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## *What is Liturgy?*

An Address given to members  
of the New South Wales Branch of  
The Prayer Book Society

by

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## What is Liturgy?

The Right Reverend Donald Robinson  
*formerly Archbishop of Sydney*

I approach this question within the context of our present interest in what the Preface of the *Book of Common Prayer* calls "the Publick Liturgie" of the Church of England. The reference is to BCP itself, first compiled in 1549. This is a particular use of the word 'liturgy', qualified by its relation to the Church of England and also by its public character within that setting. The terms 'liturgy' and 'liturgical' are sometimes used to describe any written form of service, and there is also a more restricted use, among ecclesiastical writers, to refer to the Holy Communion, especially when considered as one of the elements in the common tradition of the churches. Although BCP does not use the word 'liturgy' in this way, it does recognise a certain distinction between the Holy Communion and daily Morning and Evening Prayer. 'When men say Morning and Evening Prayer privately,' says the Preface, 'they may say the same in any language that they themselves do understand.' This liberty includes priests and deacons, who are required to 'say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer either privately or openly.' On the other hand, all eligible parishioners are expected and exhorted to be present for the Communion on

every occasion of its administration, to judge from the Exhortations, though special provision is made for 'the sick person . . . not able to come to the Church' (see opening rubric of the Communion of the Sick).

Daily prayers seem always to have been primarily a private, i.e. domestic, activity. An interesting instruction appears in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (3rd century), under 'Of Times of Prayer':

Let every believer, man and woman, when they rise from sleep at dawn before they undertake any work wash their hands and pray to God, and so let them go to their work.

But if there should be an instruction in the word, let each one prefer to go hither, considering that it is God whom he hears speaking by the mouth of him who instructs. For having prayed in the assembly (*ekklesia*) he will be able to avoid all the evils of that day . . .

If there is a teacher there, let none of you be late in arriving at the assembly, at the place where they give instruction . . .

And if there is a day on which there is no instruction, let each one at home take a holy book and read in it sufficiently what seems profitable.

(*Apostolic Tradition* 35 and 36)

We are reminded that, in the English Reformation, the great draw-card for the daily Morning and Evening Prayer was the public reading of the scripture in English. The curate was to cause the bell to be rung 'that the people may come to hear God's Word, and to pray with him' (Concerning the Service of the Church).

But the meeting of the church on the Lord's Day was in essence a corporate activity of the whole membership of the church and the expression of the body of Christ in that place. Another early Church Order gives a vivid account of how this was seen:

Command and remind the people that they be constant in the assembly of the Church, so that you be not hindered, but that they be constantly assembled that no one diminish the Church by not assembling, and make smaller by a member the body of Christ. For it is not about others alone that a man should think, but about himself, hearing what our Lord has said, that 'he who gathers not with me scatters abroad'. As, therefore, you are members of the Christ, scatter not yourselves from the Church by not assembling yourselves, for you have a head, that is Christ, as He counsels and promises, that you are partakers with us. Therefore do not despise yourselves, and do not deprive our Saviour of His members; do not mangle and scatter His body, but leave everything on the Lord's day, and run eagerly towards your Church, for this is your glory. If not, what excuse will you have before God, for those who have not assembled on the Lord's day, to hear the Word of Life, and to be nourished with the divine food which endures for ever?

(*Didascalia Apostolorum*, Syria, 3rd century)

It was this understanding of the significance of the assembly of the church as the body of Christ and its purpose that gave rise to the use of the term 'liturgy' to describe what the *Didascalia* elsewhere calls 'the worship of God' by the assembled body.

But let me here say something about the origin of the term itself.

In ancient Athens, certain public functions, provided for the benefit of the community at large, were called *leitourgiai*, liturgies. Rich citizens were expected, or even required, to provide them, and foot the bill for them. These liturgies included such things as choruses for dramas, festival banquets, conducting public delegations to foreign festivals, providing a vessel for the navy, or even subsidizing a horse for a knight. Think of corporate sponsors for our Olympic Games! In time, a liturgy just meant a public office. Etymologically the term probably meant 'work provided for the people'.

The term came to be used beyond the civic context for any service rendered, such as that of slaves to masters, parents to children, or friend to friend. One use of 'liturgy' was to describe the functions of priests and other ministrants in religious cults, i.e. service to a god or gods.

