

Canada's Prayer Book

A Lecture at St. Olave's Church, Toronto

marking the 60th anniversary of the Canadian Prayer Book of 1962 and the 360th anniversary of the English Prayer Book of 1662

by Jesse D. Billett, Faculty of Divinity, Trinity College, Toronto, November 1, 2022

Outline

- A. The Prayer Book as “mind of the Church”
- B. Can there be “local” Prayer Books at all?
- C. Revision in Canada: Reconciling “High” and “Low” Anglicans
- D. Consensus vs. Compromise

A. The Prayer Book as “mind of the Church”

1. Owen Chadwick on Archbishop Cranmer's liturgical work

The diverse elements upon which [Cranmer] worked, traditional or Protestant, were taken up by his careful scholarship and transmuted into a beauty, at once delicate and austere, of liturgical prose and poetry. Liturgies are not made, they grow in the devotion of centuries; but as far as a liturgy could ever be the work of a single mind, the Prayer Book flowed from a scholar with a sure instinct for a people's worship.

The Reformation, 2nd rev. repr., Pelican History of the Church 3 (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 119.

2. Fr. Robert Crouse (1930–2011) on Cranmer's scriptural criterion

The clear word of Holy Scripture was to be the criterion; and within that criterion, the Reformers strove for continuity and comprehensiveness. The continuity they sought and effectively maintained was a continuity with the developed and living tradition of their own Church; that is to say, the tradition of Latin Christendom as it existed in the English Church. Thus, the fundamental liturgical document underlying the Prayer Book liturgy is the Sarum Missal, and the theological standpoint might be described as basically Augustinian. But within that context, they drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources: contemporary continental, Roman Catholic and Protestant, as well as ancient and Eastern liturgies, of which they had a remarkably precise knowledge. Beyond the most essential points, the liturgy they provided was not a very precise theological document, but rather broad, flexible and comprehensive. The value of those qualities in the Prayer Book has been abundantly demonstrated in subsequent centuries of Anglican history.

3. Fr. Crouse on the Prayer Book as *consensus fidelium*

The Book of Common Prayer is the form of the collective memory of Anglicans, the *consensus fidelium*, the “common mind” of the Church, the principle of authority and cohesion of the institution, and the guarantee of its catholicity. ...

Authority for Christians is fundamentally the authority of the Word of God, expressed in Holy Scripture. Anglicanism, in particular, is a certain way of hearing and understanding and

living by the Word, an ongoing exegesis of God's Word, fostered by and expressed in the tradition of common prayer. In no other Church in Christendom does liturgy play so crucial a role. ... Anglicans recognize no papal *magisterium*; for us, it is the tradition of common prayer which elucidates and defends and deepens our memory of the Word of God. The destruction or neglect of that tradition induces a crippling amnesia.

“‘The Form of Sound Words’ (2 Tim. 1:13): The Catholicity of the Prayer Book,” lecture to the Toronto Branch of the Prayer Book Society of Canada to mark the 450th anniversary of the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, St. Paul's, Bloor Street, Toronto, May 1, 1999, <https://prayerbook.ca/the-form-of-sound-words/>.

We must not expect to find in the Universal Church any very specific human locus of authority. What we must look for, rather, is the Church's common mind, what is technically referred to as the *Consensus Fidelium*, the common mind of the faithful in relation to the Word of God revealed. It was the Church's common mind which, over a period of several centuries and not without dispute, established the Canon of Holy Scripture. It was the Church's common mind which promulgated credal affirmations and conciliar formulations. It was the Church's common mind which defined the Church's mind on the forms of apostolic ministry and sacramental practice and established the norms of moral and ascetical life.

By common mind, *Consensus Fidelium*, we do not mean current popular Christian opinion. It is not a matter of counting heads or taking plebiscites. Truth is not established that way. You know, if you had tried that method, say, in the middle of the fourth century, the result would probably have been Arianism. If you had tried it in any later century the result would almost certainly have been a kind of unwitting Pelagianism. No, the *Consensus Fidelium* is the mind formed (and by no means always popularly) by the Church's ongoing, serious, and devout attention to and submission to the Word of God, unconformed to the wisdom of this present age. It is then expressed with greater or lesser precision and in varying degrees of authority in credal and conciliar pronouncements, in liturgies, canon law, and in the theological tradition as a whole.

