

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

CHARLES READ

'No way to run a railway' – Revising the Eucharist for *Common Worship*

The appearance of *Common Worship* is an event of major importance in the history of the Church of England. Yet for many, the process by which the liturgy is revised remains a mystery. Charles Read sets out very clearly what is involved, and reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the system.¹

When you talk to people in other denominations they think that the way in which we revise our liturgy, having to pass it all through Synod and so on, is crazy – or at the very least a bizarre system. Professional liturgists gasp in amazement when they realize that a committee of over 600 people is asked to comment on and revise prayers and texts which have been carefully constructed and refined by experts in the field. The late Michael Vasey once said 'Getting liturgy through the General Synod is like trying to do embroidery with a crowd of football hooligans.' Yet I think that our system can be defended even if the details of it could be fine tuned. The process of liturgical revision has been revised since the ASB was produced and may be revised again, but the principles of open government and participation in the process remain the same.

How the eucharist has been revised: mechanics

Technically speaking, the Liturgical Commission acts only on instructions from the House of Bishops, but in practice the Commission has ideas of its own. However, liturgical business can only be introduced into Synod with the approval of the House of Bishops, who will have seen drafts of new material before they are sent to Synod.

The first debate in Synod is a 'take note' debate which simply requires a majority vote for the material to enter the revision system. The purpose of a take note debate is for the Synod to say that the report or texts in front of it are on the right lines and are worth persevering with to get them to a final state. Thus for the Synod to refuse to take note of something indicates that Synod members are deeply unhappy with the whole concept or execution of the work in front of them (as nearly

¹ A version of this article was read as a paper at the Society for Liturgical Study at Plater College Oxford in August 2000.

happened with the recent Blackburn report on 'flying bishops' and previously with the Bridge report on Synodical government). When Synod votes to take note of something this does not then mean that Synod is entirely happy with what is in front of it – you can vote to take note while remaining convinced that much revision needs to be done.

Liturgical material then passes to a revision committee. This is made up of members of the Synod appointed to the committee by the appointments panel. Members are chosen because they have some interest and expertise in the area and the committee is set up so as to keep a balance of gender, ecclesiastical tradition, clergy/laity and regional location. Within the revision committee there is a steering committee consisting mainly but not exclusively of Liturgical Commission members. The steering committee is always in a minority on the revision committee so that it can be outvoted if necessary – this is to ensure that the 'experts' cannot force something through against the wishes of the rest of the revision committee. When the revision committee decides that texts need redrafting or explanatory notes need writing, it is the steering committee which has to go and do this work. For the eucharistic prayers the steering committee was chaired by the Bishop of Salisbury (David Stancliffe) and also included Michael Perham, Jeremy Haselock, James Jones, Rachel Moriarty and myself. Rachel and I are not Liturgical Commission members but were appointed as 'ordinary clergy and laity who had some knowledge of liturgy and theology'. (Rachel lectures in church history at the University of Southampton). Of this steering committee of six, two of us would clearly identify ourselves with the evangelical wing of the church and on the wider revision committee we also had Michael Nazir-Ali and John Stanley among others.

Synod members and others are encouraged to write in to the committee with suggestions for changes great and small to the texts. Synod members may also ask to come and speak to the committee in person. We received a large number of letters concerning the eucharistic prayers and we spent at least two afternoons talking to people who wished to lobby us in person. At the end of this first round of revision the revised texts and the committee's report go back to Synod and specific items can be referred back to the committee for further revision if the Synod so votes. (This is technically called a recommittal motion).

If any recommittal motions are passed by Synod, we move to the second revision stage with the same committee as before and again people can write to and lobby the committee. When the revision committee presents its second report to Synod there is only the chance to proposed specific amendments to the text – there is no third revision stage. Eventually the material is put to the final vote where a two-thirds majority is needed in each of the three Houses of Synod. This is an important point for this is where the revision committee has to guess whether there will be sufficient opposition to something to prevent the two-thirds majority being reached in one of the Houses.

