

A New Shell for the Anglican Way

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Must Anglicans become nominal Congregationalists to survive the crisis of Anglicanism in the West from 2009 onwards—or even mild Presbyterians—in terms of general church government?

Anglicans have done it before in the 1650s and may have to do it again in the next decade if they wish to preserve for the West an authentic form of Anglicanism, which is not severely perverted by innovations based on modern powerful ideologies like rights-monism. In my book, *Puritans and Calvinism*, I have a long description of The Cromwellian National Church which replaced the Established Episcopal National Church of England and sought to make place for all groups except devout Anglicans, who used *The BCP* (1559) and lived within its liturgy and devotion. How did these Anglicans survive this imposition and retain their parishes? By not using the BCP as a text to be read aloud but a text to be quoted from memory in an extempore style.

Most regrettably most of those called Anglicans today would be unable to do this for (a) they use an assortment of prayer books usually with different doctrines in them; and (b) they have lost the art of learning by heart, of committing the sacred text to memory and do not love our treasured tradition as they ought to.

We recall the great dangers that the Roman Catholic families and priests faced at a time when they had to hide priests in their homes to hear Mass, gain spiritual counseling, have pastoral care and learn devotion. Judging by the number of devout Roman Catholics in Britain one can say that under God this daring movement was a gracious though painful success, perhaps more so than the Anglican experiment in congregationalism.

When I was a young priest in the C of E, and before the liturgical revolution of the 1970s-1980s, I often went visiting in homes and usually when I offered prayer, using the BCP, the persons present joined in, from memory! Unfortunately, much of this devotion and piety has disappeared and all that one hears is an Amen. Indeed to find a priest today who knows off by heart the Common Prayer, the

Service of Holy Communion, the Baptismal Office, and the Burial of the Dead from the classic Prayer Book (1662, 1928, 1960) is rare indeed.

It is the same, or even worse with the Bible, where we are surrounded by a multitude of paraphrases and would be translations. For liturgy a sound and stable and pleasing text is needed and nothing as yet has replaced the KJV of 1611. Millions used to know large portions of this Version off by heart and for Anglicans it was necessary as the Eucharistic Lectionary of The BCP is taken from it. Today very few Anglicans in America actually open up the KJV!

My point is that the Anglican Church of Canada and The Episcopal Church of the USA, not to mention some of the ecclesial exits from them in recent times, are fast abandoning the very sources that they ought to be passing on to their children and grandchildren. On the one side, they are heading into distorted forms of Christianity where yesterday's immorality is today's holiness and celebrated as such; on the other side, they treat the Common Prayer Tradition as a kind of small supermarket from which to choose what they like when they like, setting it mostly within modern generic evangelicalism and the charismatic movement. The long and the short of this is that only the very few, very few, are reading the main content of the BCP, and even the Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer, with the intention of learning them off by heart and with a view to meditating on them and obeying them.

The time is at hand when under very different conditions, Anglicanism, if at all, will be saved—humanly speaking—by the righteous remnant (empowered by grace and patience) in North America. For they will keep alive in what may seem to be Congregational or Presbyterian situations, the spirit and content of The Common Prayer and through sanctified memory, not reading texts. For this period, bishops, archdeacons and dioceses will be no more and everything will depend, once again humanly speaking, on the consecration, devotion and membership of those who believe that the Anglican Way is the way of Reformed Catholicism and as such ought to be preserved as intact as possible for generations to come as a living religion, an integral part of the One, Holy Catholic Church of God the Father and of his Son Jesus Christ.