Prayer Book Society

Blackburn Branch Annual Festival
Blackburn Cathedral
Saturday, 21st April, 2018

Musings on the Book of Common Prayer

When addressing members of this Branch of the Prayer Book Society in 1992 actress Prunella Scales began with the words, 'Previous speakers … have been of such daunting distinction and scholarship that it is very difficult to defend or even account for my presence here.' I know exactly how she felt! However, I have been invited to address you, and address you I shall; but first may I crave your indulgence to offer a word or two of personal introduction, because they have a bearing on what comes later.

As some of you may recall, our family were members of the congregation of Blackburn Cathedral for twenty years, from 1979 to 1999. My wife Jan was a member of the Candlemass Club, a keen flower arranger and the first woman to be appointed to the Cathedral's Administrative Chapter. She is also, we believe, the first woman ever to preach in Blackburn Cathedral. Our two sons were members of the choir: Andrew in the days of John (now Doctor John) Bertalot; and Simon, who had the distinction of being Head Chorister, under David Cooper. Our daughter Judy was married here. I was, for most of the 1980s, the leader of the band of altar servers in the days of Provost Lawrence Jackson, and I often stood duty as a virger

when dear old Ron Holroyd needed some help. Thus this was our family's spiritual home for those two decades.

Before we moved to Lancashire we lived in Suffolk and in 1976 I was given a Probationary Lay Reader's licence. After leaving Suffolk for Lancashire my time was fully occupied with family and employment responsibilities and I had no opportunity to continue with my readership training. Yet, despite not being engaged in formal theological studies I spent many happy hours in discussions with the Cathedral clergy, who, between them, inculcated in me a love for and some understanding of liturgy and its importance in governing the worshipping practices of the Church. I have so much for which to thank them.

In 2002, after Jan and I had settled down to a life of retirement on the Isle of Mull, on Scotland's west coast, I enrolled as a part-time, distance-learning, under-graduate student at the University of Aberdeen and in July of 2009, some seven years later, I was delighted to be awarded a Bachelor of Theology degree with Honours. In acknowledgement of that achievement our bishop licensed me as a Lay Reader. So concluded what may have been the longest Probationary Readership in the history of the Church, some thirty-three years! I wonder if I ought to contact the *Guinness Book of Records*! Later in 2009 I enrolled as a part-time, distance-learning, post-graduate, student at the University of Glasgow to study the life and principle works of twentieth century, Anglican monk and liturgist, Dom Gregory Dix. I first heard of Gregory Dix in one of a series of lectures on liturgy and worship given here by the late Canon Geoffrey Williams and his name must have

somehow stuck in the back of my mind. After five years of research, which culminated in the writing of an 85,000 word thesis, the University of Glasgow conferred its degree of Doctor of Philosophy on me in June of 2014. I should perhaps add that one of the examiners, against whose questioning I had to defend my work, was the Most Reverend and Right Honourable the Lord Williams of Oystermouth; you may remember him better as Doctor Rowan Williams, formerly Archbishop of Canterbury.

May I say how wonderful it is to be back in this beautiful Cathedral; it really is like a home-coming. I offer my heartfelt thanks to the members of your Committee for giving me this opportunity to speak to you this afternoon and to follow in the footsteps of such luminaries as: P D James (who came here twice, if memory serves), Douglas Hurd, Prunella Scales (as mentioned earlier), Alan Bennett, Pam Rhodes and, of course, our Honorary Branch Secretary Emeritus, Neil Inkley, (to name but a few).

Ten years ago, a report was published in the Advent 2008 edition of the *Prayer Book Society Journal* (as it was then called) in which Oxford priest Father John Hunwicke presented a rather humorous account of a visit he made as a locum to a country church to celebrate Holy Communion. In his report Father John explained that he was asked by his host to use the Prayer Book. Let me quote their conversation as Father John reported it: 'You'll have to use the Prayer Book here,' he said, rather abruptly. 'It'll be a pleasure,' said I, rather puzzled. 'I mean 1662,'

said he. ‘Certainly,’ said I, even more puzzled. ‘Word for word; absolutely word for word,’ he said. ‘No problem at all,’ I replied. Later, after the service, Father John discovered the background to this bizarre exchange. The incumbent had learned that Father John had trained at a theological college with an extremely Catholic tradition; he was afraid that the visiting cleric would unleash heaven-only-knows what sort of High Church or Popish rigmarole on his unsuspecting, country parishioners.

