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AN ANGLICAN PRAYER BOOK (2008)

By Robin G. Jordan

As the Episcopalians who had left The Episcopal Church for other Anglican jurisdictions began to realize that The Episcopal Church was not going to retreat from its moral and theological innovations and that the Anglican Communion was not going to discipline The Episcopal Church, those who were using the services of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer began to perceive a need for an alternative service book in contemporary English. They had left The Episcopal Church because of what they viewed as the denomination's apostasy and heresy and yet they continued to use the denomination's service book and hymnal, primarily because they were accustomed to these worship resources. The time had come for them to shake the dust from their feet and move on.

Like the U.S. 1928 Book of Common Prayer, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer dilutes a number of core biblical doctrines but to a much greater extent. A significant amount of material in the book is open to a liberal or revisionist interpretation. Like the 1928 Prayer Book, the 1979 Prayer Book does not conform to the doctrine of the Anglican formularies—the Thirty-Nine Articles, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and the 1661 Ordinal. Both the U.S. 1928 Prayer Book and the 1979 Prayer Book are fairly Catholic in tone. For example, they teach that the Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is a sacrifice—rather than a meal upon a sacrifice, as do the Articles and the Prayer Book. A number of evangelicals, however, continue to use the 1979 Prayer Book because the book's services are in contemporary English and they have become desensitized to the book's doctrinal shortcomings.

For evangelicals in the Church of England who are not familiar with the history of The Episcopal Church, the more conservative of the denomination's evangelicals succeeded from the church in the 1870s due to the growth and increased influence of Tractarianism in the church and the incipient Catholic doctrines of the 1789 Book of Common Prayer. Those who remained in The Episcopal Church became Broad Church liberals. By 1900 evangelicalism had disappeared from The Episcopal Church. Anglo-Catholicism and Broad Church liberalism became the dominant theological streams in The Episcopal Church. The denomination experienced a revival of evangelicalism in the 1970s in part due to the influence of the Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry and in part due to the charismatic renewal movement. The new evangelicals are more charismatic than confessional, sit loosely to the doctrine of the Anglican formularies, and are much more tolerant of Catholic doctrines and practices than the old evangelicals.

In 2006 the Prayer Book Society of the USA collaborated with the Anglican Mission in the Americas (AMiA), the oldest non-Episcopalian Anglican entity in North America affiliated with a global South Province, to produce *Services in Contemporary English from The Book of Common Prayer of 1662*. "The green book," as it was called in the AMiA, was intended for restricted trial use in AMiA parishes and missions for a limited period. The services of the green book, however, were far from contemporary language versions of the services of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer as Dr. Peter Toon, then President of the Prayer Book Society, described them in the society's journal, *Mandate*. The green book drew heavily from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, the 1928 Proposed English Prayer Book, and the 1962 Canadian Prayer Book. The green book's The Order for the Holy Communion incorporated liturgical elements (e.g., the Benedictus, an invocation of the Holy Spirit, an oblation of the bread and wine before the distribution of the Communion, the Agnes Dei, the reservation of the sacrament) that are not found in the 1662 Holy Communion service and express a doctrine of the Lord's Supper significantly different from that of the 1662 service. The green book's The Public Baptism of Infants and The Order of Confirmation teaches the medieval

belief that confirmation is a sacrament in which the gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred by the imposition of episcopal hands upon the confirmand. This is in sharp contrast to the 1662 Order of Confirmation which is a catechetical rite and in which the confirmand make a personal profession of faith before the church and the bishop prays that the Holy Spirit will strengthen the confirmand and lays hands upon him as gesture of goodwill and concern. [1] Among the green book's other flaws were awkward and poorly chosen language, versions of the New Testament canticles ill-suited for recitation or singing, and a lack of the kind of flexibility needed for the North American mission field [2].

Conservative evangelicals in the AMiA did not like the green book because it was not what its title said that it was—services in contemporary English from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Anglo-Catholics did not like the green book because they were expecting a liturgy closer to that of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.

Early in February 2008 the Prayer Book Society and the AMiA released *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008). *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) is basically *Services in Contemporary English from The Book of Common Prayer of 1662* (2006) with some important revisions and additions. The Order for the Holy Communion is completely redone. The revised Holy Communion service emphasizes even more the Catholic view of the Holy Communion as a sacrifice. The new rite of Baptism combines infant and adult baptism into one rite as in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. The expanded Catechism and the revised Order of Confirmation move away from the position of the 1928 Proposed English Prayer Book that the *gift* of the Holy Spirit is given by the laying on of the bishop's hands and adopt the 1928 Book of Common Prayer's position that the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit are conferred by the bishop with the laying on of hands. In any case the doctrine of confirmation of *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) is not that of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Some of the language problems in *Services in Contemporary English from The Book of Common Prayer of 1662* (2006) were corrected; other problems were not. [3] A late evening service, a form for the visitation of the sick, a form for family prayer, a daily lectionary, and a contemporary English version of the Thirty-Nine Articles were added to the book.

An Anglican Prayer Book (2008) does attempt to retain the eloquence of the traditional English service books. A number of years ago Dr. Toon put considerable work into translating the 1928 Book of Common Prayer into good contemporary liturgical English. *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) draws extensively upon his earlier work. As in the case of the traditional English service books, all the services that a church needs for its worship, baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals, and ordinations are contained in one book.

In the Preface to *Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) senior AMiA Bishops Chuck Murphy III and John Rodgers Jr. commend *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) as a part of the renewing of the Anglican Way in North America. They go on to state that, while the book was prepared for the use of the AMiA, they expect that the services in the book “will also be used by other Anglicans and Episcopalians both in North America and elsewhere in the English-speaking world.” Already the book is used in a number of Anglican jurisdictions in North America albeit only by individual churches. No jurisdiction has so far adopted it as their official service book.

The reaction of evangelicals in the AMiA to *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) has been mixed. Some are not enchanted with the book but use it because the AMiA collaborated in its production. Others use services from *An English Prayer Book* (1994), *Common Worship* (2000), and other sources that contain contemporary English versions of the services of the 1662 Prayer Book. *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) has received a warmer welcome from traditionalist Anglicans largely because of the book's Catholic doctrinal content and other similarities to the 1928 Prayer Book.

As a confessional Anglican I do not share Bishops Murphy and Rodgers' rosy assessment of *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008). *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) is just the latest American Prayer Book that departs from the Anglican beliefs of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer—from genuine Anglicanism.

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Endnotes:

[1] J. I. Packer, *I Want to Be a Christian*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), 149-150.

[2] The United States and Canada form together the seventh largest mission field and the largest English speaking mission field in the world. In 2001 roughly 41% of the population in the United States was churched but the percentage of Americans regularly attending a church has been shrinking.

[3] A more detailed analysis of the services of *An Anglican Prayer Book* (2008) from Morning and Evening Prayer through Confirmation may be found at: <http://exploringananglicanprayerbook.blogspot.com/>