This last usage appears frequently in the Greek Old Testament where *leitourgia*, *leitourgein* and *leitourgos* are used for the Levitical cultus, and for the actions and persons of the priests and levites. The whole system of worship in Israel was service or liturgy to God, and the priests and levites were his servants. This usage appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews where the Old Testament worship and priesthood are alluded to (Heb. 8: 2,6), and also in reference to Christ's fulfilment of that worship and priesthood (Heb. 9: 21; 10: 17). The priestly liturgy is also referred to in Luke 1: 23 in connection with Zechariah's priestly duty. Hebrews 1: 14 speaks more broadly of angels as 'ministering (liturgical) spirits', i.e. ministering to God (*see v. 7*) who despatches them for the benefit (*diakonia*) of those who are to inherit salvation. Sometimes in the New Testament 'liturgy' just means service rendered, as in Romans 15: 27, 2 Cor 9: 12, Phil. 2: 25 & 30. While there is no material or ceremonial cultus of worship in the early Christian church like that of the Levitical system, Paul twice uses the lan-

guage of sacrificial liturgy in describing Christian activity. In Romans 15: 16 Paul depicts his apostolic role in God's gospel to the gentiles as that of a ministrant (*leitourgos*) acting as a priest (*hierourgounta*) in a cultus where Christ Jesus is the deity he serves, and where his office is to ensure that the offering (*prosphora*) made by the gentiles is acceptable. A similar, but not identical, image of liturgy is in Phil. 2: 17 where the response of the Philippians to Paul's gospel ministry is described as 'the sacrificial ministry (*leitourgia*) of your faith'. But in this ceremony Paul is not the priest, but merely a drink-offering poured out on the sacrifice which is the faith, i.e. the effectual response, of the Philippians. However, vivid as these cultic images are, they do not provide the basis for, nor lead to, a theology of Christian ministry or worship in terms of a cultus.

More intriguing is the description, in Acts 13: 1, 2, of the activity of the five prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch (including Barnabas and Saul) in 'ministering (*leitourgounton*) to the Lord', in the course of which the Holy Spirit directed them to 'separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. Dom Gregory Dix took this text to mean that 'liturgy' was by this time the name given to the corporate worship of God by the whole church, the 'priestly' society of Christians (*The Shape of the Liturgy*, p. 1). But the syntax does not support this. The subject of the verb 'ministering' is the prophets/teachers. We have seen already how Paul applies this verb to the exercise of his special ministry as an apostle, and we should note also the description in the (contemporary or near-contemporary) *Didache* of bishops and deacons 'ministering the ministry (*leitourgousi ten leitourgian*) of the prophets and teachers' (chap. 15). This liturgy at Antioch is a designation of the work of these prophets/teachers as a real service to God. Of course, other terms are used in the New Testament to describe service offered to God, including both *diakonia* and *douleia*, but Acts 13:2 seems to be the only use of 'liturgy' for this purpose in connection with ministers within the Christian assembly. But, isolated as this reference is, it may be a

bridge to the extensive usage found in the *First Epistle of Clement* which itself goes far to explain the later concept of liturgy as the corporate worship of God within and by the assembled church.

### *Post-apostolic Liturgy*

Clement sees the whole Christian life as *leitourgia*, liturgy or service to God. His view is consistent with that of the New Testament and its language of sacrifice, e.g. that of Paul in Romans 12: 1,2, though Clement is much freer with the liturgy group of words. In chapter 4 he points to the gifts and sacrifices offered to God by Cain and Abel as original responses to God's goodness. Then, after rehearsing the 'examples of old time' and of the apostles, he says 'let us come to the glorious and venerable rule of our tradition' (the *kanon* of our *paradosis*) 'and see what is good and pleasing and acceptable before our Maker' (chap. 7:2). This sounds as if there was by then (i.e. the last decade of the first century) a recognised and agreed way of formulating the Christian response to God within the churches. This response included the way of repentance and right conduct, but Clement goes on to say: 'Let us fix our gaze on those who rendered service (*leitourgein*) perfectly', and he cites Noah's *leitourgia* in foretelling a new beginning for the world (chap. 9:4), perhaps indicating that prophecy still had a special place in church liturgy. Among the marks of the Christian life acceptable to God are not only faith, piety, humility and peace, but order such as is seen in the movements of the heavenly bodies. The very winds fulfil their liturgy. The goodness of God, experienced in his gifts, prompts us to approach him in holiness of soul 'raising pure and undefiled hands to him' in praise, the model of which is the myriads of the heavenly host of Daniel 7: 10 and the *Sanctus* of Isaiah 6, sung by the whole multitude of his angels who stand and minister (*leitourgein*) to him. 'We too must gather together in harmony (*en homonoia epi to*

