



THE LAMP



"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119)

IN DEFENCE OF SET FORMS IN COMMON PRAYER

(A sermon preached at St. James' Cathedral, Toronto on October 14, 2012, by Dr. Ephraim Radner, Professor of Historical Theology at Wycliffe College.)

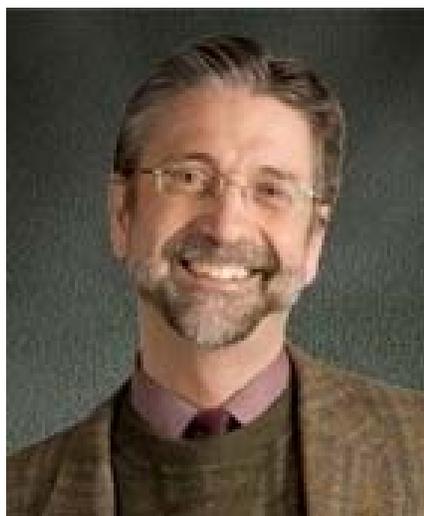
A sermon on the BCP is almost a self-contradiction; and might immediately be thought thin gruel – like going to a lecture on the joys of model ship construction. Sermons are in any case usually about things we can get our teeth into – ideas, propositions, doctrines. Oddly enough, Anglicanism has very few of these at the center of its life: no voluminous Confessions; no magisterial theologians to pore over; no dogmatics to argue about, and to preach on point by point.

Instead, we have a Book of Common Prayer. Compiled, edited, and rendered into English in the mid 16th century by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, the BCP became the single most identifying and formative tool of the English Reformation and subsequent Anglicanism. Revised here and there, its 1662 edition has itself been or has formed the primary basis of every Anglican Prayer Book around the world, up to the recent present. So we have the BCP: which means we pray. We are *doing* something, as it were, not thinking something or thinking out something.

Now I can try to explain a little *what* we are doing. But, it's like talking about singing. It's fairly pointless unless you sing or take in the singing of someone else. The good part of it is that we *are* singing here, as it were; that is, we *are* praying. So whatever it is I have to say, it will speak to a fact we share, not to someone's idea about something none of us knows.

So let us start right there: what *are* we doing, now?

We are gathered to celebrate the divine life shared – the life, death, and resurrection – of Jesus Christ. We are also celebrating the Book of Common Prayer. The only reason we would do this, here in this cathedral, is because the BCP itself is somehow a gracious servant of the life of Christ. For which we give thanks; and whose service of Christ's life we are called ourselves to cherish, to uphold, to further. The BCP is the servant of our life in Christ, then. How so?



Revd. Dr. Ephraim Radner

What we are doing is an activity, a work. Not a work for which we receive a reward, to be sure; but a work nonetheless: liturgy, literally, is the "*work* of the people". And the BCP is the framework for this work. Let me divide it neatly into three actions.

The first one, we may call *Exposure*. You could also call this "offering", as in self-offering. But I want to make clear that the praying we are doing in the BCP is not the offering of a gift to God: it is the baring of our souls to God's own self-giving to us. The "oblation of ourselves" that the BCP mentions as being so central to our worship, is one of exposed proximity – of coming to stand before something in all of our nakedness. Before what? Before God of course: as in the Epistle to the Hebrews, here we draw ourselves near to "the throne of grace". And drawing near, we are being laid bare; for "before him" – the living and active Word – "no creature is hidden", our hearts are uncovered, the deepest ligatures of our beings are unraveled, and the hidden brought into the light. We are laid bare, just so that the Word might do its work on us.

What the BCP gives us, first and foremost of all, are the words of Scripture before which we stand, exposed. The words of the Word – psalms, the law, the prophets, the Gospels. These are just the things that Jesus referred to with the disciples after meeting some of them on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection: “these are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled” – and so he taught them (Luke 24:27, 44f.). Cranmer’s systematic lectionary for the people, around which the BCP was structured and through which daily and weekly the entire Bible was read in public, was truly a “reforming” enterprise that changed the way Christians related to the Scriptures. There it was: the words of the Word spoken to all, each and every day, every week, from Genesis to Revelation; and we standing before them, opened! And not only the lectionary; the entire BCP, in its prayers and canticles, is suffused with Scriptural quotation, reference, and allusion. “You are turning the Bible into your own prayers!” the Puritans complained, worried that the distinction between God’s words and our own was somehow getting lost in this steady tide of Scripture pounding against our spirits. But that was just the point: the words of the Word must become our words too.

