

An English Prayer Book for Today?

The Dedham Lectures 1995

David Streater

Introduction

In answer to a question about his theological interests, an applicant for a senior parochial post in the Church of England wrote to the patrons of a living, that he particularly liked inventing new forms of worship! That is an illuminating answer which raises many questions about current practices in the national Church. The issue of any prayer book is to do with the worship of Almighty God and that raises two important questions: What is worship? And how God is to be worshipped? We will return to these questions after we have set the scene which forms the background to the publication of *An English Prayer Book*.

1 Setting the scene

Whatever the precise problem in the 'Nine O'Clock Service', which even shocked the popular press, it is indicative of a very unsatisfactory state of affairs in the Church as a whole. Even the *News of the World* devoted an editorial article asking the question 'Whatever is going on in the Church of England?' We may well believe that this is a case of the poacher turned gamekeeper, but it does demonstrate that for all the considerable efforts by the Church of England to go with current fashions, by and large such trendiness is counter-productive. Professor Arthur Pollard in his Latimer House Lecture stated aptly:

Yet though [the bishops] appear so keen to exert authority in certain areas of the Church's life, in others [they] seem reluctant to act at all. I said ... that I am no congregationalist, but liturgically I fear that the Anglican Church is becoming a congregational church. Visiting a strange church one often does not know what to expect!¹

Pollard goes on to point out that weekly Eucharists, which were

1 A Pollard 'Future of the Church of England' Latimer House Lecture 1994

regarded some forty years ago as the panacea to solve the problems of the Church's decline, have in fact in many ways hastened that process by creating a situation in which, far from being the Church of the Nation with the privilege and responsibility of taking the gospel to every man's door, in many areas the Church's responsibility is seen only as ministering to the 'in' group – the paid up members. This is seen most clearly in many suburban churches which pride themselves in a large membership with few financial problems. The fact is that compared to the rural churches the percentage of the population to which they minister is far less.

In addition to these problems there is a serious departure from intelligent worship for adults to which children may be introduced as they become sufficiently mature. I speak of what only may be described as '*infantilism*'. That is not to condemn genuine family services. What was done in the bible class forty years ago now becomes a regular feature of adult worship. Teaching methods appropriate for five to seven-year-old children are used to instruct adults. Alternatively, entertainment methods are used. A pop group is found in the front of the church replete with guitars and drums plus the lead female singers who think nothing of gyrating in front of the congregation. It is interesting to compare this with the robed choir and the musicians gallery at the back where the musicians played in the village church to the Glory of God. To quote Pollard again:

Not for nothing did Cranmer prescribe Morning and Evening Prayer with regular ministry of the Word as the principal services of the Church. Not for nothing did the eighteenth-century church regard the monthly sacramental Sunday as something very special.²

In other words, there has been a very serious shift from worship with the mind, to worship with the emotions. Social problems have replaced spiritual truths and the result is that the 'hungry look up and are not fed'. Evangelicals must bear a part of the responsibility for this major change in church life. From the 1960s the cry has been for a return to the New Testament. That is not necessarily wrong, provided it means that doctrines and practices are checked against New Testament teaching, but if it means unravelling two thousand years of church history and doctrine, then it is a very serious error which means that each and every generation has to reinvent the Christian wheel!

In addition, strident feminism is demanding that the Scriptures be rewritten to accommodate modern views of the equality of the sexes but it ignores the basic differences. This has led to demand for a Father/Mother God and in the most extreme cases, a female Christ, 'Christa', who made a

2 A Pollard 'Future of the Church of England' Latimer House Lecture 1994

brief and unhappy appearance in a service not sanctioned by Manchester Cathedral but which was not checked either. It is from this source that the demand for political correctness emanates with its torture of the English language. We must ask the question as to why this has come about?