*auto sunachthentes*) and cry earnestly to him with one mouth, that we may share in his great and glorious promises (chap. 34: 6.7). Note this vocabulary of Christian assembly and its heavenly counterpart. The notes of order (*taxis*) and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) are essential to this corporate liturgy. 'Since then we have everything from him, we ought in everything to give him thanks (*eucharistein*) to whom is the glory for ever and ever. Amen' (chap. 38: 4).

In this great discourse on Christian worship there is as yet, in Clement, no mention of the Lord's supper. The whole Christian life is a liturgy, the offering of a sacrifice of praise to God. This is expressed in the corporate liturgy, as all meet in the one place, in order, and join with one heart and voice in ascribing holiness to God. Even when Clement goes on to say that the Lord has commanded that offerings and liturgies be performed, not thoughtlessly or disorderly, but at fixed times and hours, and in the places, and by the persons, whom God himself has willed (chap. 40), there is still no explicit reference to the Lord's supper. It is liturgy as worship, and its order, that is paramount. It is also clear in Clement that the whole church is involved, every member according to his proper place, and the greatest offence is to act in such a way as to cause someone to separate themselves from the assembly. In Clement's view, this corporate liturgy of the whole church belongs to the 'appointed order of God's will', and is the product of 'the gospel of the kingdom of God' itself (chaps. 41, 42).

What then is the relation of the Holy Communion, the rite of bread and cup, to this larger concept of liturgy? Professor E. C. Ratcliff of Cambridge has pointed out that the idea of the Church's liturgy as *eucharistia* is older than, and was originally independent of, the rite of bread and cup (the Sacrament). This broader eucharistic liturgy was inspired by what the Book of Revelation depicts about the worship of the whole company of heaven which St John saw when he was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day' (Rev. 1:10). Blessing and honour and praise was offered to the 'one sitting upon the throne' for creation, and then to the

Lamb in the midst of the throne for redemption. The *Sanctus* was said, and also the new song of redemption by the blood of the Lamb. Every creature was in its proper place and order, and the response was total (Rev. 4, 5). To this *eucharistia* thus comprehensively offered and echoed by the Church on earth, the Church duly added the particular *eucharistia* or *eulogia* for the bread and cup as instituted by the Lord Jesus on the eve of his passion (e.g. Matt. 26: 26 ff.). We should note that the 'canon of our tradition' in BCP reflects this pattern and sequence, though much abbreviated: it passes from the exhortation to lift our hearts to the Lord in heaven, and offer our thanks (eucharist) to him, and the joining in the Holy, Holy, Holy, with the whole company of heaven, to the remembrance of Christ's death for our redemption and thus to the institution of the sacrament of bread and cup.

The concept of corporate worship as liturgy which we see in Clement of Rome finds expression in all the great regional liturgies which emerged over the following centuries in both East and West. The liturgy of the Church of England which emerged in 1549 was somewhat unusual in that it was the liturgy of a small national church and was composed in what many would still have thought was that nation's uncouth vernacular; but for all that it was recognisably the child of the Latin rite of Western Europe and of the Roman liturgy in particular. It was a former Bishop of Sydney, a good Protestant, who introduced his much esteemed study of BCP with these words:

The English Prayer Book embodies, in tangible form, the chief principles of the English Reformation. It was no new book, drawn up by the religious leaders of the sixteenth century, but was mainly a reformed publication of those old Services, which had grown up through nearly a thousand years of English Christianity, being themselves developments of the Liturgies of an even remoter antiquity. So far it exemplified the famous Declaration (in the Act against suing for Dispensations at Rome, AD 1533),

that the English Church and nation in the Reformation "intended not to decline or vary from the Congregation of Christ's Church, in things concerning the Catholic faith of Christendom, or declared by Holy Scripture and the Word of God necessary to salvation". But at the same time it was an assertion of a right to remodel and reform, to add to and take away from, these old Services, so as to adapt them to the needs of the people and of the age . . .