In recent years a further element has appeared in this process: liturgical material has been field tested in about 800 trial parishes and chapels around the country. This is because, as liturgy teachers are always telling their students, you cannot

see whether an act of worship will work just by reading the text on the page – you've actually got to worship with it.

I have described the process in some detail because my experience is that people outside Synod (and sometimes even Synod members themselves) do not appreciate what is involved in producing new liturgy or legislation. I would make three basic comments about the process. First, it is democratic and involves a wide variety of clergy and laity in making comments, proposing changes and voting on the proposals. While it is always possible to allege that General Synod is not representative of the Church of England 'out there in the parishes', this system is nonetheless better than one in which liturgy is produced by professional liturgists or bishops and presented without much debate for use in the church. Second, the voting system, especially the two-thirds majority at the end, lends itself to politicizing the process – people know that if they can get just over a third of the House of Laity for example, to vote against something then that will sink it even if the clergy and bishops vote overwhelmingly in favour. Third, people often worry that this highly political and bureaucratic system dampens creativity, especially in things like liturgical texts (which in terms of genre are more akin to poetry than anything else). I will suggest later that in practice this is not the case, though it could certainly happen in theory.

How the eucharist has been revised: the product

Common Worship contains four 'orders' for the eucharist and although people like the Prayer Book Society have made much of this variety there is in fact no more variety at this level than we had already with the ASB and BCP. The four orders in *Common Worship* include two that follow the structure of BCP communion and two that follow the structure of ASB. For each structure there is a contemporary language and a traditional language version. These four orders work out as follows:

Order 1 is Rite A shape in contemporary language (the new Rite A)

Order 1A is Rite A shape in traditional language (the new Rite B)

Order 2 is BCP shape in traditional language (the Prayer Book 'as used')

Order 2A is BCP shape in contemporary language (the new Rite A according to the pattern of the BCP).

As you can see, all four orders are new versions of existing services. Order 2 is an attempt to recognize that BCP communion is often led in ways that deviate from the BCP as printed.² Order 2A was not originally going to be included but was put in at the revision stage after lobbying by conservative Evangelicals who felt that the very shape of the BCP service was doctrinally important and that the ASB shape was doctrinally suspect. Nonetheless, they wanted a service in contemporary language so that worship may be accessible to contemporary people. The question needs to be asked whether you can have BCP doctrine without BCP language³ and whether BCP structure is itself off-putting to contemporary worshippers.

2 The BCP itself cannot be revised by Synod but only by Act of Parliament.

3 A point made by Jeremy Fletcher in *Communion in Common Worship* (Grove Worship Series 159) pp 19f.

Within Order 1 there are eight eucharistic prayers. Prayers A, B and C are new versions of the four ASB Rite A prayers (prayer A is a conflated version of ASB prayers 1 and 2). Prayers D, E and F are new compositions by members of the Liturgical Commission and prayers G and H came into the package through the revision process.⁴ While there are different theological and stylistic emphases in these eight prayers, they are not 'party' prayers in that all Church of England liturgy is meant to be useable by all branches of the church, even if people nearly always choose one option rather than another. Prayer H, for example, has been warmly welcomed by many Evangelicals but there are certainly Catholics who do not like it.⁵

Politics in action (1): The epiclesis

Most eucharistic prayers throughout most of history and in most parts of the world include a petition for the Holy Spirit. This epiclesis can be what is often called a consecration epiclesis (invoking the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine) or a communion epiclesis (invoking the Holy Spirit on the worshippers). In practice, an epiclesis can do both at the same time and this has often been the ASB's approach: ASB prayer 1 includes the phrase 'grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and wine may be to us his body and his blood.' Where there is a single epiclesis it is of the communion type (i.e. on the worshippers but not the elements) – as in ASB prayer 3 which has 'Send the Holy Spirit on your people and gather into one in your kingdom all who share this one bread and one cup' (and there is a combined type of epiclesis earlier on in this prayer). Cranmer's BCP is significant in this history of liturgy in that it does not really have an epiclesis at all. Evangelicals have often been suspicious that an epiclesis on the gifts might lead to a belief such as transubstantiation and there was therefore quite a lot of lobbying of the revision committee to make sure that there was no epiclesis on the gifts in the new eucharistic prayers. Some people even felt that the ASB's combined type of epiclesis was a hostage to fortune and one person spoke to the revision committee to urge that all references to the Holy Spirit be removed from all the eucharistic prayers.⁶