I wondered, after reading his account, just how near Father John came to that supposed ideal, and, indeed, how close his host really wanted him to come. Father John mentioned, for example, that he had not insisted on being given the names of intended communicants on the day before his service, as the first rubric of the Holy Communion service requires. Did Father John check, we might enquire, that members of his congregation had been satisfied that any ‘open and notorious evil livers’ had, ‘truly repented and amended their former naughty lives’ as demanded by the second rubric?

Let me pose for you some more questions about the service that Father John celebrated, in relation to the Prayer Book’s requirements. Was the table (not an altar, you note) placed in the body of the Church or in the Chancel? Was it covered by just a fair white linen cloth? Did Father John, at the conclusion of the Nicene Creed, refrain from giving any notices to the congregation, ‘but what is prescribed in the Rules of this Book, or enjoined by the Queen, or by the Ordinary of the place’? Thereafter did he preach the mandatory sermon? No alternative is given in

the rubric, other than to offer instead one of the Homilies, 'already set forth, or hereafter to be set forth by authority'.

On the subject of sermons; I well remember that the late Canon David Galilee, in obedience of this rubric, always offered a short address at Cathedral Sunday morning, 8:00 o'clock, Prayer Book, Holy Communion services, often taking his material from a small book by Austin Farrer entitled *The Crown of the Year*.

But, let us get back to Father John's service. Were the alms of the faithful collected, 'in a decent bason', observe the archaic spelling, 'to be provided by the parish for that purpose', while the Offertory Sentences were being read (no collecting bags, you note!)? I was delighted to read that Father John included the appropriate Exhortation – they are almost never heard these days – but, as he later remarked, 'Do we really want an Exhortation every Sunday?' Another rubric demands that the bread of the Eucharist is, 'as such as is usual to be eaten, the best and purest Wheat Bread'. It is to be hoped that the parish that Father John visited did not use communion wafers because the rubric suggests that they, 'provide occasions of dissention and superstition!'

So we move on to what is called The Canon of the Mass. Now, it is the practice of many Celebrants to remove the breaking of the bread to a separate place outside the Prayer of Consecration, indeed the Fraction, as it is called, has now become a uniquely identified part of the liturgy in many modern Eucharistic rites. It is to be hoped that Father John followed the 1662 rubric and broke the bread where the prayer dictates.

At this point I must declare a personal interest. As a student at the University of Glasgow I studied, as I mentioned earlier, the life and principal, liturgical writings of Dom Gregory Dix. Many of you will have heard of him. He was an Anglican, Benedictine monk whose short life spanned the first half of the twentieth century; he died in 1952. His magnum opus, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, first published in 1945, has been on the book sellers' lists ever since. In this ground-breaking work of some 750 pages Dix explained that, despite studying the writings of the Evangelists, the Apostles and the Early Church Fathers, he found it impossible to arrive at a consensus of what comprised the original wording of the earliest Eucharistic rite. Dix argued that the different written accounts made this task impossible to resolve. However, there was, in his opinion, a 'shape' to the liturgy that has survived from earliest times. This shape had four essential elements, which could be identified with the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he 'took, blessed, broke and gave'. Within the Eucharist these correspond with the Offertory, the Consecration, the Fraction and the Communion. Many subsequent liturgists, following Dix's hypothesis, have placed the Fraction, the Breaking of the Bread, in its own special place, detached from the Prayer of Consecration. In the Church of England it was in the publication of the *Alternative Service Book*, the *ASB*, in 1980 that Dix's explanation of the four-fold shape was essentially incorporated into its Eucharistic rites. Rite A contains the detached words, 'We break this bread to share in the body of Christ'. So, despite rubric 'b' included in the 1662 Prayer of Consecration, 'And here to break the Bread:', it has become common practice to remove the Fraction

from the Prayer of Consecration. Should we, as good Prayer Book folk, adhere to what many may consider to be Cranmer's instructions in this matter? Well, we may like to think so, but, in fact, Cranmer removed the so-called 'manual acts' from the Prayer of Consecration in his 1552 revision; they didn't appear again until 1662. Those of you who read my paper in the Trinity 2014 edition of *Faith and Worship* will appreciate that Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and Dom Gregory Dix, studying, as they did, the same Evangelistic, Apostolic and Patristic sources, albeit some four hundred years apart, came to significantly different, one could almost say diametrically opposed, conclusions on a number of fundamental, theological, ecclesiological and liturgical matters, none of which we have time to explore this afternoon, as I am sure you will be delighted to hear. For completeness I should add that a number of modern liturgists, like Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks, disagree with Dix's assertion of a 'four-fold shape', so the *ASB* may well have got it wrong!