Alfred Barry, *The Teacher's Prayer Book*

### *Liturgy in Australia*

I shall be arguing later that the *Book of Common Prayer* contains the only lawfully ordered forms of service as yet authorised for use in the Anglican Church of Australia (as distinct from permitted deviations) under our constitution. Whether or not all agree with this, there is no doubt about the *declaration* made in the Ruling Principles of the constitution 'that the Book of Common Prayer, together with the Thirty-nine Articles, be regarded as the authorised standard of worship and doctrine in this Church'. If, therefore, we ask What is Liturgy? in relation to our own authorised standard, we should be clear as to the character of BCP.

We should first note a number of presuppositions of BCP.

1. It presupposes a 'particular or national church' (Article 34) as the body whose liturgy it is;
2. It presupposes a *parish* as the normal communal context, whose members meet in assembly corpor-

ately to worship God and to 'set forth his most worthy praise';

3. It presupposes *uniformity* of liturgical use, to express both the unity of all Christian people in the parish and also the unity of churches throughout the national church.

I need not enlarge here on anomalies which have arisen in regard to these presuppositions, or on the difficulties some people feel about them. They are, nevertheless, among the 'principles of the Church of England' which this Church 'retains and approves' under our Constitution (Section 4), and we are bound to take them seriously.

Let me now point to four features of our liturgy which belong to our common Christian liturgical tradition.

1. **Easter:** the Christian Passover or Paschal Feast, which celebrates annually the mighty act of God in our redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ. This celebration – 'the Lamb's high feast', as an ancient hymn describes it – is older than the historical commemoration of the successive events in Christ's life which began in the fourth century in connection with pilgrimages to the Holy Land;

2. **The Lord's Day:** the weekly celebration of the resurrection on the first day of the week, and the foretaste of the great sabbath rest of God, what the Epistle of Barnabas (chap. 15: 8) calls 'the eighth day' of the new creation;

3. **The historical commemoration of Jesus' curriculum vitae:** from his conception to his ascension and pouring out of the Spirit, and within which Easter has now been accommodated. This historical commemoration occupies about half the liturgical year, introduced by the overruling Advent expect-

ation and concluding with the acknowledgement of the glory of the eternal Trinity;

4. **'The sanctification of time':** the recognition of our relation to God in the daily and hourly passage of time. As God makes 'the outgoings of the morning and evening to praise' him, so his responsive creatures offer the morning and evening sacrifices of praise, declaring his loving kindness in the morning and his faithfulness every night (Psalms 65:8, 92: 2).

The mode of engagement in this yearly, weekly, and daily liturgy is, in our Reformed tradition, guided by our extensive use of scripture. Special or Proper lessons, psalms, prefaces and collects direct our response at Easter, on all Sundays, and at the commemorations of biblical events and saints. For the 'daily hearing of holy Scripture read in the Church' we have *lectio continua*, whose merits are set forth in 'Concerning the Service of the Church'.

From this comprehensive and patterned hearing of God's most holy Word come our liturgical responses. The Psalms are not merely read; we use them ourselves as personal and corporate response, interpreting them as Christ-centred. Their scope is wide and subtle, and we should not neglect their systematic use as seems to be happening in some churches today. BCP also provides certain hymns and canticles, completing the category of 'psalms hymns and spiritual songs' in Col 3: 16. BCP's three designated 'hymns' are the *Gloria Patri*, the *Te Deum* and the *Benedictus* of Zechariah, while the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* are called 'songs'. (The one metrical hymn in BCP is the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* in the Ordering of Priests. We now have an embarrassing wealth of metrical hymns at our disposal; we should be careful to use them to enhance, and not confuse, the liturgical sense of our services.)

Prayer and intercession is another significant feature of our liturgy. Again we have an apostolic injunction to

guide us (1 Tim. 2: 1, 2), and patterns of intercession are in Morning and Evening Prayer, the Litany, and in the Prayer for the Church in the Communion office of BCP. Likewise there are model thanksgivings in Prayers and Thanksgivings upon Several Occasions, in the Communion – ‘Let us give thanks unto our Lord God’ – with the Prefaces and *Sanctus*, in the post-communion thanksgivings, and in the wonderful thanksgiving for the *aeterna munera Christi* at the Ordering of Priests.