By *Consensus Fidelium* of the faithful we do not mean the opinion in one diocese or one province of the Church but the mind of the whole Church. We do not mean the mind of the Church just as it might be isolated as at this particular moment, you know as a kind of chronological provincialism, but the coherent development of Christian thought and life from the very beginning. What we are speaking of, then, is the living, developing tradition of the universal Church, as it is guided by the Spirit in relation to the revealed Word of God. Now that traditional consensus is really the only fundamental authority in the Church of God.

Robert D. Crouse, “The Prayer Book and the Authority of Tradition,” in *Church Polity and Authority: Proceedings of a Theological Conference held at the University of King's College, Halifax, Nova Scotia, May 27–3, 1984*, ed. G. Richmond Bridge (Charlottetown: St. Peter Publications, 1985), pp. 53–61.

4. Martin Thornton (1915–1986) on the “opinion of the Church”

The Caroline Church [of the seventeenth century] did not need a Pope to make authoritative decisions on current questions of faith and morals, because such decisions were hammered out by the Church, loyally united by the Prayer Book system. The modern Church has to face such

questions as nuclear armament—or disarmament—birth-control, gambling, industrial relations, and so on, and it is justifiably accused either of saying nothing about them or of speaking with a divided voice. Two bold bishops will make honest, sincere, forthright, and contradictory pronouncements about any of these things, but this is not the opinion of the Church, nor even the Church giving a lead. It is but the view of a Christian individual against which the decisions argued out in the Reverend Mr Baxter's house on Thursday evenings [*i.e.*, the “open houses” held by the Puritan Richard Baxter in his home to discuss the previous Sunday’s sermon] carry far more moral authority. For that was at least the microcosmic Church, comprised of individuals grounded in the Rule of the Church, living daily within the channel of grace. Do all members of the average Diocesan Conference, or of the House of Laity, live seriously and loyally by the Prayer Book pattern? Unless, or until they do, those bodies are theologically incapable of making decisions of any real weight.

In the seventeenth century, individual liberty of conscience was firmly guarded, yet the “opinion of the Church” had real meaning. To-day it has not; not because individual Christians lack integrity or courage, but because they are not acting as, are not being, the Church. Our need is the same: spiritual guidance according to the Caroline pattern, based on the Catholic ascetical theology which the Prayer Book pattern embodies. To attain efficiency, we must either be true to our adult spirituality, or we must constitute a Sacred College through which the Archbishop of Canterbury can exercise total power!

English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology according to the English Pastoral Tradition (London: SPCK, 1963), pp. 238–39.

B. Can there be “local” Prayer Books at all?

5. Early Lambeth Conferences on Prayer Book Revision

Lambeth 1867, Resolution 8

That, in order to the binding of the Churches of our colonial empire and the missionary Churches beyond them in the closest union with the Mother-Church, it is necessary that they receive and maintain without alteration the standards of faith and doctrine as now in use in that Church.

Lambeth 1878, Recommendation 7

Your Committee, believing that, next to oneness in “the faith once delivered to the saints,” communion in worship is the link which most firmly binds together bodies of Christian men, and remembering that the Book of Common Prayer, retained as it is, with some modifications, by all our Churches, has been one principal bond of union among them, desire to call attention to the fact that such communion in worship may be endangered by excessive diversities of ritual. They believe that the internal unity of the several Churches will help greatly to the union of these one with another. And, while they consider that such large elasticity in the forms of worship is desirable as will give wide scope to all legitimate expressions of devotional feeling, they would appeal, on the other hand, to the apostolic precept that “all things be done unto edifying,” [1 Cor. 14:26] and to the Catholic principle that order and obedience, even at the sacrifice of personal preferences and tastes, lie at the foundation of Christian unity, and are even essential to the successful maintenance of the faith.

Lambeth 1888, Resolution 10

That, inasmuch as the Book of Common Prayer is not the possession of one diocese or province, but of all, and that a revision in one portion of the Anglican Communion must therefore be extensively felt, this Conference is of the opinion that no particular portion of the Church should undertake revision without seriously considering the possible effect of such action on other branches of the Church.

6. “Solemn Declaration” of the First Canadian General Synod (1893)

We are determined by the help of God to hold and maintain the Doctrine, Sacraments, and Discipline of Christ as the Lord hath commanded in his Holy Word, and as the Church of England hath received and set forth the same in “The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England; together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches; and the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons”; and in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion; and to transmit the same unimpaired to our posterity.