Now, I have to be careful what I say about the *Alternative Service Book*. Dare I even mention it in such august company? Its principle architect was Doctor Ronald Jasper, who was Chairman of the Church of England's Liturgical Commission in the 1970s and who was later Dean of York. Dean Jasper's son, the Reverend Professor David Jasper, was my research supervisor at the University of Glasgow and it was he who guided me in my five-year study of Gregory Dix. I should perhaps add, for the sake of completeness, that Dean Jasper's daughter, David's sister, Christine is the wife of the former Bishop of Blackburn, Nicholas Reade. We do live in a small world!

Let us return to the *Book of Common Prayer*. Again, it is the practice of many priests to get the final ablutions out of the way immediately after the Administration of the Communion, but a Prayer Book rubric clearly states that, 'the Minister shall return to the Lord's Table, and reverently place upon it what remaineth of the consecrated Elements, covering the same with a fair linen cloth'. It is interesting to reflect that, even within this avowedly Protestant order, the consecrated elements must remain on the altar, sorry, table, until after the blessing. The 'high' theology associated with this action was clearly in direct contrast to Cranmer's thinking. In his revised Communion rite of 1552 he adopted what Dix called a Zwinglian, receptionist interpretation in which he saw the Lord's Supper celebrated purely as a memorial meal. The presence of Christ was only to be found in the hearts of the worshippers, not in any mystical attribute of the sacramental species. In the minds of the Reformers, Jesus Christ was not ubiquitous, his Body and Blood were in heaven, were he was seated at the right hand of his Heavenly Father; they could not possibly be present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Cranmer's 1552 rite, the Elizabethan order of 1559 and the 1604 Savoy Conference Communion service of James I, all contained a rubric that said, 'If any bread and wine be left over the Curate shall have it for his own use'. In those earlier days the Church taught that there were no sacramental changes; even after consecration the bread and wine were still just that – bread and wine.

The major revision in the Church's understanding of the sacredness of the Eucharistic elements between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shows how

important it is that, in all of our discussions, we clearly separate Cranmer and his advisors from many aspects of the wording of the Restoration Book, the one that we hold dear. To put it simply, the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1662 is not wholly the work of Archbishop Cranmer! On this subject Father John made the following observation: 'We are fortunate enough to belong to the Prayer Book Society. Naturally, it includes people of many different types, from dyed-in-the-wool Reform Protestants to those who glory in the name of Catholic. This is admirable. But occasionally the Prayer Book Society can seem a bit like a Cranmer Admiration Society'.

Despite the confusion caused by Cranmer's developing Eucharistic doctrines, we must continue to admire the wonderful, classical, liturgical language in which he and those who followed him translated and composed their texts. As Father John reminded his readers, 'Cranmer was steeped in the Latin prayers and texts with which he had grown up, and they formed the basis of his work, both when he was translating and when he was being creative. They were texts which went back … to the ancient Roman sacramentaries put together by Popes in the early Christian centuries. Among examples are the great majority of the Sunday Collects'.

Now, despite all these minutiae about orders, rites and rubrics, and their respective authors and instigators, we all profess a deep devotion for this wonderful book, yet I firmly believe that we love it for what we perceive it to be, not necessarily what it is. It is a sort of 'all-things-to-all-men' book. The parts that we like, we include in our worship; the parts that we don't, we simply ignore. How

many of us don't notice the absence of an Exhortation in our Holy Communion services? Most of us, I suspect, have never heard of one being included; I certainly haven't! How many of us don't object to there being no sermon at 8:00 o'clock on Sunday mornings? How many of us are indifferent to hearing The Summary of The Law, rather than having The Decalogue rehearsed with us? We must, of course, thank the authors of the Deposited Prayer Book of 1928, which never, of course, passed into law, for proposing that change.

Let me digress for a moment. The story is told of a Minor Canon at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London who, shortly after the publication of the 1928 Prayer Book, suggested to the Dean that he was considering replacing the Decalogue with the Summary at the 8:00 o'clock celebration on the next Sunday morning. The Dean is reported to have replied, 'The Ten Commandments have been thundered from the altars of this church since Sir Christopher Wren built it; I see no reason to make any changes to that long tradition!!'