In point of fact, the epiclesis is not straightforward. Although some Evangelicals fear it will encourage belief in transubstantiation, the medieval Roman Mass contained no epiclesis on the elements at all and yet people still managed to believe in transubstantiation! Going back earlier into the history of the eucharist, we find in the Patristic period that eucharistic prayers regularly invoke the Spirit on the elements but sometimes invoke the Logos instead. This may reflect a stage of the

4 The identity of the original authors is not normally revealed, but the information does have a habit of leaking out, as happened with the ASB.

5 For more on the eucharistic prayers see Colin Buchanan and Charles Read *The Eucharistic Prayers of Order 1* (Grove Worship series 158).

6 When challenged by the committee about this approach, this person could not put up a

cogent rationale for her request. At other stages in the process, Evangelicals argued that our theological starting point should be 1552 rather than 1662. This might be arguable, but the fact remains that it is 1662 which is the doctrinal and liturgical standard, not 1552, and that arguments to the contrary need substantiating; mere assertion will not do. Evangelicals must get their theological act together better than this if they are to exert influence in the Synod.

church's life when its trinitarian theology was not fully thought out and the Logos epiclesis certainly does not persist into later history. What is noticeable about these early epicleses is that they typically pray for the Spirit to change the bread and wine so that the recipients may grow in faith and may be furthered in their discipleship. The action of the Spirit does not terminate on the bread and wine.⁷

The original version of prayer E in *Common Worship* included the lines 'send your Holy Spirit on us and these gifts that broken bread and wine outpoured may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.' This caused much comment and the Revision Committee received more correspondence about this item than any other. There was certainly evidence of a co-ordinated campaign to get this explicit epiclesis on the gifts removed.⁸ After much discussion in the revision and steering committees we decided to retain this wording as being theologically defensible even though it was more explicit than anything which the Church of England had had before. Although the lobbying to remove this epiclesis had come from conservative Evangelicals, my own informal taking of soundings suggested that many Evangelicals could at least live with this form of words. This would certainly have been untrue 40 years ago. Why had their apparently been a shift amongst Evangelicals on this point? I speculated that two factors may have played a part in this.

First, many Evangelicals have been influenced by charismatic renewal. If you are used to praying for the Spirit to come in worship – on people, into places, into situations – then you probably do not have much of a problem with praying for the Spirit to come onto the bread and wine, especially if this is closely bound up with the Spirit coming onto the congregation. Many Charismatics are used to the idea of the Spirit (in some sense) working through oil in healing and the Spirit working in and through bread and wine in communion does not seem much different.

Second, Evangelicals are more theologically relaxed nowadays than they were forty years ago. A Church of England led by George Carey is bound to be very different for Evangelicals from a Church of England led by Geoffrey Fisher or Michael Ramsey. Of course, some allege that this more relaxed position has made Evangelicals complacent and that they are not so sharp doctrinally as we were. However, the NT itself shows Christians able to live with a certain amount of diversity even in doctrine.⁹ Whether an epiclesis on the gifts goes beyond the acceptable limits of diversity in eucharistic theology is still to be ascertained. Nonetheless, Evangelicals seem less worried about it than they used to be, especially if it is carefully phrased to link communion and consecration epicleses as prayer E attempted to do and as the ASB had done.

7 See the extensive discussion in J. H. McKenna *Eucharist and Holy Spirit* Mayhew-McCrimmon 1975, especially chapters 1 & 2.

8 The steering committee was able to compare some of the letters which came in, which were almost identical to each other in phraseology, and work out something like

the text of the original campaign letter from which they were clearly copied. We knew that skills of Biblical source criticism would come in handy one day.

9 As has been demonstrated by James Dunn, not least in his *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, SCM, London 1977 – see especially chapters 10 & 14.