Every age has its peculiar emphases, not least our own, and in that it follows the spirit of its predecessors. The Victorian Age, through the advent of Romanticism, aided by Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels, the equivalent of *Eastenders* or *Coronation Street* in the popular perception of the time, endeavoured to return to Merry England and the golden age of the Gothic. This led to the widespread 'restoration' of existing churches on lines laid down by Pugin which could be described with some justification as 'Victorian vandalism'. Churches of earlier years, Tudor, Stuart and Georgian disappeared, or were so changed as to be almost unrecognizable. Simple eighteenth-century Hanoverian churches, pulpits, box pews, all of which tended to emphasize the primary nature of preaching gave way to a very stylized liturgy with the swelling music of the organ replacing the village musicians in the gallery. Robed choirs were now found in the tiniest of rural churches. Soon to follow this extravaganza of light and sound was the tinkling of the bell to indicate the consecration of the host.

The Victorian age was one of structured class, with the '*rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate*', and the flow of the time was for heavily decorated churches with heavily structured services which inevitably led in a ritualistic direction. Two world wars completed the disintegration of Victorianism with its strengths and weaknesses. We now live in the age of the common man. '*Vox dei*' has become '*vox populi*'. Jack is not only as good as (and by liberation theology definition much better than) his male oppressor, but Jill is now much better than Jack! This is the flow of the age. It is seen in the democratization of the Church and it is reflected in the informality of worship and the urge to be politically correct.

Of course, there were many other movements at the time and we do not claim that the analysis is complete, let alone exhaustive. This is simply designed to show that in endeavouring to be relevant to the age in which we live there is always the danger that it is possible for the Church to be conformed to the passing world fashions. We need to return to the questions which were originally raised. What is worship? And how do we worship Almighty God?

2 True Worship

Herbert Carson paints the scene on a broad canvas in answer to the first

question 'what is worship?' when he states that:

Worship is the declaration by the creature of the greatness of the creator... It is the united testimony of an adoring congregation... It is the summit of the service of the angels and the climax of the eternal purpose of God for His people. It is man's supreme goal here and the consummation of his life in heaven.³

However, we shall lay aside comments concerning the angelic host and the heavenly scene to concentrate upon the local congregation, and in particular 'the united testimony of an adoring congregation'.

Worship must always be a private spiritual exercise, but it must be a public exercise too and the principles concerning private worship hold good for public worship. Nowhere in the New Testament do we gain a more incisive view as to what is true worship than in the meeting between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Woman of Samaria. 'God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.' (John 4:24)

In his reply to the woman's question about true worship the Lord Jesus laid down a principle that 'God is Spirit' and therefore there are two unalterable and interrelated consequences which the Church of Jesus Christ must follow in its worship. It must be both 'in spirit' and 'in truth'. If we join these areas together we find that worship is the adoration of the Triune God which must follow the prescription of being 'in spirit' and 'in truth'. Dr Packer is his usual articulate self when he states how we are to worship:

'In spirit and in truth' means more than from the heart, in sincerity, though subjective genuineness as opposed to hypocritical formality is certainly involved: but the main thought is the response to the truth which God has set forth in Christ, through the power of the Spirit whom God has sent. Christian worship must therefore keep within the circle of revealed truth; it must centre upon the grace made known through the person and work of Him to whom the Spirit bears witness, it must also responsively echo and therefore proclaim to God's praise the everlasting gospel of that salvation which is of the Jews. Correlative to the freedom which Christ has given the Church in ordering its worship is its responsibility to see that these principles taught by Christ are constantly observed.⁴

In simple terms all worship must be judged by the criteria of 'in spirit

3 H M Carson *Hallelujah* (Welwyn Herts: Evangelical Press 1980) p 7

4 J I Packer in R Beckwith ed *Towards a Modern Prayer Book* (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press 1966)

and in truth' because of the nature of Almighty God himself. If that is true then worship which begins and ends outside the circle of revealed truth which is found in the Scriptures, fails to measure up to its privilege and falls short of its basic responsibility. We must now return to the Apostolic church.