So, to continue my theme, I must muse on other parts of the Prayer Book. How many of us attend Matins yet don't seem to mind if the *Quicunque Vult*, otherwise entitled 'At Morning Prayer', that wonderful, Christological and Trinitarian Creed, named after, although not written by, Saint Athanasius, is not substituted for the Apostles' Creed as the rubric requires, 'upon these Feasts…' (fourteen days are listed)? How often do we find The Litany included after Morning Prayer on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, as we rightly should? Do we still hear the Collect for the First Sunday in Advent, 'repeated every day with the other Collects

in Advent, until Christmass Eve'? Similarly, do we hear the Collect for The First Day of Lent, 'read every day in Lent after the Collect appointed for the Day'? On this First Day of Lent, after Morning Prayer and The Litany, do we still hear, 'A Denouncing of God's Anger and Judgements against Sinners (A Commination)'? On Good Friday are we still happy to implore God's mercy for, 'all Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks'?

The service of Confirmation has fallen by the wayside in many places and Baptism is often seen as the single and only requirement for full membership of the Church and admission to all of its sacraments. I'm sorry, I should have said 'both of its sacraments', if we are to adhere to the doctrine contained within Article Twenty-Five of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. According to our Prayer Book, The Catechism, 'is to be learned of every person before he be brought to be confirmed by the Bishop'; is it still taught, I wonder? The first version appeared in the 1559 Elizabethan Prayer Book. At that time bishops' injunctions demanded that weekly classes in the Catechism be held for the youth of each parish and that no one was to be admitted to Holy Communion who did not know it thoroughly. This doesn't seem to apply in today's Church, where, in many places, young children are permitted to receive the Sacrament. I should perhaps add that Gregory Dix believed that Christian initiation comprised all three elements of Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion.

We love to hear the opening words of the Marriage Service, or more correctly The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony, 'Dearly beloved brethren, we are

gathered together here in the sight of God …'; yet we don't seem to want to be reminded of, 'man's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding …'. Do we still expect the mothers of new-born babies to, 'come to church decently apparelled,' to give thanks and be 'churched'? What today would comprise 'decent apparel'? When did you last hear the Accession Service, or 'Forms of Prayer with Thanksgiving to Almighty God', for use, 'upon the Anniversary of the Day of the Accession of the Reigning Sovereign'? These prayers, of course, strictly apply to the date of the sovereign's accession; which, for our present queen, is the sixth day of February. However, their very mention prompts me to wish Her Majesty every happiness on this her 92nd birthday.

Should we, as Father John asked his readers, discontinue the singing of all hymns, with the obvious exception of *Veni Creator Spiritus*, two versions of which are included in the Prayer Book Ordinal?

Let us muse over some other Prayer Book matters. When visiting the sick of the parish does the minister, 'admonish the sick person to make a will and declare his debts' (if he hath not previously disposed of his goods)? Does he require that sick persons make, 'special confession of their sins', and receive absolution? In this context the priestly absolution contains the words, 'And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins'. How many of us appreciate or acknowledge that auricular confession and priestly absolution are demanded within the pages of the *Book of Common Prayer*?

On the subject of auricular confession and priestly absolution, I should mention in passing the abhorrence and detestation expressed by a number of bishops when what is now called the Sacrament of Reconciliation was re-introduced into the Church of England at the time of the Oxford Movement in the first half of the nineteenth century, not least by the Honourable Doctor Henry Montague Villiers, Lord Bishop of your neighbouring Diocese of Carlisle. In a Charge delivered to his Clergy in 1858 he wrote, 'I am thankful that we appear to be clear of the filthiness of the confessional, as well as free from [other] puerilities connected with the Church of Rome.' Yet sacramental confession was demanded within the pages of the Prayer Book all the time. What, we might ask, did the said bishop think he meant when, at the Ordinations of his clergy, he used the words, 'Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained?' Of course, this was all in the past. All a candidate for priesthood gets to hear today from the *Common Worship* Ordinal is: 'Send down the Holy Spirit on your servant for the office and work of a priest in your Church'. There is no mention of sin or of absolution. It's all rather sad.