Despite all this, when the eucharistic prayers came back to Synod for the debate at the end of the first revision stage in July 1999 a recomittal motion was passed instructing the committee to look again at the epiclesis. The revision committee under these circumstances is duty bound to discuss the issue again but can stick to its guns and refuse to make any changes. We still felt that the epiclesis in prayer E was defensible but we thought that there might well be over a third of Synod members who would vote against such an epiclesis. We were told at the same time that we could not get the Synod to vote on the prayers one by one – they had to be taken as a package – and so we were facing the prospect of losing all of the prayers. In order to get the prayers through Synod safely we therefore removed the epiclesis in prayer E so that the text now reads ‘send your Holy Spirit, that broken bread and wine outpoured may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.’ What we have done is to remove the reference both to the elements and to the congregation for we felt (in line with most thinking in liturgical theology) that you should not have an epiclesis on the congregation without an epiclesis on the gifts linked to it.

In the second report of the revision committee we explain our decision in the following way. First we explain that some form of an epiclesis on the gifts can be found in Reformed liturgy such as the Westminster Directory of 1644 and Richard Baxter’s Savoy Liturgy of 1661. Modern Reformed revisions often include an epiclesis. Further, we point out that ‘nearly every Anglican revision since 1637 has provided an epiclesis’ and we point to the way in which the epiclesis is used in all four ASB prayers. We remind Synod that Charles Wesley’s eucharistic hymns are not afraid to speak of the action of the Spirit in the eucharist.

After this defence of our earlier decision to leave the epiclesis in prayer E unchanged, we write: ‘The committee has made some adjustment to the phrasing of the epiclesis in prayer E to accommodate the concerns expressed in the July debate in subsequently in submissions. In making this change the committee recognizes that in satisfying those who were unhappy with the original drafting there will be others who will keenly regret the changes. It is the committee’s view that, as now phrased, there is nothing to preclude a distinctly “catholic” interpretation. The genre of prayer is necessarily distinguished from the precision of doctrinal treatises.’¹⁰

This may be seen by some as the supreme example of Anglican fudge and compromise – we defend our original decision but make the change anyway simply because we don’t think the voting figures will work out in Synod. We sacrificed the epiclesis in order to save the whole package of prayers. Certainly many Catholics in the Church of England are very upset by this outcome, despite the committee’s suggestion that a ‘catholic’ interpretation of prayer E is still possible. It would be churlish of Evangelicals to regard this as a great victory over the catholic enemy. Here is a theological issue on which Evangelicals and Catholics need to engage in further discussion.

¹⁰ *Draft Eucharistic Prayers: Second Report of the Revision Committee* GS 1299X pp 9f.

Democracy in action: prayers G & H

One of the issues which emerged in the first Synod debate and about which people wrote to the revision committee, was the question of the number of eucharistic prayers. The Liturgical Commission was proposing six and this very number seemed too much for some people. It was one factor which had led to the eventual downfall of the previous set of eucharistic prayers in 1996. The committee was very cautious about adding any more prayers and we never seriously considered this option in the first round of revision.

The question of the number of prayers needs to be put into context. The ASB contains four prayers in the main text of Rite A, a further 'emergency' prayer for use with the sick, a eucharistic prayer in the order Rite A according to the pattern of the BCP and two prayers in Rite B. Some people made great play of the ASB containing eight prayers already when the matter was discussed in 1996. This is a bogus argument because the first three ASB prayers are of a basically identical structure, prayer four is not far off it and the Rite B prayers also fit into this pattern. The most you can claim in the ASB is that there are two types of eucharistic prayers and that one of them is hidden away in the little-used Rite A according to the BCP pattern.

In the package of six prayers presented to Synod in 1998, the first three (being derived from ASB prayers) all have the same structure and the next three have new structures – though prayer E pretty much conforms to the ASB pattern. Even in this package there is not very much variety of structure and the variety of style is expressed through the phraseology used more than through the theology – although there are theological differences between the new prayers.