3 New Testament Worship

The Church which we find in the New Testament is a worshipping community (Acts 2:40-7). That worship from its inception at the Day of Pentecost involved the assembling of the disciples together for instruction, the apostles' doctrine, for fellowship, to break bread in remembrance of Christ's death and passion, and for prayer together. At this early stage there are areas of spontaneity under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit but there is also, as the New Testament records, a progressive development of patterns of worship. This can be clearly seen in the Apostle Paul's instructions to the Church in Corinth where he regulates the use of glossolalia, inhibits certain ladies from causing problems in the Church and sets out the basic principles of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:14). If there is added to these the instructions in the Pastoral Epistles concerning the importance of preaching and the reading of Scripture with corporate prayer (1 Tim 2:1-8), a process of development can be discerned which may be summed up from the first Corinthians Epistle: 'For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the Churches of the Saints' and again, 'Let *all* things be done decently and in order' (1 Cor 14:33,40). Ralph Martin's comments in *Worship in the Early Church* are to the point:

The conclusion seems inescapable that the Church in moving out of a situation in which the pattern of worship is pliant and free under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit and with each believer making a contribution as it seems good to him (with all its attendant perils)... into an area of experience that comes with reorganization and development and where the worship (though no less Spirit inspired and real) will be offered according to recognized '*canons*'.⁵

Even during the period of New Testament writing, there is the beginning of structured worship as the Church seeks to worship in 'spirit and in truth' which will lead on to liturgical worship. Such worship is not based upon the prescriptive rules and regulations of the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple which have been fulfilled in Christ, but upon principles enunciated by himself. These principles fit the developing Synagogue pattern of prayer, praise and preaching to which are added the dominical sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper (or Holy Communion).

5 R Martin *Worship in the Early Church* (1964) p 137

4 The Early Fathers

There is no doubt that during the apostolic period, the 'signs of an apostle' were wrought in many places. Nor is there any doubt from the story of the early church that such signs disappeared after the age of the apostles. B B Warfield writes: 'There is little or no evidence for miracle-working during the first fifty years of the post-apostolic Church...'⁶

Bettenson commenting on the ministry of Clement of Rome whose Epistle to the Corinthian Church has been generally dated between 90 and 100 AD says this of the epistle:

For us the importance of the epistle lies in the picture it presents of the Roman Church at the end of the first century. A comparison of Clement [of Rome] with the other apostolic fathers reveals a wide variety of types of thought and ways of life in the Early Church... [In the Roman Church] we find no ecstasies, no miraculous gifts of the Spirit, no demonology, no preoccupation with an imminent Second Coming. The Church has settled down in the world and is going about its task soberly, discreetly and advisedly.⁷

But to what has it settled down? The Church possessed the LXX and a number of apostolic writings which would be recognized as the New Testament part of the canon of Scripture. The gospel was proclaimed and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper were strongly emphasized. Baptismal discipline was also exercised strictly and to be a member of any profession which had either idolatrous or immoral associations was to be excluded. In simple terms, the Church instead of conforming itself to the Graeco-Roman culture, stood within it, but as a separate entity.

It is worthwhile to reflect on what this meant for Christians of that time. Michael Green in his work *Evangelism in the Early Church* illustrates this:

It was not only in public life that Christians excited so much suspicion and hostility. Imagine what it would have been like in a family where one member was a Christian married to a pagan. Tertullian graphically describes a divided house and gives us a vivid insight both into the problems of a Christian wife and into what the husband must have thought of his wife's Christian activities... Harnack made an interesting study [of the] awareness among pagans, that Christians constitute a '*tertium genus*' a third type of

6 B B Warfield *Counterfeit Miracles* (London: Banner of Truth Trust 1972)

7 H Bettenson *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: OUP 1976) p 2

person in the world alongside Romans and Jews.⁸

This separation is seen as the Church celebrates the Lord's Supper or Eucharist on the Lord's Day. The Christians meet to break bread and confess their sins. Justin Martyr (c150 AD) says that the Church gathered and, led by a President, the service begins with reading from the Apostles, or writings of the Prophets, 'as long as time permits', and this is followed by a sermon from the President. Prayer is then offered, the bread and wine mixed with water. Thanksgiving is offered and the Communion eaten and drunk. By this time the shape of the liturgy is developing in the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the Sacrament.

