

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER AND THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION NETWORK, 2007: GRATITUDE, CONCERN AND OPPORTUNITY

Before moving into our topic let us note what is said of itself by the Anglican Communion Network at its website: *"We are currently ten dioceses, six convocations and the international conference stretching from coast to coast, border to border. As of January 2007, ACN dioceses and parishes count 200,000 laity and 2,200 clergy in more than 900 congregations, and the number of affiliated parishes grows weekly."* Some congregations are outside The Episcopal Church and in relation to bishops from overseas dioceses as their temporary overseers.

Let us now move directly to answering this question:

What was involved in the adoption by the Council of the Anglican Communion Network on July 31, 2007 of the Theological Statement of the Common Cause, with its commitment to the Formularies of the Church of England in their 1662 form?

In negative terms, the Council of The Anglican Communion Network rejected the Formularies of The Episcopal Church as they stood before the revolution of 1976-1979; but in positive terms the same Council accepted the present Formularies of the Church of England and of other Provinces of the Anglican Communion (e.g., Nigeria and Uganda).

Put another way, the same Council did not choose to commit to the American tradition of Common Prayer (set forth in the editions of the BCP 1789, 1892 & 1928), but went behind them to the Formularies as they were for the Thirteen Colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, before the break with the Crown and the creation of the USA.

Thereby the same Council may have sought to avoid all the guilt and shame involved in the rejection of the 1789-1928 Formularies by General Convention in 1976-1979, a rejection confirmed by all subsequent Conventions and Diocesan Conventions to the present. The Council sought to make a new start by re-adopting the Formularies of the old Colonial period, the same Formularies which are those of the Church of England and of many Anglican Provinces worldwide.

Obviously the Council did this knowing that most of the membership was still in The Episcopal Church (many as bishops and priests), still using as Formulary and worship text that which was forced in by General Convention to supplant the traditional Formularies in 1976-1979—i.e., the 1979 Prayer Book; and, further, the Council supplied no explanation of this action, no apology for the rejection of the classic Formularies by The Episcopal Church from 1976 to 2007,

and no plan to make the Formularies of 1662 truly active and meaningful in future confession of doctrine and morals and in worship and discipline.

In charity, though we know of no evidence of this as yet, we must surely believe that the Council is working on a plan to make the Formularies of 1662 (BCP, Ordinal and Articles) into truly living doctrinal, liturgical and moral texts for the constituency. Certainly the Prayer Book Society of the USA stands prepared to be of service on a wide front in this extremely important work, even though hitherto its work has been primarily to commend the American tradition of Common Prayer, 1789-1928, with the 1662 traditional as foundational to it.

In our heart of hearts, we cannot believe—though we have heard and read not a few statements to this effect—that this adoption of the Formularies of 1662 by the Council was merely an event which is so familiar in American politics. That is, the accepting by politicians of something on the surface, but not in truth or in depth, so as to gain political advantage and win votes.

Deep in our souls, we cannot believe that Bishops, who claim to be Gospel-based, would guide this adoption of the Formularies by the Council merely and only to present the Network, at this crucial time, as ready for entry into the process of becoming the prime mover within Common Cause in the USA towards a new Anglican Province, supported by the Global South if not by Canterbury. They must also, we think, have looked towards the practical use of the same Texts in the very near future.

Thus we anticipate seeing very soon a variety of moves from within The Anglican Communion Network towards the practical adoption and use of the Formularies of 1662 both for worship and for ordination services, as well as for doctrinal standards and moral principles.

Network members and others in Common Cause will surely be interested to know that the Anglican Mission in America (authorized by the House of Bishops of Rwanda) will shortly be revising and re-issuing its own collection of contemporary English renderings of services from both the BCP and Ordinal of 1662. These have been in trial use for the last six months or so, and have been used from Hong Kong to America for Sunday worship, Baptisms and Weddings, together with ordinations.

Finally, Network members and others in Common Cause will also be glad to know that there is growing demand from African Provinces both for copies of the BCP 1662 (which is used by the educated in towns and cities) and for help to get reprinted their own local language versions of BCP 1662. The Prayer Book Society of the USA is currently helping to meet this demand, as it is also supporting the translation and printing of Services from BCP 1662 into modern Spanish to meet the requests from younger Anglicans in Central and South America.