In a speech in this opening debate I made this point using the analogy of a car. Nowadays VAG make not just Volkswagens and Audis but also have a hand in building Seats and Skodas. These cars all share some family likenesses. While they are not identical with each other they do have similar traits and can be distinguished from Fords and Renaults. So the issue with eucharistic prayers is not how many we have but how many different structures we have.¹¹

During the first revision stage we were sent a eucharistic prayer by the Bishop of Oxford who asked that we consider including this in the package. It was in fact a version of eucharistic prayer two in the 1996 defeated set. This prayer has its origins in ecumenical attempts to write a eucharistic prayer and contains some memorable phrases such as 'the silent music of your praise'. It is also the only eucharistic prayer considered by the Church of England which utilizes a feminine metaphor for a member of the Trinity ('Jesus, as a mother...').

The revision committee wanted to find a way of including this prayer to make seven in all but we felt that we could not simply come back to Synod with seven so we included this extra prayer as an appendix to our report and let it be known that we would be happy for someone to suggest from the floor of Synod that it become a seventh prayer in the set. In the event, after the first revision stage debate

¹¹ General Synod *Report of Proceedings* July 1998.

in July 1999 we had to meet for a second round of revision and so were able to include this prayer among the texts for revision. In November 1999, at the debate on the second revision stage, the Bishop of Oxford proposed including this prayer as prayer G and the Synod happily and overwhelmingly went along with this.¹² The revision committee had played a cautious political game by not introducing prayer G itself but rather allowing a member of Synod to do it – and the process was probably helped by the fact that Richard Harries is known in Synod for his expertise in ethical matters rather than as a liturgist – hence no-one could say (cynically) that here was someone who just wanted liturgical variety for variety's sake.

The July 1999 debate also led to the revision committee being asked to produce an interactive eucharistic prayer. As Colin Buchanan often put it, the congregational parts of Church of England eucharistic prayers often amount to little more than the congregation saying 'Hear, hear! Now get on with the next bit...' to the president. In other parts of the Anglican communion and in other denominations there are eucharistic prayers where the president and people are in dialogue throughout. Here the congregation have lines to say which move the action of the eucharistic prayer on. At an earlier stage in revision we had tried converting the first prayer in the ASB into this kind of interactive prayer simply by giving the congregation existing paragraphs to say. We were very dissatisfied with our efforts and eventually gave up this part of the project. We came to the conclusion that this process of effectively hitting the bold key for every other paragraph in what is now prayer A will not work because prayer A was written for a solo (presidential) voice and what is written for one voice does not usually work when spoken as a congregational text. If an interactive eucharistic prayer were required, it would need to be a new composition rather than a simple adaptation of an existing prayer.¹³

When the Synod sent us back for a second revision stage, we were charged with dealing with the epiclesis in prayer E (and also in prayer G, if that were to be adopted by Synod as well) and with producing an interactive eucharistic prayer. Two of us on the steering committee had got some ideas for such a prayer and so we produced a draft version on the afternoon of Sunday July 11th which was then circulated to Synod members on the final morning of Synod (Tuesday 13th). Thus Synod members could comment on this text during the second revision stage. There was also some limited opportunity to use this and prayer G in trial parishes and at the November 1999 Synod both G and H were voted into the package of eucharistic prayers for *Common Worship*.¹⁴

The story of prayers G and H demonstrates how the Synod processes can sometimes have creative results in liturgy. Prayer G is theologically significant both in its ecumenical origins and in its one, mild stab at inclusive language for the

12 To be fair to the Bishop of Oxford, he would probably have liked less rather than more eucharistic prayers but would have wanted prayer G to replace one of the other six – he indicated as much when he came to meet the revision committee.

13 Although we did put optional acclamations into prayer A.

14 For the sake of the record, I should mention that there were some problems with H in terms of its precise phrasing and we were able eventually to have a third revision stage of sorts to iron this out. The whole package came back for final approval in February 2000.