5 The Problem of the Middle Ages

Sufficient has been said at this point to demonstrate to some degree the nature of structured worship based on biblical revelation. Time and space forbid us to trace the Church through its tortuous path once Constantine had changed its status in the East and Charlemagne's influence had been felt in the West. The Eastern Church with its Erastian relationship to the State gave way in the West under the development of feudalism to claim through Gregory VII both temporal and spiritual authority. This together with the rise of scholasticism synthesizing Christian doctrine and Greek philosophy largely closed the door on worship 'in spirit and in truth'. Green comments:

In general, religion seems to have become more mechanistic than it had once been. There was what may be called a 'penny in the slot' attitude towards the mass. Anecdotes and wills show clearly enough that many laymen believed that they could make their eucharistic prayers more efficacious simply by multiplying them... and less and less emphasis was placed on... penitence... and more and more on the mechanical... pardon which the payment of money secured.⁹

In that situation, preaching had inevitably fallen into disuse and consequently there was widespread ignorance of the Bible not only amongst the laity but the clergy also. Worship must go hand in hand with preaching and the liturgy must reflect the biblical truths which are learnt from the Word of God. By that standard the Church in the West was both liturgically and pastorally in trouble. But the rebirth of scholarship in the Renaissance turned the minds of many scholars to the study of the ancient texts.

8 M Green *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1977) p 41

9 V H H Green *Renaissance and Reformation* (London: Edward Arnold 1974) p 113

6 Cranmer and the Development of Common Prayer

It is impossible to separate Cranmer from the development of common prayer in the English Church. Like Tyndale, whose linguistic gifts were used to translate the truths of God's word into English and so to bring men's minds to an understanding of the Scriptures, Cranmer's gifts were to bring the truths of Scripture and the ancient liturgies into a common prayer form. Cranmer's approach which he sets out in the Prefaces, 'Concerning the Services of the Church' and 'Of Ceremonies' may be analysed into five areas:¹⁰

1. *Preservation*: Cranmer's aim was to preserve whatever was ancient provided it was in agreement with the Scriptures. 'Where the old may well be used, there they cannot reasonably reprove the old only for their age without betraying their own folly'.¹¹

2. *Simplification*: To remove rites and ceremonies in order to make the reading of Holy Scripture more complete and continuous.

3. *Purification*: A study of the Roman Breviary, Missal and Manual will demonstrate the multiplicity of errors judged by biblical standards.

4. *Translation*: The great bulk of the services in Latin were not understood by the laity (many of the more ignorant clergy did not understand either). It was an exotic language for worship by the English people. That is not to decry the study of Latin and its use by scholars. It is to condemn the use of any language not readily understood by the people. The principles which Tyndale worked by in translation were the principles which governed the liturgical work of Cranmer.

5. *Unity*: Rome had many variant services and Cranmer pointed out, and I paraphrase him, that it took more time to find the place in the service book than it did to use the actual service! *The English Prayer Book* united the English speaking people throughout the country in the common worship of Almighty God according to the principles of the Bible, 'in spirit and in truth'.

Unlike Tyndale, Cranmer's theological development was slow and painstaking. There is a very marked development in the Archbishop's theological understanding. Humanist teaching had sent Cranmer to the Bible but it was not simply to biblical facts for these were not in dispute. It

10 Bishop Drury *Through the Prayer Book* (The listing follows the bishop's outline)

11 Cranmer *Book of Common Prayer* (1662)

was a method of interpretation which rejected the allegorizing of the Schoolmen for grammatical, historical and contextual considerations. It was the new hermeneutic of the sixteenth century. For Cranmer this was no mere intellectual exercise which seems to have been more the case with Erasmus. This was study born of necessity of having to make judgments in controverted issues. But Cranmer was no iconoclast. Cranmer's knowledge of the fathers of the Church was second to none. His view was that much of the doctrine of the Reformation had been held at least germinally by the Early Church. Cranmer writes: All the contentions which the old fathers had with heretics was for the Scriptures... but for things which are not contained in the Scriptures, they never accused any man of heresy.¹²