7. Nevertheless... (Fr. Crouse on Prayer Book revision)

Tradition is, and must be, open to growth; liturgies have been, and must be, revised from time to time; but I think we should be well-advised to respect the policy of the 1662 revisers, of keeping to “the mean”: a policy admirably followed by our Canadian revisers in 1962; and that we should be well-advised to resist with importunity wholesale revisions or alternatives promoted because they seem to accord with the ephemeral linguistic and theological and sociological fashions of the moment.

“The Form of Sound Words” (see above, no. 3)

C. Revision in Canada: Reconciling “High” and “Low” Anglicans

Perhaps the first ever real “class” on the Book of Common Prayer met in 1827 at Oxford University, when a young theology professor called Charles Lloyd gave a series of lectures on theological subjects, including the Prayer Book, to a select invited audience. He didn’t invite students in that instance, but rather other teachers at the university. Among them were the two great lights of what was later to be known as the Oxford Movement, the Catholic revival in the Church of England: John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey. The very simple point that Lloyd impressed on his hearers was that most of the texts in the Book of Common Prayer were not composed at the time of the English Reformation, but were translations into English of very ancient Latin liturgical texts that the Church of England held in common with the Church of Rome. This was an essential insight for the Catholic revival: the Prayer Book showed that the Church of England was not a creation of parliament in the 16th century, but the continuing presence of the Church Catholic in England that had been founded in 597 by Pope Gregory I and St. Augustine of Canterbury. That insight led to a great spiritual awakening in the English Church. But it was not welcomed everywhere. Some people argued that if the Prayer Book was Catholic, then it had better be revised to be more Protestant. That’s why the Church of Ireland got its first local Prayer Book in 1878. The revisions were vanishingly few, but all of them were “anti-Roman.”

The discovery that the Prayer Book was “Catholic” was counterbalanced later in the nineteenth century by the discovery that it was also profoundly “Protestant.” We should not be

surprised that it was Roman Catholic scholars who pointed this out. I have on my bookshelves a copy of *Edward VI and the Book of Common Prayer* by Cardinal Gasquet and the prince of liturgical historians, Edmund Bishop (first published in 1890). This work points out in the bluntest possible way that the Book of Common Prayer was a radical departure from the medieval Catholic liturgy, and that it embodied a revolutionary Protestant theology. It was only a few years later that Pope Leo XIII declared that Anglican orders were “absolutely null and utterly void,” implying that the Church founded by St. Augustine of Canterbury had ceased to exist at the Reformation. Edmund Bishop had predicted that this was the inevitable outcome, and the judgement was welcomed by the Evangelical wing of the Church of England.

The person who previously owned my copy of Gasquet and Bishop’s book filled it up with underlining and enthusiastic marginal notes expressing delight at finding it proven that the Prayer Book was a rejection of all things Catholic. That reader was one Dyson Hague, who was from 1912 professor of liturgics and ecclesiology at Wycliffe College. It would be fair to say that to this day Hoskin Avenue marks a dividing line in the history of the interpretation of the Book of Common Prayer, though I am happy to say that overt hostilities ceased long ago.

8. Resistance to revision in Canada

Attempt to create an “Appendix” to the 1662 BCP, with supplementary prayers and services, for example:

- order for making deaconesses
- Institution and Induction of a minister into a new cure
- Laying a Foundation Stone of a church
- Service for the Acceptance of Baptismal Vows
- Marriage in an Unconsecrated Building
- Confirmation immediately after Adult Baptism
- Burial of a Baptized Infant
- Hallowing a Grave in Unconsecrated Ground
- Forms of Prayer for Visitation of Prisoners

9. Response to the 260-page draft presented to the 1905 General Synod in Quebec City

It had a short shrift, for it had many enemies who stood ready to kill it and bury it beyond recall. When Dr Dyson Hague was asked to summon from the shadowy past that memorable scene in old Quebec [*when Hague spoke against the Appendix*], he wrote: “The main thing that I remember is that as I passed down the stairs you stopped me and said, ‘Hague, you knocked it stiff.’”

W. J. Armitage, *The Story of the Canadian Revision of the Prayer Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 11.