Godhead.¹⁵ Prayer H is significant in two structural ways: it is interactive in form and concludes with the sanctus. On this latter point, our intention was that the prayer should build to a climax of praise and the sanctus seemed fitting as a conclusion. The original *Patterns for Worship* eucharistic prayers included two which had the sanctus in this position and some scholars have thought that there were ancient eucharistic prayers which did this.¹⁶

Politics in action (2): Prayer C

If one of the original six prayers was to be removed then prayer C was the most likely candidate. Prayer C is a reworking of Rite A prayer four which is clearly based on a Prayer Book theological model and stands slightly apart from the ASB pattern of the eucharistic prayers. The revision committee thought that there would be very few parishes which would use prayer C at all regularly.¹⁷ Nevertheless, there would be some people for whom this prayer would be the one which they could use with the clearest conscience. Likewise the other revision committee which was dealing with the overall shape and content of the eucharistic services was lobbied to include a new version of Rite A according to the pattern of the Book of Common Prayer. It was originally thought that no-one would really want a new version of this but it soon became clear that there was a small group within the Church of England for whom this again was their lifeline for using contemporary liturgy.¹⁸ Thus political lobbying and the magnanimity of the revision committees kept in two minority options which also increases the theological and stylistic variety in the *Common Worship* eucharist.

Conclusions

Those who study the eucharistic prayers in *Common Worship* in future years must not ignore the political dimension in the story of how they were produced. It is quite wrong to study the text of a prayer and assume that all the theological emphases and phrases are there due to entirely theological reasons. Sometimes a political decision has been taken in order to get the material through Synod.

The political dimension to the revision of liturgical texts has not arrived with *Common Worship*. It was certainly there in the production of the ASB.¹⁹ Liturgy and politics have often gone hand in hand – sometimes the politics are ecclesiastical and sometimes they are secular. Charlemagne sought to unify his empire by imposing a common liturgy. Similar thoughts occurred to secular rulers at the time of the Reformation in England. One interpretation of the development from the 1549 Prayer Book to the 1552 Prayer Book is that Cranmer knew that people could

15 The 1995-2000 Synod has been singularly frightened of inclusive language for God to the point where Biblical phrases such as 'born of a woman' have been criticized as being 'feminist' and the Creed retains the theologically and linguistically wrong translation 'and was made man'.

16 See e.g. C. Irvine (ed.) *They Shaped our Worship* pp 88-90 on E. C. Ratcliff.

17 Clergy who inflict this prayer on their parishes as a Lenten penance have understood neither the prayer, Lent, penance nor basic pastoral care.

18 See Fletcher, *Communion*, p 19.

19 As has been ably documented by Colin Buchanan in a whole string of publications, not least including his article in this issue.

not cope with full-bodied Protestantism in 1549 and so introduced the first Prayer Book as an interim rite in order to help people accept 1552 when it appeared. 1549 thus operates along similar principles of liturgical revision to those employed by recent revision committees.

Many Christians appear to have a dislike for politics both ecclesiastical and secular, but I would argue that this political dimension to the life of the church is in some sense incarnational. Compromise and revision by stages are part and parcel of what it means to deal with real human beings. The Christian church has often not taken the incarnation seriously and this can be seen in a whole variety of arenas, particularly in the church's attitude to sexuality and politics. If political process is a feature of human life, then we should not run away from it or dismiss it. To do so is to suggest that Christians should have their minds on higher things than the fabric of human society. To go down this course has immense implications for our incarnational theology.

Questions remain, nevertheless, about whether the Synod is representative of the Church of England as a whole. Pretty much everybody who dislikes a decision that the Synod makes says that is the case. Whatever the reality is, the Synod is an attempt at allowing ordinary clergy and laity to have a voice in church government. Every five years people can change their Synod representatives – and in the meanwhile can lobby the revision committees. Few other churches have this open and democratic element in their liturgical revision.

Messy though our liturgical revision process is, it has much to commend it and I believe that the end result this time has been to give us eucharistic rites and prayers which will serve us well for mission and worship in the years to come. But then I am a Synod hack and liturgical reviser, so I would say that, wouldn't I?

The Revd Charles Read is Tutor in Liturgy at St John's College with Cranmer Hall Durham and was a member of the eucharistic prayers Steering Committee