With this high view of Scripture, it is logical that Cranmer would wish to disseminate the Scriptures as widely as possible. And this forms the basis for his work of liturgical revision. With a Bible in English in every parish church, the ignorance of the people was to be dispelled by the systematic reading of the Scriptures through the Church's year.¹³ Cranmer was restoring an order to what had become very muddled in the multitude of service books of the Middle Ages. Cranmer wrote in the Preface to the 1549 Prayer Book:

For the (ancient fathers) so ordered the matter that the whole bible... should be read over once every year intending thereby that the clergy... should be stirred up to godliness themselves and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine...¹⁴

If the authority of Scripture was Cranmer's first shift in his doctrinal understanding, the second major shift which affected liturgical revision came with his understanding of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. Cranmer studied long and hard, examining the Epistles of St Paul and the writings of the early fathers. He came to the conclusion that Luther was right and Rome was wrong which meant that from biblical principles the liturgy of the Roman Church was in serious disarray. This was clearly evidenced by the sale of indulgences which had been the trigger for Martin Luther's protest.

But if there was to be reform in the understanding of the authority of Scripture and if the doctrine of justification by grace through faith was to be clearly taught, there would need to be a transformation of the liturgy to express these doctrinal truths. Cranmer following Luther's teaching, had

12 P E Hughes *The Theology of the English Reformers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1965) p 31

13 We may note Tyndale's earnest desire following Martin Luther that the plough boy should sing the scriptures.

14 Cranmer *Book of Common Prayer* 1552

rediscovered Paul's doctrine that human merit was not the key to acceptance with God. And if human merit is excluded then the key is to be found in the grace of God, which means that acceptance must be by faith that unites to Christ in his death and resurrection. Paradoxically, while works are not meritorious, they are the demonstration of a new creation, motivated by loving gratitude. Packer writes:

...as Cranmer grasped only evangelical worship can be edifying. For edification means the creating and deepening of Christian experience within the Church's fellowship. The sole means whereby the Spirit of God produces Christian experience is the gospel of Christ, declared audibly in Word and visibly in sacraments. Christian worship... must embody the gospel and be so designed as to lead worshippers into a renewed experience of its powers.¹⁵

How then did Cranmer endeavour to bring this biblical faith into the liturgy? The answer is through a threefold cycle which is repeated in all the main Prayer Book services. That threefold cycle follows the normative biblical pattern of sin, grace and faith. So the standards of our worship are what we believe, for worship can never be neutral. In the Church of England, it has never been the *Articles of Faith* alone which have formed the confessional norm of the Church. It has always been the *Articles* and the *Prayer Book* taken together and interpreted in the light of each other. These ideas are expressed in the Thirty-nine (Forty-two) Articles, the Homily of Salvation and in the liturgical services, especially the service of Holy Communion of 1552. The point that we are making is that the Confession of Faith (doctrine) and the worship of the church (liturgy) must coincide otherwise there is confusion. Packer writes aptly:

It is necessary to insist that any proposed new forms of worship must submit to the doctrinal test and to be clear in our minds that no compensating excellencies (including spontaneity) that they may prove to have can make up for doctrinal deficiencies.¹⁶

7 Cranmer and the Communion Service

It was in the service of Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper that the struggle over doctrine took place. By the sixteenth century, Rome taught and this was confirmed by the seventh session of the Council of Trent, *de sacramentis in genere*, that through the sacraments of the Church true righteousness begins, or is increased; or if lost is repaired; that the sacraments confer grace always upon all who receive them, unless they

15 J I Packer *The Gospel in the Prayer Book* (London: CBRP 1966) p 2

16 J I Packer in Beckwith ed p 76

place an obstacle in the way. And this grace is conferred *ex opere operato*. Horton Davies writing in his work, *Worship and Theology in England* says: '...nowhere was disagreement greater than in the interpretation of the meaning of the Catholic Mass, Lutheran or Anglican Holy Communion'.¹⁷ Cranmer was involved in the heart of this dispute in England with the publication of the First Prayer Book of Edward VI in 1549. Whatever the motives, Cranmer had attempted to retain as much as possible of the old rite but the service found few friends. It was too Catholic for the leading Reformers and too Protestant for the Catholics. Bishop Hooper regarded it as very defective and the princess Mary Tudor refused its use in her private chapel. It became clear that a new Prayer Book Service of Holy Communion was needed which would express the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Cranmer was now forced by circumstances to make changes and to depart from the traditional shape of the liturgy. Horton Davies says:

The most radical revision and reconstruction was undertaken on the order for 'The Lordes Supper or Holy Communion'... there was a change in the title and that 'commonly called the mass' was eliminated. The term 'offertory' was removed and the terms 'table' and 'Lord's Table' were substituted for 'altar'... The rubrics were radically changed.¹⁸

Such a newly cast rite has brought much obloquy upon Cranmer's head. But these criticisms fail to take into account the controlling principles which governed his revision. This was the necessity to express the authority of Scripture as the norm for all doctrine and liturgy and therefore to bring the Lord's Supper into cohesion with the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. This was not Cranmer inventing new forms of worship but applying all that he had learnt from his biblical and theological studies to draft a reformed and evangelical service of Holy Communion.

Dom Gregory Dix, a perceptive but hostile witness, says of this rite:

As a piece of liturgical craftsmanship it is in the first rank... it is not a disordered attempt at a catholic rite, but the only effective attempt ever made to give liturgical expression to the doctrine of justification by faith alone.¹⁹

¹⁷ Horton Davies *Worship and Theology in England* (Oxford 1970) p 76

¹⁸ Horton Davies p 204

¹⁹ Dom Gregory Dix *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: A & C Black 1945) see the section from p 640

That is praise indeed but well merited. All Cranmer's services have to some degree or other the sin, grace, faith cycle. In the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, which a Roman bishop recently wished were in the Roman tradition, both services in 1552 start with a penitential section, confession, absolution and arising from there, praise in the Psalms. This is followed by the declaration of faith in the Creed, followed by prayer. In the order of Holy Communion this becomes even clearer.

The threefold cycle is repeated three times during the course of the service. The first cycle begins with the Collect for Purity and runs through to the Prayer for the Church Militant with the focus on the Law, the Gospel and the Nicene Creed. The second cycle begins with the Exhortations and rises to its climax in the Tersanctus. It begins with the acknowledgement of sin, 'Ye that do truly and earnestly repent...' and concludes with praise to the Thrice Holy Triune God. The cycle is then repeated beginning with the beautiful prayer of Humble Access, 'We do not presume to come to this Thy Table trusting in our own righteousness...' leading to the administration of the elements and rising to the climax of praise in the Gloria. Surely, a much more fitting place than early in the ASB service? The Blessing which includes the Peace of God is right for the dismissal of the congregation as it goes out into the world, 'in love and charity with its neighbour, intending to lead a new life'; the life of the obedience of faith in Christ.

It is both interesting and instructive to note how Cranmer changed the old medieval pattern of prayer for Church, Consecration and Oblation which had been traditionally joined together. Why did he change them? The answer is clear when it is seen that in so doing, the finished perfect work of Christ is kept separate from the work of the Church and the personal works of the believer. The latter are seen as a consequence of faith in Christ.

These were the biblical standards that Cranmer set for the Church of England. The revisions of Elizabeth I, James II and Charles II did not basically alter the doctrinal and liturgical standards that Cranmer laid down and his work remains the benchmark for the English Church.

8 Modern Versions

The Church of England has been involved in liturgical revision of one sort or another for the last thirty years. In one sense this was inevitable, as no liturgical work, however well prepared and produced can maintain the *status quo* indefinitely. The principle of liturgical revision was certainly not wrong in itself and the fact that in principle, if not in practice, *The*

Book of Common Prayer remains the standard by which all services are judged. Dr Roger Beckwith, who acted as the chairman for the Society's Liturgical Revision Committee, wrote in the Preface of *An English Prayer Book*:

The Alternative Service Book 1980 as its title indicates, was intended as an alternative and not as a replacement to the 1662 Prayer Book. The latter remains the permanent, official standard of Anglican worship, as the Worship and Doctrine measure of 1974 (now the legal basis of Anglican worship) makes quite clear. The Measure adds that *The Book of Common Prayer*, alongside the Creeds which it contains and the 39 Articles which are appended to it, is one of the standards of Anglican doctrine, subject only to Holy Scripture itself. Alternative services should conform to these norms but they are not norms themselves.²⁰

