

The New Communion Services

David Phillips

In the process of liturgical revision at General Synod the new Communion services have now almost reached their final form. Although the Eucharistic and Communion prayers have yet to be approved the rest of the service is complete. It is likely that the whole package will be authorised for use from Easter 2000. The Liturgical Commission is keen to stress, regularly, that the use of the Book of Common Prayer is not affected by what is happening.

Two orders of service are proposed, each in two forms of language.

- Order 1 is a more developed form of Rite A in the ASB. It is called by some the ‘ecumenical’ shape and takes its lead from the work of Gregory Dix.
- Order 1(a) is a traditional language version of Order 1, therefore embracing most of Rite B from the ASB.
- Order 2 was at first described as ‘The Prayer Book as Used’. This uses BCP texts in BCP language but has various additions and permissive rubrics. It is possible from someone to construct a watered down 1928 Prayer Book Communion service.
- Order 2(a) follows almost exactly the Book of Common Prayer but is supposedly in ‘contemporary English’.

Before these four services is an ‘Order of Preparation’ which can be used in private devotion or public worship. At the end is a substantial number of alternative texts and seasonal material.

This article is only concerned with the two contemporary language rites Order 1 and Order 2(a). With a few notable exceptions they use internationally agreed English texts which are often more poetic and eloquent than in the ASB but also motivated by political correctness. Some of these changes in language will be the most niggling to congregations that have used and got used to the ASB.

Order 1/1(a)

The people and priest -
greet each other in the Lord’s name
confess their sins and are assured of God’s forgiveness
keep silence and pray a collect
proclaim and respond to the word of God
pray for the Church and the world
exchange the Peace
prepare the table
pray the thanksgiving eucharistic prayer
break the bread
receive Holy Communion
depart with God’s blessing

The main development in **Order 1** from Rite A in the ASB is the clear four-fold structure that Gregory Dix claimed to find in ancient texts and which has so dominated liturgical revision around the world in the last 50

years. In the outline of the order and the titles used, the four-fold action can be seen: taking (prepare the table), giving thanks, breaking, giving.

In addition to this development and the push for more 'inclusive language', there is a further slight shift towards a more sacramental view of Communion although this is most evident in the supplementary material rather than the main text.

Order 2(a) was granted by way of concession because a large number of people requested it and there was a fear that we might vote against the rest of the package if we were not appeased. This provides a reformed, Cranmerian order in more modern English. In fact in places the language is curious. At several points the Bishop of St Albans, chairman of the revision committee, hinted at the fact that reformed theology cannot be expressed in modern English because it is a product of the 16th Century. This reflects a commonly held view of language and theology which many hold today.

This service deliberately includes almost all the elements of the BCP service omitting only the exhortations and some of the offertory sentences. There is a new cut-down version of the sadly neglected third exhortation and the full text can be found after Order 1.

Unfortunately the service is a compromise in terms of language. Some of its texts, such as the Creed, are internationally agreed forms. They are therefore 'contemporary'. Others, such as the Confession, are a modest updating of the BCP. Therefore the service feels inconsistent in language. Texts such as the confession will seem weak to those who are used to the BCP but quaint to those used to contemporary language. Though we pressed hard at General Synod for a more consistent text we were not able to get all that we desired. In the spirit of post-modern liturgy congregations may opt to use a mixture of contemporary and traditional language texts. Therefore if everyone is familiar with the BCP Creed you may use this with integrity in the contemporary language service.

It should be noted that at this stage the 'Prayer of Consecration' and 'Post-Communion Prayer' have not yet been settled, they will come later but there will be important issues, not least whether 'satisfaction' is deemed an acceptable term today. (See Cross†Way No. 68 Spring 1998).

Order 2/2(a)

The people and the priest -
prepare for worship
hear and respond to the Commandments of God
keep silence and pray a collect
proclaim and respond to the word of God
prepare the table
pray for the Church and the world
confess their sins and are assured of God's forgiveness
praise God for his goodness
pray the consecration prayer
receive Holy Communion
respond with thanksgiving
depart with God's blessing