I conclude this general review of liturgy by expressing my personal view that we are in some danger of losing a proper perspective of what liturgy means by a defective understanding of what the church itself is, to which the liturgy belongs. The ‘cure and charge’ envisaged by the ordination commission is a parish, i.e. the residents of a neighbourhood. The concept was reinforced in the sixteenth century by Elizabeth’s Act of Uniformity (still the first item in BCP if it is correctly printed) which required everyone in the parish ‘to resort to the parish-church or chapel accustomed . . . where the Common-Prayer . . . shall be used . . . upon every Sunday’ etc. It was further reinforced by the canons of 1604, including canon 28 forbidding ‘strangers from other parishes’ to be admitted to the Holy Communion and requiring churchwardens to ‘remit such home to their own parish churches and ministers, there to receive the Communion with the rest of their own neighbours’. The modern assumption, however, is that we may go church-shopping; that we can choose any church or congregation which takes our fancy, and that consequently we can decide for ourselves whom we shall have to be over us in the Lord. We live in a consumerist, competitive society in which church-going is, even for some Christians, one leisure-time activity among others. Thus church services are designed to be attractive to outsiders or casual attenders, and ‘visitors are welcome’. These changes make us ask what is the basis of church membership? The concept of the church of a place, meaning the assembly of the believers who belong to a particular place, has its roots in the New Testament. It is implied in St Paul’s address to

‘the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’, with its probable allusion to the parallel civil *ekklesia* of the Thessalonians, comprising the citizens of Thessalonika. When Paul went to Corinth he was assured by the Lord that ‘I have a numerous people in this city’ (Acts 18: 10), and in due time we find Paul writing to ‘the church of God which is at Corinth’. The link between church and neighbourhood is strong in the New Testament.

In recent years there has also been a multiplication of different styles of Sunday service in the one parish, either to cater for individual tastes, or to provide evangelistic or pastoral approaches to particular people-groups. Desirable as it certainly is to reach out to non-members, and to minister to the needs of youth and other groups, some rethinking of ways and means is necessary when the menu of Sunday services means that ‘the whole church coming together’ (1Cor 14:23) as the one body of Christ expressing the unity of the spirit in the diversity of its members is no longer possible. The Prayer Book Commission, in its 1966 report to General Synod exploring the possibilities of Prayer Book revision, drew attention to the ‘need for one main assembly of the local church on the Lord’s Day’, and made a number of recommendations related to this need; but subsequent trends have been away from the biblical doctrine and model of ‘the church of God which as at X’.

It is not possible to explore this question fully here, but I believe its resolution is essential if we are to have a firm basis for understanding the function of the liturgy. The ecumenical movement for a long time sought to reverse the modern trend, but it has made little progress since the World Council of Churches Assembly at New Delhi in 1958, which defined the unity it believed to be God’s will as ‘one fully committed fellowship’ of ‘*all in each place* who are baptized into Jesus Christ . . .’. I do not underestimate the obstacles in the way of returning to the primitive and catholic (and reformed) concept of the church as consisting of those believers who, belonging to a particular neighbourhood, meet as the people of God and the body of

Christ in that place; but I record my conviction that a radical re-thinking of our present tendencies is essential if we are to understand both the church of God and the full significance of its liturgy.

### *Change in Australia*

May I now venture some comment on the present phase of liturgical usage and change within the Anglican Church of Australia.

With the beginning of the operation of our new Constitution in 1962, it was determined, as a Ruling Principle of the Church, that 'this Church . . . retains and approves the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in the Book of Common Prayer . . . and in the Articles of Religion'. As we have already noted, it was further declared that BCP with the Articles be regarded as 'the authorized standard of worship and doctrine in this Church'. Section 4 of the Constitution also made it clear that the retention of the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in BCP did not inhibit our Church from exercising the right to 'order its forms of worship', provided BCP and the Articles remained the authorised standard, 'and no alteration in, or permitted variations from, the services or Articles therein contained shall contravene any principle of doctrine or worship laid down in such standard'.

