



BCP Revision Needs Ecumenical, Cross-Cultural Approach

by the Very Rev. Andrew McGowan, Dean of the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale

Halfway through the 79th General Convention, Prayer Book revision seems likely. While the bishops may have their different thoughts, it seems probable that the Church will gird its loins and face some version of a long and challenging process of trial use and preparation for reform.

There is a curious introspection about much of the conversation so far. Whatever our positions on the different rites, existing and envisaged, the driving concerns seem

focused on the sensibilities and characteristics of Episcopalians themselves: "our" diversity, our commitments, our needs.

Liturgy, however, is an ecumenical and a cross-cultural business, not a merely denominational or national one. The drafters of the 1979 Prayer Book knew this, certainly. Many deputies and other Episcopalians who were once members of other Churches may currently take for granted the ease with which someone formed in the Roman Catholic Church, or in a set of denominations just to the Protestant side of us on the spectrum, can slide into the prayer of the 1979 Prayer Book. It's no accident: The 1979 Prayer Book is the product of about 100 years

of ecumenical scholarly convergence, which shaped the liturgies of all those Churches. This would not have been the case with the 1928 Prayer Book. We didn't get where we are alone.

It is worrisome that despite the soaring temperatures of Austin, the current Prayer Book conversations take place in an ecumenical winter. There are numerous important reasons why things have changed in our dialogues with other groups since the 1960s and '70s, but a profound question remains largely untouched in this debate: How will our liturgy reveal and help create the unity of the Body of Christ, whose relationship with the Episcopal Church is, well, inexact and incomplete?

This shouldn't mean we just borrow the insights of other traditions as ritual toys. One of the faintly tragic elements on display in the 1979 Prayer Book are the numerous borrowings from Orthodox liturgy, which reflect not just scholarly knowledge, but prayerful conversations with Russian and Greek scholars of the mid-20th century who were then genuine dialogue partners. It is hard to find such engagement with eastern Christianity in the Episcopal Church now, beyond the somewhat hollow testimony of facsimile icons in Church bookstores.

Adequate worship can never be adequate worship just for us, however we conceive of ourselves. It's not the nature of the Christian

-continued on page 2-

Encountering the Spirit in Marriage Liturgy Debates

by Patrick Keyser, Staff Writer

In the homestretch of any General Convention, tiredness, frustration and myopia can set in. It's important to keep reminding ourselves of what healthy, loving, Anglican debate looks like. Patrick Keyser brings us just such a story.

The unexciting name of Committee 13 in no way reflects the importance of the work that was placed before it at this General Convention: revising the 1979 Prayer Book. I was especially interested in the discussions of marriage liturgies. Given the diverse views on marriage within the Episcopal Church and the division that has plagued our Church in recent years, I expected the discussions to be acrimonious. Yet, as I sat through the many hours of testimony and committee deliberations, I was surprised to find something completely different.

The leadership of Committee 13 played a major role in setting the tone for the conversations. Bishop Jeffrey Lee of Chicago began every open hearing by inviting all assembled to join in song. It was marvelous to see a large group of Episcopalians who hold a range of views on contentious issues standing together singing, "Glory to God, glory to God, glory in the highest!" and "Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ under our feet." Opening the hearings with song and prayer created an atmosphere in which all assembled were reminded that they were standing before God as they passionately debated the pressing issues before our Church.

When the time came for Committee 13 to hear testimony on resolutions related to marriage liturgies, people came to the microphones and spoke their truth, often with boldness and profound vulnerability, and always with conviction. Some rose to speak of how meaningful it had been for the Church finally to recognize and to bless their relationships. Others rose to express their concern about the impact on ecumenical dialogue that could result from defining marriage as a covenant between two people. Several of the bishops who have not authorized use of the trial liturgies for marriage in their dioceses rose to offer their views. Still

others who view marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman expressed their fear of exclusion and marginalization within the Episcopal Church.

The atmosphere was not overly deferential or lacking in authenticity, nor did it reflect the acrimony I so feared. No, the conversations were conducted in a spirit of genuine love and care, borne out of a desire to seek reconciliation and relationship in the face of difficulty and division. It was a witness, in my view, to the work of the Spirit among us. I admittedly have a respect and appreciation for bureaucracy, but even I wouldn't expect a committee meeting to be a particularly powerful place for encountering the Spirit.

In a time when most discourse seems to be aimed at producing winners and losers at the expense of genuine dialogue, the Episcopal Church has the opportunity at this Convention to show the world that there is a different way to discuss issues and to disagree. Vehement disagreement need not end relationship. Relationship does not require agreement on all issues. But it does require that we hold each other in love, especially in contentious and painful moments.

The final decision of this Convention on marriage liturgies remains undetermined, as resolutions move through both Houses. Whatever emerges, I am humbled and grateful for the movement of the Spirit within our Church that is calling us to discern difficult questions together in love.

Patrick Keyser is a seminarian at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale.

BCP Revisions, continued

Church to retreat into agreeable enclaves where our differences can be avoided or even celebrated by giving us only the prayers we like. Liturgy ought at least to rub our noses in the scandal of disunity, not reinforce it.

Prayer Books have, of course, been revised and even just written from scratch before. History suggests, however, that there are some conditions for success. This process has always involved scholarly as well as faithful and prayerful people. Given our history, in the past this basically meant white men. There is no way that can continue in a future process of revision. However, that doesn't mean that any commission will be made adequate to the task simply through diversity from among our own constituencies, or that even such a commission would reflect those constituencies' opinions accurately. Unless there is some deep recognition of the place expertise and scholarship play, not in determining every outcome but in shaping the questions, we will fail.