So we come to our second action in the BCP: *Receiving*. The Scriptures of God – the Word spoken to us – is not only spoken but is somehow made a part of us, somehow penetrates within. That is at the center of the BCP’s action. We sit and listen; we kneel and repeat; we stand and utter forth – these words, over and over. That is the effect of the formal ordering of BCP worship in its “iterated” force: bit by bit, over time, the words crack open the conscience and the mind and heart; weekly, yearly, over a lifetime – for the BCP is a life-time’s work, not a moment’s – the ordering of time finally drills itself into a focus on the one act of self-giving that *is* Jesus Christ: the Holy Communion. Here, not simply is the Last Supper remembered, and a few words from the Gospels repeated, but the entire Scriptures are summarized from creation to fall to promise to incarnation and sacrifice to resurrection and Spirit, to Church and eternity.

And we should be clear: one *does* Communion; one does it for the sake of receiving the Word’s own offering to us. One exposes oneself to the Word; one lets it make its way within us, and then, only then, does one receive it, like the ground that is prepared for the sowing of God’s seed (Mark 4). It’s a wonderful reality: the Word in its words prepares us for its own reception.

And so to the third action of the BCP’s worship that serves the life of Christ in our midst: *Conforming*. This is perhaps the greatest challenge to our age’s mindset, but also the greatest gift. “Conformity”: the word means to take on the form of another, or to take this shape on *together with* another person. It’s a word with a very specific set of connotations for Anglicans in the late 16th and later 17th centuries: conforming to the laws, to the usage of the Church in worship, yes; but more deeply, conforming to the words of the Word, and doing so *together* – being “conformist” in a modern sense, “like everyone else”, but actually *with* everyone else: living in the Word *with* others.

The BCP doesn’t itself actually use the word “conform” in this regard (although writers like Coverdale and then Hooker do). But it does speak very frequently of two things that often are linked: “gathering together” and using the “forms” of the Prayer Book itself. We are always “formed together”; and that forming is ultimately given in forms of “unity” and “concord” and “peace” and finally, of course, the “form of God”, the servant who is Christ. If everyone is exposed together to the two-edged sword of the Word; if everyone endures it sufficiently together to let it pierce and penetrate, listening to its repeated approaches; if everyone is *thus* one, then together the form of Christ is discerned within the forms of the words of the Word. So that the Lord speaks to the Rich Young Man today, not to me or to you, not just this day or this moment, but to *us*, together, yesterday and today and tomorrow – no one rises up and leaves, or if they do, there is another day, another prayer, another time for the words of the Word – for together then and now and again and again, we listen, we respond, we pray these words, for we are still here for those who could not hear but now return – then, yes, conformation, conformance, becomes a gift of the Lord.

To be sure, this kind of view may lead you, as it does me, to resist multiple revisions of the Prayer Book, or multiple options within it – Form I or Form II, Eucharistic Prayer 4 or 6, A, B, D, and so on. But I actually think that – and history bears this out – there is enormous roominess within the conforming body of Christ. BCP culture over the centuries, as we know, was one of enormous scope in intellectual engagement. Not merely because of the permissiveness of formalism, but because of the fact that the Word is itself, in the words of Gregory the Great, “like a river again, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim”. But we must go to the river together, and delve into its current over the course of our lives.

Anniversary Year Celebrations in the Diocese of Toronto

By Diana Versegny, PBSC Toronto Branch president

Readers of *The Lamp* will remember that the last issue featured a copy of the letter from Archbishop Colin Johnson to all of the parishes in the Diocese of Toronto, inviting them to observe the 50th anniversary of our Canadian BCP. St. James' Cathedral held a special service on October 14, at which Dr. Ephraim Radner preached (his sermon is reprinted in this issue). Here are samples of communications that I have received from other parishes:

- St. Giles' Church in Barrie, which normally uses the BAS almost exclusively, chose to mark Remembrance Day with a sung 1962 BCP Communion service. The incumbent, the Revd. Elizabeth Green, said that this was unanimously felt to be very fitting and appropriate.
- At St. John's Church in Craighurst (one half of the two-point parish of Craighurst and Midhurst), the incumbent, Fr. Nico Montalbetti, said that a special service was held on September 2 to commemorate the first Anglican Eucharist in Canada. During the

service a new altar cloth and candelabra were blessed.