This proviso, which envisages the possibility of alterations to, and permitted variations from, the BCP services, seems to imply that those services already constitute the forms of service of this Church which the Church has authority to order under this section of the Constitution. But even if the BCP services are not our Church's ordered forms of worship by virtue of Section 4, they are so under

Section 71(2), which keeps the existing law regarding ritual and ceremonial in force unless and until varied in accordance with the Constitution.

Thus we can confidently say that the 1662 Prayer Book (in the text as it stood in 1955 – see Section 72 (2)) is the Publick Liturgie of our Church in Australia.

Next we note that the central provision of Section 4 of the Constitution enables our Church not only to order its forms of worship but also to 'alter or revise such . . . forms'. There is nothing surprising or novel about this. BCP was altered or revised five times between 1549 and 1662, and the legitimacy of revision is defended in the Preface to BCP itself. There were a few minor revisions also in 1871, 1872 and 1922 (and most dioceses in Australia adopted these, as they were able to do) but the identity of BCP as the 'one use' of the Church remained.

The central clause of Section 4 speaks of alterations or revisions of BCP but says nothing about 'permitted variations'. 'Deviations from the existing order of service' were permitted in a later proviso of Section 4 as a temporary expedient ('until other order be taken') and in particular parishes only. When the Declaration that BCP and the Articles 'be regarded as the authorised standard of worship and doctrine in this Church' was added to the final form of the Constitution in 1955, the words were added: 'and no alteration in or permitted variations from the services or Articles therein contained shall contravene any principle of doctrine or worship laid down in such standard'. Again we should note the difference between alterations in BCP services and permitted variations from them.

How, then, are we to regard *An Australian Prayer Book* and *A Prayer Book for Australia* in terms of what the Constitution authorises or allows? Neither book alters or revises the forms of worship contained in BCP within the meaning of Section 4. An alteration or revision would formally change the text of BCP services, as would be

necessary, for example, if or when the name of the sovereign needed to be changed. But no alteration or revision has been made in the text of BCP services since 1962. As I see it, both AAPB and APBA contain not alterations to, but variations or deviations from, the services in BCP. Note that the Preface of AAPB describes that book as 'an ordered means for experiment in liturgy' for 'trial use' (p. 13). The only difference between its services and the various services for trial use which were published between 1962 and 1978 by the Prayer Book and Liturgical Commissions of the General Synod is that the latter were used with the episcopal permission allowed in the third proviso of Section 4 for certain deviations, whereas AAPB purported to have the authority of a canon of General Synod. I say purported, because it is not clear what power resides in General Synod under the Constitution to authorise deviations or variations as distinct from its power to order the Church's forms of worship and to alter or revise those forms.

In due time the General Synod requested the Liturgical Commission to revise AAPB. It is somewhat confusing that the Synod, in authorising (or purporting to authorise) APBA by canon, retained AAPB in authorised use as well. APBA is therefore an addition to AAPB rather than a revision of it. So now both books offer permitted variations or deviations from – although they do not make alterations to – the services of BCP.

Dr Evan Burge, then the longest serving member of the Liturgical Commission, in the Austin James Lecture of 1995 claimed that APBA was significantly different from AAPB. He saw it, I would say, as liturgically different when he described APBA as 'a Watershed for Australian Anglicans': implying that the liturgy of the Australian Church now flows in a different direction from that of its former course. Presumably this estimate reflects the view, and the intention, of the Commission as a whole. Dr Burge uses as an illustration of his estimate the acceptance by General Synod of Thanksgiving 3 in the Second Order of the Communion as being 'at least one Thanksgiving that

Catholics could use with a clear conscience'; behind this was the argument that the Thanksgiving in the Third Order had been included in the book 'to meet the needs of evangelicals'. Dr Burge uses this 'development' as he calls it, and also the new sub-title to the book, *Liturgical Resources*, as illustrations of his estimate that APBA is a watershed. He says: 'The old principle of uniformity has been replaced by another Anglican principle, that of comprehensiveness.'