When I was a child it was my great delight to be taken by my grandmother every Sunday morning to High Mass in her richly decorated and beautifully appointed neo-Gothic, Anglican Church where the altar (most definitely not a table!!) was covered, in each liturgical season, by a succession of beautifully embroidered, Laudian frontals. With its six enormous candlesticks, tabernacle and crucifix, it was set before a carved, stone reredos which was lavishly decorated with images of

apostles and saints. It was, to my young mind, a pure vision of heaven. During the service the clergy wore full, Eucharistic vestments and birettas; the choir sang the Mass, often in Latin; numerous altar servers gathered; crosses, lights and banners were formed up into processions; bells were rung and hymns were gloriously sung; and, to quote from the Sixth Chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah, 'the house was filled with smoke'. And all of this grand ritual and high ceremonial was contained within the liturgy that was still the Holy Communion service of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and nobody thought this at all unusual. Sin-of-sins: I seem to remember that they used collecting bags instead of a decent bason for the alms!

Perhaps I have been too flippant and have waxed over-lyrical in my musings on the *Book of Common Prayer*, but we only have to hear its resonant cadences: 'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord'; 'a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world'; 'for we have no health in us'; 'Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings, with Thy most gracious favour'; 'We bless thee for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life'; 'In the midst of life, we are in death'; and, dare I say it, 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'; to know that what we read in our Prayer Book is divinely inspired. For three hundred and fifty years Anglicans across the globe, and many others besides, have used this quaintly charming yet wonderfully stirring book for their private devotions and corporate worship; a book that for all its rubrical regulations and requirements, either firmly followed or irreverently ignored, has been of inestimable benefit down the centuries for Protestant and Catholic Anglicans alike. As

Professor Eamon Duffy wrote in his wonderful book *The Stripping of the Altars*, 'Cranmer's sombrely magnificent prose, read week by week, entered and possessed their minds, and became the fabric of their prayers, the utterance of their most solemn and their most vulnerable moments'.

The Editor of the *Prayer Book Society Journal* posed a question at the end of Father John's paper: 'Is it wrong for congregations to expect Prayer Book services to be used word for word and for rubrics to be followed to the letter?' How should we respond to this? As we have seen, such an expectation is clearly not reasonable nor practical without the Prayer Book, or, at least, many of its rubrics, undergoing some serious revision; and who would decide on what changes were acceptable? Try to remember the problems of such endeavours in 1927 and 1928. Yet the *status quo* must be defended. We must continue to demand that we be allowed to use our Prayer Book for our corporate worship, and, as Neil Inkley reminded us two years ago, not just at 7:30 on Wednesday mornings. However, within that demand, we must be prepared to accept that not every devotee sees the Prayer Book through the same liturgical lens. But surely that is the basis of our understanding and our love for this tantalising work.

Where does all this leave us in relation to the request from Father John's host in that country church a decade ago? Did he really want the Holy Communion service celebrated 'absolutely word for word'? I suspect he did not! He wanted his congregation to take part in a service with which they were familiar, just as, severally, we all do. The fact that this content varies significantly from church to

church, and from congregation to congregation is, it seems, of little consequence. We know what we like and we each want our particular orders of service to be maintained.

In conclusion let me remind you that even Prayer Book devotees make their own interpretations of its content, order and rubrics. The late, much loved Reverend Canon Geoffrey Williams, who was the prime mover in the foundation of this Branch of the Prayer Book Society, always added the Prayer of Oblation to the end of the Prayer of Consecration, just as Cranmer had ordered in 1549. He then prostrated himself before the altar, leaving members of his congregation in no doubt that he believed in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the consecrated elements. His gesture was, of course, in complete contrast to Cranmer's later Eucharistic teaching, and the strictures contained in John Knox's infamous Black Rubric, which mysteriously resurfaced in our 1662 Book. Yet, I cannot believe for a moment that Saint Peter denied Canon Williams entry into Heaven for those idiosyncrasies. I suspect that Saint Peter may be as confused about the *Book of Common Prayer* as the rest of us!

As Father John Hunwicke has been our companion in our Musings on the *Book of Common Prayer* this afternoon, perhaps we should let him have the last word. At the end of his report he wrote: 'I value the Prayer Book for its continuities, rather than as a sign of rupture or a repudiation of the way Englishmen have worshipped for a thousand years. I value it not as a new start or a Protestant beacon shining in a gloom of Romish superstition and darkness, but as one way in which ancient

traditions and texts of Catholic worship were handed on. Cranmer occupied but one moment – albeit a remarkable one – in that wonderful continuum'. I think we can all agree with Father John's sentiments, don't you?

Thank you for your patience and forbearance.