

## **Will the 1928 edition of “The Book of Common Prayer” ever be generally used again in North America? A preliminary answer.**

From the late 1920s to the early 1970s the authentic American *Book of Common Prayer*, in its official 1928 edition, was everywhere used in the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. From the early 1970s it was sidelined through the use of trial forms of worship, and the latter came together in 1976 and 1979 as the new “Book of Common Prayer” (1979). From 1979, the historic, classic and authentic *Book of Common Prayer* (in its latest, official, American edition of 1928) of The Anglican Way was put in the archives by (what now called itself) The Episcopal Church [TEC] and the new Prayer Book took its place. The new Book was hailed by Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals alike, but for different reasons — to the one it made possible certain cherished emphases like having the “Gloria” at the beginning of the “Mass”, and to the other it provided services in what was judged to be accessible and relevant modern English. Though the new Prayer Book was called by the same name as the one that it replaced — the one that had been through various editions (1662, 1789, 1892 & 1928) — it was in fact a very different type of Book, based upon the theories of liturgists (e.g., Gregory Dix) of recent times.

### **The 1979 watershed**

After 1979 some parishes continued courageously to use the *BCP* (1928), usually against the desires of their bishops, and this practice remains today, although the number so doing has diminished considerably. And of those who use it today, very few use it alone. Where it is still used inside TEC, it is usually alongside the 1979 Book and in a limited way. St John’s, Savannah, GA., is one of the very few where the only Prayer Book used is the classic BCP edition of 1928.

What is not often recognized is that the expression, *BCP* (1928) refers not only to the Common Prayer but also to two further formularies, *The Articles of Religion* and *The Ordinal* (services for making deacons, ordaining priests and consecrating bishops), bound within the same covers. And, likewise, the 1979 Prayer Book contains not only services for worship but also services for ordinations and a new “Outline of the Faith.” Thus in 1979 TEC actually changed its formularies completely; it adopted a new standard of worship, doctrine and discipline, setting aside not only the classic BCP but also the classic Ordinal and Confession of Faith.

So, one may say that in 1979 TEC rejected what had been The Anglican Way to launch its own novel creation, “The American Episcopal Way.” The nature of this new Way was not clear all at once, but it has become clearer as the years have gone by. In fact, in 2007 it looks as though this “Episcopal Way” is so out of

line with the global Anglican Communion of Churches that it will go its own way, developing the full potential of what it launched in 1979, and maybe gathering to itself other liberal, progressive Anglicans living in the West. [See further, *Episcopal Innovations*, from [www.anglicanmarketplace.com](http://www.anglicanmarketplace.com)]

### **Recent secessions**

Everyone is aware that there have been secessions from TEC in recent months for they have been give much publicity. In fact, it is difficult for most observers to keep up with the many relations and associations those seceding have developed in their life outside TEC as “extra-mural Episcopalians.” This is because virtually all groups have linked themselves with one or another overseas bishop of one of the provinces of the global Anglican Communion. In some cases this linking is through either “networks” or dioceses created by bishops from overseas (especially Africa) provinces.

There has been no serious study as yet of the worship, doctrine and discipline found in the new congregations of these seceders. Where they are made distant members of a diocese or network belonging to an overseas province, then one would expect that they would use the forms of worship of that province, but this is not universally the case by any means. In fact, there is a great variety in the forms of worship and in this the dominant use is – strange to relate – that of services from the American 1979 book.

Very strangely and most significantly, It would seem to be the case that the seceders do not, in the main, connect what they call the apostasy and faithlessness of TEC with its official formularies (the 1979 Prayer Book); but, rather, they connect the apostasy with the move away from what they deem to be the orthodoxy of these very 1979 formularies! It seems that most seceders have not carefully studied what happened to TEC in the 1960s and 1970s and so they assume that the 1979 formularies are authentically Anglican. Happily a few of their leaders are making the point that they ought to adopt – to be in line with the Global South – the formularies of The Church of England, that is, the *BCP*, Ordinal and Articles of 1662; but this adoption is envisaged as a kind of confession of faith not as a living way of worship and prayer.