So we can't solve all the problems or grasp all the opportunities of liturgical revision just by looking inwardly. We might need people of color (in particular) as expert consultants who are not Episcopalians at all, but Anglicans from elsewhere, as well as Roman Catholic and Protestant, and even Pentecostal scholars who have reflected on their own and other traditions profoundly. Yet we can't be satisfied with borrowed insights—these have to be based on real relationships, not just the appropriation of attractive elements.

We also need to pay closer attention to how liturgical renewal has rolled out in other parts of the Anglican Communion. It seems to have escaped notice in much of the Episcopal Church that there is no other Church so confident as this one that a single book can do the work some imagine it can do. Elsewhere, expansive and dynamic bodies of authorized texts, which refer back to a historically normative book, are far more the rule.

This issue will actually rear its head in that part of the Episcopal

Church's conversation that focuses on translation. There seems – properly – to be strong support for new translations of the BCP that are less wooden and that allow for idiom and image that will work in the different cultural contexts of Spanish-speaking and other worshipping communities. Yet this actually means multiple liturgies and multiple books, in practice. So, in the end, we will not be able to face the challenge of diversity just by adding more pages to the Book, let alone by cutting out the pages at which we tend to sneer, but which are the heart of others' communal prayer. Something bigger than mere revision is needed.

Given the length of time involved, all this work will be for the worshipping lives of an as-yet hypothetical next generation of imagined churchgoers (or Jesus followers). Yet the young people, as well as the more diverse congregations of these conversations, may so far be constructs suiting the own various imaginings about what and whom we would like to follow us. Will we allow actual young Christians (as opposed to imagined ones) to play the key roles in what comes next? Will we allow Prayer Book revision to be driven by the sensibilities of a graying Church, however progressive, when a rising generation may have its own things to say?

Last, but hardly least, this is a God thing, and a Bible thing. Liturgy is our attempt to serve the living God, not to suit ourselves. The greatest claim of Anglican liturgy is not its aesthetic beauty but its scriptural heart. This doesn't answer the questions that face us, but it does change them. The challenge of arbitrating between different opinions about worship in Anglicanism is as old as the introductory essay to the first BCP, of 1549. There, as Cranmer and others negotiated a path between conservative and progressive tendencies, he offers a pithy guide to Prayer Book revision: "it was thought expedient not so much to have respect [for] how to please and satisfy either of these parties, as how to please God, and profit them both."



Justice, Access and Theological Education

by Sarah Kye Price, Staff Writer

Whenever two or three seminarians are gathered, just as many stories of call are in our midst. The stories are varied, but often include the roadblocks and challenges, as well as moments of grace which mark turning points in the journey. For some people, the fierce persistence of their call took decades to materialize because of economic circumstances, family commitments, or bewilderment about what the process of formation might look like. Others have a more straightforward path, sometimes paved by a mentor who helped them make the right connections, or a seminary willing to offer financial assistance. Even in our digital world, information about options, funding and support can be hard to come by without the right connections.

Now, more than ever, we are compelled to pay attention to diversity among our clergy and in our ministry contexts. As we yearn to offer culturally and contextually relevant ministries in all corners of our Church, the stories I've heard bear witness to issues of access and justice in the ways in which call, discernment and formation take place across the Church.

Still, some stories have yet to be told because of the barriers presented by distance, finances, family caregiving and other practical needs in the lives of those who are called to serve.

GC79 is considering several pieces of legislation relevant to those seeking information about non-traditional theological education options, including centralizing the clearinghouse of information about non-traditional seminary education options (A022), and creating a task force for the development of a scholarship fund that would serve those in non-traditional paths of formation (A027). The common theme among these proposals is a more centralized understanding and access to the various methods of formation available for laity, deacons and priests so that the formational needs of those called to serve the Church will guide program selection, rather than proximity to assets and resources.

I spoke with the Rev. Dr. Susanna Singer, who has guided the development of the proposals initiated by the Task Force on Clergy Leadership in Small Congregations. Our conversation crystallized the ways

in which these seemingly minor proposals reflect much larger issues of access and justice faced by seminarians and the Church. "People who are called to serve should not be dissuaded by the process of seeking options to fulfill their call," Singer asserted. She went on to explain that, while traditional, residential seminary education has been normative for many years, the rise of highly adaptive virtual classrooms allowing for low-residency education, as well as expanded options for local formation mixed with seminary study, now offer a larger range of opportunities with expanded access.

While seminary leaders at public hearings have expressed both optimism and caution regarding this shift in theological education, the justice issue remains. Culturally and contextually situated leaders cannot always pick up and move, nor would it necessarily be best for them to do so. (For me, relocating would have meant severing a tie with one of the vocations in my bi-vocational call.) And yet, these leaders crave theological formation and wish to respond authentically to vocational call. Currently, it is the purview of seminaries to offer assistance and/or the ability of dioceses to supplement expenses for either seminary or local formation programs, which determine formation options in situations of resource scarcity. It becomes an issue of economic justice: "If we don't do anything, then privilege will reign," said Singer.

When I have a chance to tell my own story of call and formation in those seminary circles, it is with gratitude and awareness of the privilege it has been to remain in my secular employment while studying in a low-residency format at an Episcopal seminary. Allowing others to have access to the information and resources needed to discern in community what will ultimately help them form and serve the Church is a significant step forward in removing structural barriers to theological formation. Yes, these are moments of grace, but also, a commitment to justice.

Sarah Kye Price is a professor of social work at Virginia Commonwealth University and a seminarian at Church Divinity School of the Pacific.