

**THE CATHOLIC TRADITION AND
THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 2004
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In the years that followed the disestablishment of the Church in 1871 those members of the Church of Ireland who would have held views that were more or less 'affirming catholic' felt marginalised and threatened. The majority of the lay members of the new General Synod and a large number of the clergy were aggressively 'evangelical' and 'protestant'. The canons ecclesiastical enacted were designed to prevent those expressions of 'ritualism' which were currently dividing the Church of England entering the Church of Ireland. A campaign began, waged in the daily press and through pamphlets, to remove any elements in the Book of Common Prayer that might be deemed 'catholic': the ordination commission to a priest to absolve, any hint that there is any Real Presence in the Holy Communion and baptismal regeneration. The 'High Church' party was apprehensive but the proposed changes were too radical to carry the day in synod. Only one significant alteration was to be found in BCP 1878: the '*te absolvo*' absolution formula was removed from the order for the Visitation of the Sick. That edition of the BCP is chiefly significant for the changes which were not made. The Church of Ireland remained a church where the 'affirming catholics' of the day could live. As Primate Alexander was to remark some twenty years later, "Our Prayer book has not admitted into its text enough anti-catholicism to drown an ecclesiastical midge."

The canons printed with the book ensured that the laity were aware of the ceremonial restrictions imposed on the clergy. At time groups resorted to the Church Courts to restrain those who longed for more appropriate and colourful enhancement of worship. When I was ordained these people were still active and a priest might at the least be reported to the bishop for breach of canon or rubric.

In the 1960s two significant decisions were taken by General Synod. Two lay members succeeded in 1964 in having a Private Members' Bill passed that amended the canon prohibiting a cross being placed on or behind the Holy Table. This passed after a legal decision that this was not a doctrinal issue and so did not require the complicated requirements in the 1870s Constitution designed to prevent doctrinal changes being introduced to the BCP. Two years earlier a Liturgical Advisory Committee had been set up to prepare and bring forward proposals for changes in the way the Church worships.

The years of restraint were ending. With the permission for trial use of proposed services, congregations all over Ireland would experience new ways. In October 1967 I received permission to celebrate 'Holy Communion 1967' – the 'white book' using the westward-facing position in the Church of The Annunciation, Knocknagoney – a

church designed with liturgical renewal in mind. In my sermon I was prophetic when I said "The worship of the Church of Ireland will never be the same again." In many places, not designed like the new churches at Knocknagoney, Belvoir and Carryduff, altars were pulled out to enable the westward position. In 1969 the 'red book' introduced a trial Holy Baptism in contemporary English, followed in 1972 by a modern language Holy Communion – the rite almost unchanged is Order Two in BCP 2004. There were those who would have like to retain sixteenth century language with the 1972 'shape' but this never appealed to General Synod. I think wisely as there is little virtue in addressing God and speaking to one another in an artificial language construct. Order One has value in that there is an element of continuity with the reformed worship of Anglicanism.

During the 1970s most of the remaining canons restricting ceremonial were removed. Coloured stoles became common and are worn except by some die-hard evangelicals who insist on black scarves even at the Eucharist. (Catholic-minded priests had for years worn at sacramental services what the ecclesiastical outfitters advertised as; black stoles for Church of Ireland ministers!). General Synod removed the ban on lighted candles early in the eighties but an attempt to permit full eucharistic vestments never got beyond an introduction to General Synod. The church was not yet ready to go as far: it was an idea before its time. However, whether lawful or not, the cassock alb has become more-or-less generally acceptable throughout Ireland.

BCP 2004 enshrines all the developments in liturgical scholarship and understanding of the second half of the twentieth century, although it has preserved for those who insist on them the sixteenth and century Cranmerian services. No one doubts the beauty of the language: what affirming catholics do question are the inadequate ways in which they express the theology of the eucharist, initiation and ordination. The initiation rites affirm the centrality of baptism in the life of the Church. In the Order Two eucharistic rite the 'shape' of the eucharist has been recovered to what it was before its medieval distortion. The Roman rite has since the Missal of Pope Paul VI followed the same pattern: not a few Roman catholic liturgists view with trepidation moves to re-introduce the Tridentine Mass. Irish anglican affirming catholics can embrace with thanksgiving BCP 2004, a service book for which our forebears of the 1870s would have welcomed with delight, joy and thanksgiving.