For many who stood firm for the classic *BCP* and formularies in TEC from the 1970s (note that The Prayer Book Society was formed in 1971 when it became clear what was happening to the received Faith), the apparent rejection of the use of the *BCP* (1928), as either living text for worship or as formulary, by the recent seceders is painful to observe – very painful indeed. And painful also is the general use of the 1979 texts by the seceders as if they were classic orthodoxy! However, this intense pain is alleviated in part by news that some new

congregations are using contemporary language forms of BCP (1662) services – provided in part by the help of The Prayer Book Society. But, all in all, it appears to those, who in the 1980s and 1990s risked much to stand for the received Anglican Way of orthodoxy, that the religion of the recent seceders is still too dangerously close to that of TEC before 2000 to be a sure anchor in the present stormy seas. They pray earnestly that these seceders will recover the classic texts, either in their traditional version or in a suitable, dignified contemporary English.

### **Secession in 1977**

The recent seceders are not the only seceders since the 1970s. There was a much publicized secession in 1977 by Episcopalians who believed that TEC, in moving to adopt a new Prayer Book and ordaining women, was moving away from the received Anglican Way. They met in conference in St Louis and founded the Continuing Anglican Church, which was based on the formularies within the *BCP* (1928). Their vision was to be one new church, reflecting what TEC ought to be but had decided not to be. This movement began well, but was soon put off track by internal disagreements with the result that it soon became several groups not one, and these groups – with others that have been created from them or alongside of them – remain to this day struggling on and growing little.

One of the strange and regrettable facts of American Church history is that these older seceders, who had accumulated twenty years of experience before the new secessions began in the late 1990s, seem not to have ministered (except in a few isolated ways) to the new seceders. Why? One may suggest several reasons. First of all, the traditionalist Continuists are strongly opposed to the ordination of women and thus they had little in common with the new seceders who in general are supportive of this new practice. Secondly, many of the traditionalist Continuists have ceased to use only the *BCP* (1928) for the Eucharist/Mass. They use the Anglican Missal (which has additions to the *BCP* text from the traditional Roman Mass) and this places them a very long way from the mostly evangelical and charismatic seceders of recent times. Thirdly, the traditionalist Continuists have developed a sense of their own unique ecclesial vocation as “Anglicans” outside the global Anglican Communion, which they regard as at best a mixed-blessing. To them the present Archbishop of Canterbury is a disaster for true Faith!

One result of that which has just been described is that no impetus towards the examination and use of *BCP* (1928) has been felt amongst the new seceders from the example or guidance of the 1977 seceders. In fact, not a few of the recent seceders state clearly that the 1977 traditionalist Continuists have no attraction at

all for them, especially because they seem not to be committed actively to the Great Commission (Matthew 28; Mark 16).

## Conclusion

With deep regret one has to accept that from virtually all sides there is a negative message about the possibilities of the use of the *BCP* (1928) and its associated formularies heard by the new seceders. But not all sides. The tiny Reformed Episcopal Church has stood firm in its use of the *BCP* (1928 & 1662) recently. And The Prayer Book Society has tried, and continues to try by a variety of means (visit [www.anglicanmarketplace.com](http://www.anglicanmarketplace.com) and see The Mandate at [www.pbsusa.org](http://www.pbsusa.org)) to persuade the new seceders that there is an evangelical and wholesome use of the classic *BCP*, and that it may be used either in its traditional language or in a good contemporary form of English.

Of those who hear this message – and, happily, they are growing slowly in numbers – a majority respond by saying, “Why not go back to the 1662 for this is what is used Sunday by Sunday (in English or in translation) in provinces like Uganda and this is what is the doctrinal formulary for all the Global South?” So it looks as though, if the new seceders are to recover the Anglican Way, and be set free from “the Episcopal Way” of TEC, then it will probably be through the discovery of the *BCP* (1662) in one form or another. Perhaps then, and only then, will appreciation of the three American editions of this same *Book of Common Prayer*, those of 1789, 1892 and 1928 be really appreciated – but that is some way off at present.

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