You will note that Dr Burge seeks to validate the change in liturgical direction by calling comprehensiveness 'another Anglican principle'. However, comprehensiveness of the kind he has in mind is *not* an Anglican principle. Dr Burge's supposition is that, for example, evangelicals will use one Thanksgiving while Catholics will use another, but not *vice versa*. That idea is clean contrary to the liturgical principle of uniformity so emphatically set out in the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity and Preface (items 1 and 2 in BCP), embodied in the BCP services themselves, and expressed in the declaration that 'henceforth all the whole realm have but one use'. The Thirty-nine Articles lend no support to a principle of comprehensiveness either. They were agreed on 'for the *avoiding* of diversity of opinions, and for the establishing of *consent* touching true religion'. Dr Burge does indeed pose the question: 'Does this [comprehensiveness] mean that, by adopting such a book the Anglican Church of Australia has forfeited its theological and liturgical unity?' and he recognised that 'Some think so. There is a greater risk now of going to an Anglican church and finding a service that is altogether unfamiliar and perhaps unacceptable'. I believe that this situation makes nonsense of the fundamental concept of our Church's public liturgy embodied in BCP. Moreover, even though APBA be no more than a resource book containing possible variations from the services of BCP, if it embodies a principle at variance with a principle of worship laid down in BCP, it stands condemned by Section 4 of the Constitution itself.

### *Where are we heading?*

The fact is that our Church has lost its way in the voyage it set out on at the General Synod of 1962 when it appointed a Prayer Book Commission to 'explore the possibilities of revision of, and addition to, the Book of Common Prayer for the Church of England in Australia'. In 1966 the Commission proposed a programme of both conservative and more original revision of BCP services. *An Australian Prayer Book*, presented to the Synod in 1977, was the result of that exercise. It was intended as 'an ordered means of experiment in liturgy' for 'trial use' over a period of some ten to fifteen years. The end in view was the revision of BCP as recommended in the 1966 report. But instead of harvesting the results of the AAPB experiment so as to focus on the objective of revising BCP, General Synod asked the Liturgical Commission merely to revise AAPB. The Commission produced a larger book of even greater variety (APBA); and, as if that had been a light thing, the Synod in 1995 authorised both books for further indefinite use, together with BCP. At the same time General Synod authorised negotiations with a publisher to produce 'an edited version (provided by the Liturgical Commission) of Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Holy Communion from the Book of Common Prayer 1662 for use in Australia (under Section 4 of the Constitution)'. The result of this was *In Living Use: Revised Services from the Book of Common Prayer (1662)* which appeared in 1994. The purpose of this production was 'to assist those who wish to keep *The Book of Common Prayer (1662)* "in living use"'. The changes in this edited version are not extensive. But they do comprise a third experiment with BCP and include deviations for which permission must be sought from the diocesan bishop. The question is: where is the experiment with endless deviations leading us? We seem to have entered the era of a thousand flowers blooming!

In this rudderless voyage of our Australian Church, BCP stands in splendid isolation as still the only 'ordered' public liturgy of our Church. No change has been made in

it (not even the name of the sovereign!) in the nearly forty years since the Constitution has been in operation. But it is not enough to preserve BCP in quiet corners as a cherished antique. At least it should function as a lighthouse until we find the port we are seeking! The place of liturgy as such, in the parish as well as in the national church, needs to be studied and understood. The tide is against such study at the moment, because the nature of the church itself, in its historical continuity as well as in its local corporate expression, is widely misunderstood. But let us pray that the God of all patience and consolation will grant us to be like-minded towards one another according to Christ Jesus, that we may *with one mind and one mouth* glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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### **Bishop Donald Robinson**

Bishop Robinson lectured in Liturgiology as well as New Testament at Moore College for many years. He was a member of the Prayer Book Commission of General Synod which produced the report *Prayer Book Revision in Australia* in 1966, and also of the subsequent Liturgical Commission which produced *An Australian Prayer Book* in 1977. He was the Australian contributor to *Modern Anglican Liturgies 1958-1968* and *Further Anglican Liturgies 1968-1975* (edited by C. O. Buchanan and published by Oxford University Press in 1968 and 1975).

Bishop Robinson's published articles include:

'Liturgical Patterns of Worship', a Position Paper at the National Evangelical Anglican Congress (Melbourne, 1971), published in *Christ Calls us to a New Obedience*;

'Cranmer into Australian Speech', *St Mark's Review* (Canberra), January 1977;

'From Cranmer's Reformation to Australia's Bicentenary: Reflections on the Continuity of the Book of Common Prayer', published in *A Way of Life*, Proceedings of the National Bicentennial Conference on the Book of Common Prayer in Australia (Melbourne), Prayer Book Society in Australia, 1989.

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