10. The Canadian BCP of 1918/1922

Central Revision Subcommittee: 26 members of General Synod

Chairman: David Williams, Bishop of Huron

Secretary: W. J. Armitage, Archdeacon of Halifax

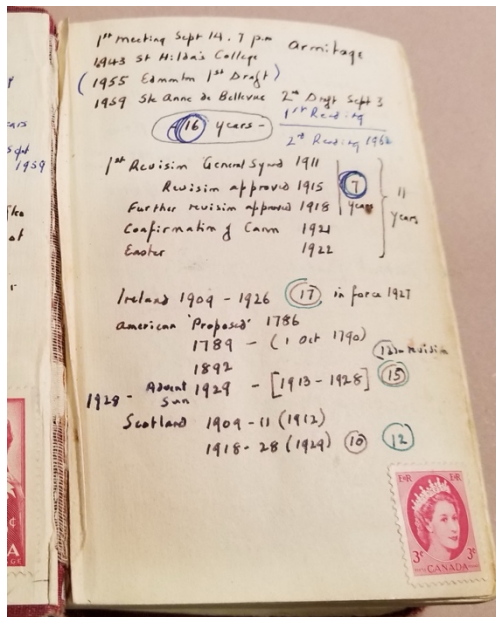
Evangelicals proposed a resolution reflecting their deep distrust of Anglo-Catholics: Nothing that would change or even *indicate* (i.e., imply) a change of doctrine.

11. Nature of the 1918/1922 revisions, as exemplified by the Burial Service

- Allows a form of burial for people excluded from the full service (e.g., those who have died “by their own wilful act”—replacing the 1662 wording, “those who have laid violent hands on themselves”)
- Special forms for the burial of small children
- Acknowledges that the weather in Canada may make it impossible to bury the corpse on the same day as the funeral service!

12. The Canadian Revision of 1959/1962

First meeting, September 14, 1943, at St. Hilda's College, Toronto



The Graham Library at Trinity College holds several Prayer Books that were filled with annotations by a leading member of the revision committee, Ramsay Armitage (Principal of Wycliffe College). Principal Armitage was much interested in how *long* it took to complete the Canadian revision—16 years!—in comparison with other revised Prayer Books across the Anglican Communion.

13. Principles of Revision (Preface to the 1959/1962 BCP)

The aim throughout has been to set forth an order which the people may use with understanding and which is agreeable with Holy Scripture and with the usage of the primitive Church. And always there has been the understanding that no alterations should be made which would involve or imply any change of doctrine of the Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, or any other alteration not in accord with the 27th Resolution of the Lambeth Conference of 1908 and the 78th Resolution of the Lambeth Conference of 1948.

14. High and Low: Fr. Roland F. Palmer, SSJE, and Dr. Ramsay Armitage, Principal of Wycliffe College

When a committee was struck to revise the Canadian Prayer Book in the 1950s, the representative of the Anglo-Catholic point of view was a Trinity man, Father Roland Palmer of the Society of St. John the Evangelist; the evangelical representative was the principal of Wycliffe, Ramsay Armitage, who at the first meeting said, “Father Palmer, come sit by me where I can keep my eye on you.” The two men always discussed controversial matters privately before the committee met, so that in formal meetings of the committee Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic could speak with one voice.

See William R. Blott, *Blessing and Glory and Thanksgiving: The Growth of a Canadian Liturgy* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998).

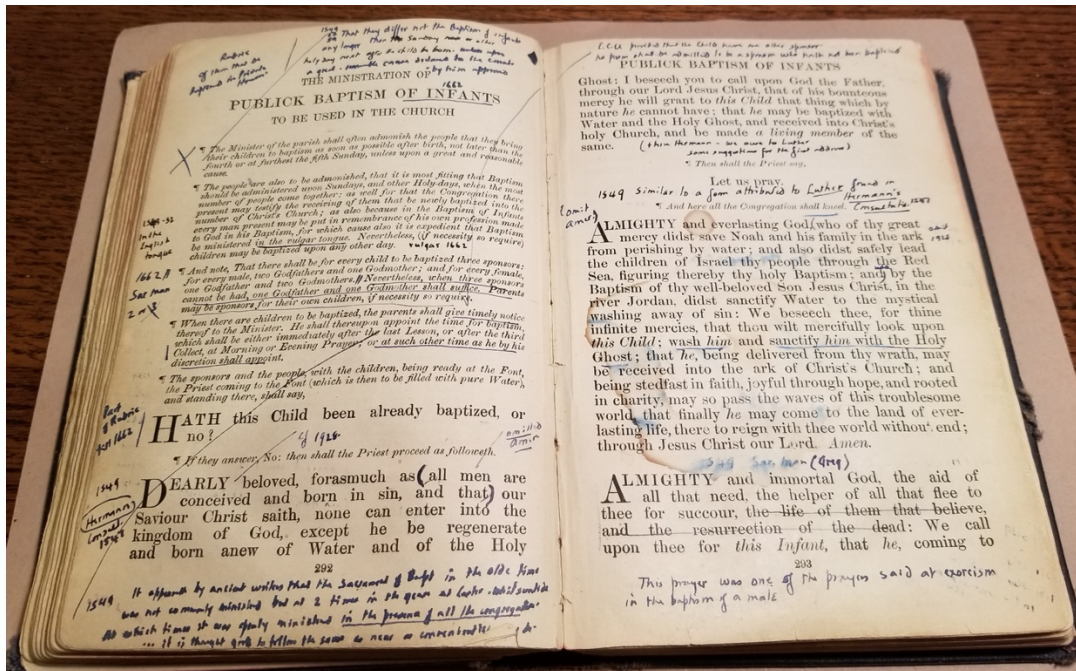
15. Armitage records Palmer's view of revision work

