Communion of Saints and the Anglican sense of proportion in presenting the whole Gospel is lost. We become more like a sect, concentrating on one aspect to the neglect of all the rest. What a pity that in the eucharistic or consecration prayer we did not as in the 1549 B.C.P. include the commemoration of "the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs and the wonderful grace and virtue declared in all thy saints from the beginning of the world" and here especially naming the patron saint or those of a particular nation or region, for example Patrick, Brigid, Columba, etc. This gives a real sense of Catholic continuity with the past and with "all the saints who from their labours rest". In the world-wide Catholic fellowship we are all one in Christ Jesus, Our Lord, past, present and future.

For Christians the incarnation means the initiative of God, God reaching down to man in Christ to lift humanity upwards. Unfortunately there is a tendency to reverse the order with man reaching up, as it were, to grasp God and bring him down to human level, to encapsulate the deity. This leads to the loss of a sense of mystery and transcendence. Therefore we must be on our guard when in our liturgical revisions we make use of contemporary colloquial language and idiom to suit the instant communication of this modern age and we do not at the same time surrender the poetry of mystery and the sense of the numinous.

The Orthodox have held on to this sense of the numinous as the essential in worship and are gaining converts from those unfulfilled by today's diet of materialism. Instead of attempting to present the Gospel in modern dress using contemporary language and idiom the Orthodox look to the total spiritual impact.

The sinful soul is lifted up to Heaven, right into the presence of the all-holy triune God, there to join with the angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven in ceaseless adoration. Heaven and earth are united and "full of the majesty of thy glory". The Orthodox can remind us to preserve the balance, not to substitute the horizontal for the vertical and thereby lose the shape of the Cross, for God, not man is the measure of all things". For, as Archbishop Michael Ramsey put it, "it is possible to have a devotion to words and definitions which misses the sense of mystery which belongs to all religious language".