

Preface to the printed edition

By Roger Beckwith, Warden of Latimer House

An English Prayer Book is an unofficial but (its compilers hope) a constructive contribution to the revision of the *Alternative Service Book 1980*, a revision which is scheduled to take place in the year 2000. The Liturgical Commission, which has the responsibility of making official proposals about revision, has been giving somewhat conflicting signals as to how it thinks this work should be done. In its reports *Lent, Holy Week, Easter* (1986) and *The Promise of his Glory* (1990) it seemed to feel free to move a further stage away from traditional Anglican worship, beyond what its predecessors had done in producing the *ASB*, and in its report *Patterns for Worship* (1989) it even seemed to be moving away from liturgical worship altogether. Again, in its report *The Worship of the Church* (1991) it spoke of the possibility of replacing the *ASB* by a range of books rather than by a single book (shades of the Middle Ages!), and, at the same time, of making concessions to various fashionable cults of the day. On the other hand, in its more recent report *The Renewal of Common Prayer* (1993), it has clearly acknowledged the Anglican ideal of common prayer, or prayer for use by everybody, and the important place of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) in maintaining and restoring it. This is a trend in the Commission's thinking which the compilers of the present work would like to encourage.

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 are not norms themselves.

One day the Church of England may come back to the question of revising the 1662 Prayer Book, but that lies well in the future. If the Church does, it will have to give careful attention to the cautious principles for liturgical revision laid down in its own Preface, which are designed to ensure that, with any necessary updating, the book remains recognizably the same, still reflecting the liturgical mastery of Cranmer and grounded on the pure teaching of the Bible. But that is also a task for another day. At present, we are concerned with revising the *ASB*.

The *Alternative Service Book 1980* was the culmination of a process of liturgical revision beginning soon after the Second World War, in which the first publication was the Liturgical Commission's report *Prayer Book Revision in the Church of England* (1957). It was followed by three series of Alternative Services, in paperback and pamphlet form (the third of the series being in a modern idiom of English), and then by the *ASB*, which combined a selection of the services into a bound volume. Remarkably enough, the principles on which the Liturgical Commission worked in producing this report and these series of services were not the same as those embodied in the legislation (drawn up by the Church Assembly and General Synod) which afterwards authorized the services for use. The Commission told us that it wished to set the *Book of Common Prayer* aside as a standard for worship and a starting point for revision, and that in matters of doctrine it wished to pursue 'studied ambiguity'. The greatest opportunity which the coming revision of the *ASB* offers is to introduce consistency into the liturgical process, by recognizing that the *ASB*, though different from the Prayer Book, must conform to the doctrine of the Prayer Book, and that in liturgical matters it ought to show due regard to the fact that the Prayer Book will continue in use, and continue to be the standard. It is hoped that the present Liturgical Commission, with its quite altered membership, will be willing to reopen these basic questions, and to give different answers to them from those given by its predecessors.

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 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.

We recognize that there is a widespread desire for services in modern English that adhere to the biblical teaching of the Prayer Book (a desire which the *ASB* has excited but not fulfilled). We earnestly hope that our work will be accepted as a worthwhile contribution to the forthcoming revision of the *ASB*.

Finally, the compilers would like to acknowledge their consciousness that many faults may be found in their work: they express their hope that nevertheless it may be accepted by Almighty God, and in a small way that it

may bring glory to him and edification to his church and people.