In our work of revision
there was no conscious copying
of this or that rite, but a setting
forth of ... an order agreeable
with Holy Scripture and the usage
of the Primitive Church and order
which must before all else be one
'that the People can use with understanding'
Roland Palmer
Ep. Gen. 1960

"In our work of revision there was no conscious copying of this or that rite, but a setting forth of ... 'an order agreeable with Holy Scripture and the usage of the Primitive Church' [an] order which must before all else be one 'that the people can use with understanding'."

16. Characteristics of the 1959 revision

- Hews close to 1662, with astute awareness of every other option in the Anglican world.
- Pastoral clarification, without change of doctrine, e.g., in the opening address at the Baptism of Infants



Annotations to the Baptismal Service in Ramsay Armitage's copy of the 1922 Canadian BCP

1918/1922 Canadian BCP (unchanged from 1662)

Dearly beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin, and that our Saviour Christ saith, none can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of Water and of the Holy Ghost: I beseech you to

call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his bounteous mercy he will grant to this Child that thing which by nature he cannot have; that he may be baptized with Water and the Holy Ghost, and received into Christ's holy Church, and be made a living member of the same.

Sources

Psalm 51:5 (Coverdale) "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness: and in sin hath my mother conceived me."

Job 25:4 "How can he be clean that is born of a woman?"

The phrase "conceived and born in sin" gave great offence to persons who believed that it condemned sexual intercourse as intrinsically sinful.

See, for example, Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at Christianity and the Religious Establishment in the New Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), pp. 24–25.

But it is in fact a classic example of "Cranmerian doubling," especially in the way the phrase pairs a word of Latin derivation—*conceived*—with one of Anglo-Saxon origin—*born*. This pairing about natural birth ("conceived and born") corresponds rhythmically and conceptually with the phrase about spiritual rebirth that follows it ("regenerate and born anew").

See Stella Brook, *The Language of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), pp. 127–33.

1959/1962 Canadian BCP

Dearly beloved in Christ, seeing that God willeth all men to be saved from the fault and corruption of the nature which they inherit, as well as from the actual sins which they commit, and that our Saviour Christ saith, None can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be born anew of Water and of the Holy Spirit, I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that he will grant to *this Child* that which by nature *he* cannot have; that he may be baptized with Water and the Holy Spirit, and received into Christ's holy Church, and be made a living member of the same.

Sources

1 Tim. 2:4–5 "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Article IX Of Original or Birth-Sin "Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born in this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.

There is *no change of doctrine* here. The doctrine expressed by a biblical allusion that had caused misunderstanding has been more clearly stated so that "the people may use [it] with understanding."

D. Consensus vs. Compromise

Consensus

“Consensus” in liturgy means that all parties find the words and ceremonies of a rite acceptable, even if they may differ in their theological interpretations of it.

“We may have theological differences, but we can both use this shared liturgy in good conscience.”