The fact is that liturgical revision has sent some very conflicting signals to the membership of the national Church. *The Alternative Service Book*, described by one diocesan, who shall be nameless, as 'an elephantine production', has largely returned to the medieval pattern that unless you know your way in the book, it takes more time to find the service than it does to use it. Originally, *The Alternative Service Book* was licensed for use for ten years but this period was extended by a further ten so that the year 2000 should see new services for use by the Church. The question is what will those services be? To what patterns will they conform? Are we to be swamped by politically correct language which makes nonsense of reality? Are we to conform to the strident element of the feminist movement with Mother God and Christa? I only use those terms under protest. The question is, how shall we return to a flexible common prayer based on the doctrinal standards of the Church in modern English following the principles that Cranmer used? This was the aim of the compilers of *An English Prayer Book*. It did not set out to replace 1662 but to act as a modern supplement to it. It intended to set out the same doctrinal standards and the Thirty-nine Articles were bound in the same book. The original Articles were transliterated into modern English to bring these standards back to the attention of the congregations. To quote Dr Beckwith again:

An English Prayer Book aims to show in practical terms, what such a change of policy might mean. Though using the modern language of the *ASB* and including many detailed features of the *ASB* where these have proved valuable, it aims throughout to give clear expression to the doctrine of the Prayer Book and to show proper

20 Beckwith *An English Prayer Book* (Oxford: OUP 1994) Preface pp 7-8

respect to its liturgical usages. It restores the doctrinal items which are conspicuously absent from the *ASB* (the catechism, the 39 Articles and the Athanasian Creed), it conforms to the calendar of the Prayer Book and to its incomparable set of collects, and in many other respects it attempts to bring the *ASB* closer to the Prayer Book, where there had been no adequate reason for moving away.²¹

In brief, the object is to return the Church to a common prayer based on the Bible where intelligent and profound worship is offered to Almighty God, where sinners are humbled and where the people of God are built up in the holy faith once delivered to the saints. Such worship would set the scene for expository preaching based on the sound principles of grammatical and historical exegesis. This is the true area of church growth; quality first and quantity second!

What are the criteria to establish whether or not this has been achieved in the publication of *An English Prayer Book*? I would suggest that it is not whether or not the book is accepted by the Liturgical Commission where it is presently being studied at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury. That is not to say that I should not be delighted if it received some limited acceptance. However, I should wish the book to be judged by two criteria which would bring it into line with the biblical injunction of 'in spirit and in truth' and I am indebted to Dr Packer for them. The first is that they should not contain less of the gospel than 1662:

Our present services (1662) set forth the gospel in two ways. First they take us into a world of the gospel – the world of spiritual reality, in which God's wrath and mercy, man's sin and salvation, the atonement, God's promises, remission of sins, union with Christ, new birth, the war with Satan, the Spirit's ministry and the hope of glory are the main facts on which to focus. The 1662 services are full of these things. Second, they embody both the content of the gospel and the experience it evokes by the constant use of the sin, grace, faith sequence of themes as a structural principle.²²

The second is that new services should contain more of the gospel than 1662 does:

This is possible! Stronger notes of joy in Christ's victory and the Christian hope for instance, and more stress on the prospect of Christ's return would make our already rich services richer still, and new services supplying this lack would be most welcome.²³

21 Beckwith p 9

22 J I Packer *Gospel in the Prayer Book* (London: CBRP 1966) p 8

23 Packer p 8

Churchman

These two objects have been our intention. It was our belief that a statement was necessary that the Church of England is a doctrinal church with a liturgical base. That base needed to be updated in its language but not in its doctrine. The Church of England should speak the standard language of the people, which is one of Cranmer's principles, so that the ignorance of the people might be dispelled in the light of the proclamation 'in spirit and in truth' of the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

DAVID STREATER is the Director of Church Society