- The rector of Christ Church in Woodbridge, Fr. Mark Stacey, advised me that his parish would be celebrating the 50th anniversary on Advent Sunday, and asked for recommendations for special prayers (I put him in touch with our national Chairman).
- The parish secretary at St. Thomas' Church in Brooklin, Georgeina Knapp, reports: "We will indeed be celebrating our BCP on Dec. 2nd with a service of Evening Prayer. For the past few months we have displayed the BCP poster in our parish hall and our weekly bulletins had mini history lessons of the BCP and a series of "Did you know?" about the contents of the Prayer Book. These were all very well received by both our congregations."
- It was particularly gratifying to hear that St. George's on Yonge St. – formerly St. George's Willowdale – worshipping in a totally reconstructed building in an ultra-modern setting, chose to make their services on September 2 BCP ones, by way of commemorating our Anglican heritage and the first Prayer Book Eucharist in Canada.

A letter from the Revd. Daniel Graves, Priest-in-Charge of Trinity Anglican Church, Bradford

Dear Diana,

Thank you for both of your letters reminding us about the importance of using the Prayer Book and commemorating two very important anniversaries.

On the feast of the Ascension, I had Canon David Neelands with us who officiated at a "period" Communion service. I assisted him in this and we offered a liturgy as close as possible to what a 1662 Communion service might have looked like in a small parish church (we did not offer it with the Office and Litany, though). We were able to borrow the Communion silver from St. Catherine of Alexandria Byzantine Catholic Church (the former Trinity Anglican, Bond Head), which had been used by the Rev. Featherstone Osler, the first resident clergyman in this area (and father of Sir Wm Osler). In fact, Canon Neelands believed it was likely the silver that was used by his ancestors who lived in the area. The silver was of the old Protestant style of cup and plate, so this added a nice touch. He also gave a talk on the history that led to the 1662 settlement and BCP revision. It was a well-attended and appreciated evening.

I should tell you that when I arrived in Bradford, the Prayer Book had essentially been abandoned. I have reinstated it on the first Sunday of every month with a full Communion service. It is our most popular service. We also have Mattins and Evensong, sung, several times a year, and indeed we will do so this Sunday, as the Legion is in attendance for Remembrance Day. I will also be using the BCP Communion service on Christmas Day (with a bit of incense thrown in, as well).

Thank you for all your efforts to encourage the use of our dear Book of Common Prayer. Using it feeds my soul and nurtures my theological reflection, and I know that it does so for others as well.

Yours faithfully, Dan Graves +

ONTARIO REGIONAL CYCLE OF PRAYER, JANUARY-MARCH

(Over the coming months, please remember the following parishes in your prayers. You might consider using for this purpose one of Prayer #8 or #9, found on pages 43 and 44 of the Book of Common Prayer, or the prayer "For the Parish" found on page 736.)

JAN.	6	<i>Epiphany</i>	St. John the Evangelist's Church, Elora
	13	<i>Epiphany I</i>	St. Mark's Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake
	20	<i>Epiphany II</i>	Church of the Resurrection, Toronto
	27	<i>Septuagesima</i>	Little Trinity Church, Toronto
FEB.	3	<i>Sexagesima</i>	St. Luke's Church, Brantford
	10	<i>Quinquagesima</i>	St. Thomas's Church, Toronto
	17	<i>Lent I</i>	St. Barnabas' Church, St. Catharines
	24	<i>Lent II</i>	St. George's Church, Windsor
MAR.	3	<i>Lent III</i>	St. John the Evangelist's Church, Port Hope
	10	<i>Lent IV</i>	St. John's Church, North Bay
	17	<i>Lent V</i>	St. George's Church, London
	24	<i>Palm Sunday</i>	St. Olave's Church, Toronto
	31	<i>Easter</i>	Parishes of PBSC members outside of Ontario

The Prayer Book Society of Canada was founded in 1986 by Anglicans who were alarmed at the erosion of classical Anglican doctrine, worship and spirituality that was proceeding alongside the adoption of new liturgies. The Society's aim is briefly to support the continuing use of the Prayer Book for all who value it as their preferred medium of worship, preserving as it does faithfulness to Holy Scripture and adherence to the orthodox Anglican doctrine of the Christian faith. The Mission Statement of the Society, adopted in 1995, is: "To promote the understanding and use of the Book of Common Prayer as a scriptural system of nurture for life in Christ".

The Society operates on two levels: the national level and the branch level. The National Council is responsible for setting policy and direction for the Society, and for overseeing activities with a national scope. All branch presidents are *ex officio* members of the National Council. The branches are individually responsible for organizing local activities and initiatives in their own geographical areas, in support of the aims and objectives of the Society.

The Ontario Council of PBSC Branches is an informal coalition of branches in southern Ontario, formed in 1994. It serves as a forum for the planning of joint activities, and provides a network of support for the branches. It publishes this newsmagazine, "**The Lamp**", which appears quarterly in the months of March, June, September and December. Opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the Society as a whole. Contributions of articles and news items are welcome, and should be sent to the editor (see opposite).

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