Compromise

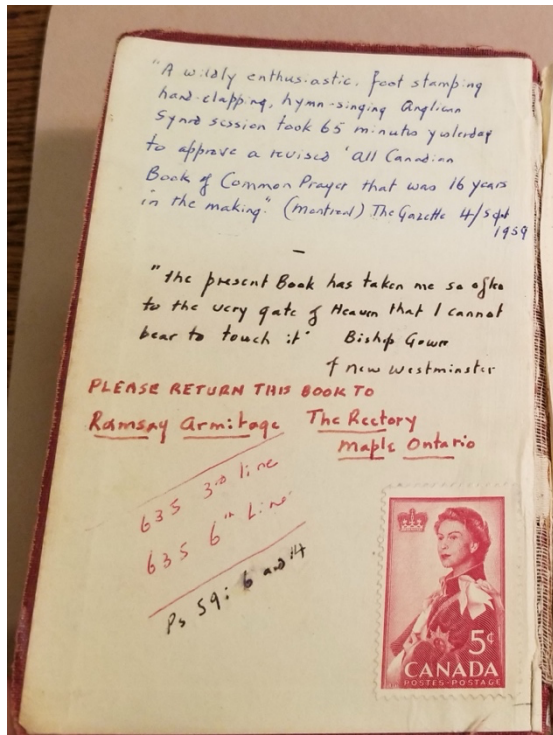
“Compromise” in liturgy means that options are provided to satisfy the liturgical preferences and theological convictions of parties that disagree with each other.

“I couldn’t use that liturgy in good conscience, but you can use it as long as I get to use this other one that you dislike.”

17. Reception of the 1959/1962 BCP

Immediately after the reading of the report on the proposed new Prayer Book at General synod in 1959, a motion to approve the new book was proposed by a graduate of Trinity College, seconded by a graduate of Wycliffe College—representing acceptance of the book by both “High” and “Low” Anglicans. There followed a standing ovation lasting many minutes, concluding with the spontaneous singing of the Doxology, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

18. Notes in Ramsay Armitage’s BCP, on the adoption of the book by the General Synod in 1959 and its final authorization in 1962



A wildly enthusiastic, foot stamping hand-clapping, hymn-singing Anglican Synod session took 65 minutes yesterday to approve a revised “All Canadian Book of Common Prayer that was 16 years in the making.”

(Montreal) *The Gazette*, 4/Sept 1959

“the present Book has taken me so often to the very gate of Heaven that I cannot bear to touch it”

Bishop Gower of New Westminster

19. Disagreement within consensus: Principal Armitage praises the Prayer Book commentary of Fr. Palmer

With most of *His Worthy Praise* I find myself in full, complete accord. Here and there I might say it differently although everywhere I wish that I had the grace and competence to say it as well. And when I meet some statement which through inheritance and conviction I would challenge, I recognize that here we stand on that solid Anglican ground of the true comprehensiveness which was a mark of the wide embracing Christian Church in the New Testament and apostolic times.

Foreword to Roland F. Palmer, *His Worthy Praise: On Worship according to the Book of Common Prayer (Canada 1959)*, rev. 3rd printing (Toronto: Anglican Church of Canada, 1963), pp. ix–x.

20. How far do contemporary liturgies reflect a consensus, the “mind of the Church”?

General Synod 1995 on the BAS

The [Evaluation] Commission [on the Book of Alternative Services] concluded that the BAS reflects a theologically orthodox presentation of the Christian faith, noting however that there is a difference of opinion between those who regard 16th century formulations as definitive and those who have a more developmental notion of theological process.

The Synod ...

AGREED to instruct the Faith, Worship, and Ministry Committee to prepare as soon as possible supplementary material to The Book of Alternative Services containing ... a contemporary language eucharistic rite **that embodies Reformed theological conscience** over such issues as the manner of the presence of Christ’s saving work on the cross, eucharistic oblation, and epiclesis.

21. Fr. Crouse on the difficulty of Consensus

The authority of consensus is not easy to live with. It involves learning and deliberation, debate and controversy, when we would prefer, perhaps, the peace of easy compromise. It involves the patience which must sometimes think in terms of centuries instead of months or years. It involves reverent, careful, and humble attention to the past when we are, perhaps, inclined to be preoccupied with the latest findings of Biblical Criticism or the Social Sciences or with the latest popular causes. And in the divided state of Christendom, the divided state even of our own communion, it involves, or should involve, the frustration and self discipline of refraining from local decisions which are not clearly justified by the *Consensus Fidelium* as more universally conceived in time and space.

Robert D. Crouse, “The Prayer Book and the Authority of Tradition,” in *Church Polity and Authority*, ed. G. Richmond Bridge (Charlottetown: St. Peter Publications, 1985), pp. 53–61, at p. 56.