

# News of Liturgy

Editor: Colin Buchanan

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## Editorial

There has been an issue in my mind since the project of *NOL* first began to gestate, way back in 1974. This issue relates to 'priestly' blessings and absolutions. Why is the layman or deacon not to give such blessings? And inevitably what happens if he does? Or is that there is no restriction truly existing in law or liturgy, and the Church of England has all come out to cheer an emperor with no clothes on? And if this is so, why has it taken me myself eight years to get down to actually stating that he has no clothes on?

Let me start at just that point. It is my settled conviction that there is no principle—not even a figleaf of one—which actually exists in law or theology. Merely because the whole crowd thinks there *is* something there does not make it true, and closer inspection will reveal the total nakedness of principle involved.

Before we get to law, let us start with grammar. What we seem to hear being said is that if one person addresses others in church in the second person plural, involving God in the third person singular, then this is a 'blessing' or an 'absolution'—as, e.g., in the form 'God bless you' or 'God forgive you'. Persons who are not priests are, it is asserted, allowed to bracket others with themselves and use the *first* person plural ('God bless us' or 'God forgive us'), but must not address others in the second person. What untoward event would occur if they did is not known. What benefit they are missing when they do not is also unspecified. But Anglican opinion, even dogma, has been thought to be saying they must not. No one, of course, has ever gone as far as some would about the ordination of women and claimed that they are actually incapable of it. Obviously lay persons and deacons can actually frame the words, but I suppose there might be some lingering suspicion at the back of minds that even if they do frame the words, somehow the words do not 'take'. Certainly some discussions about deaconesses in the Church of England—and also some discussion about women priests from overseas—have included worries about their ability to absolve the dying. Well, we must ask, is this really the case?

Let us look next at the law. Until the 1960s, there was only one absolution (admittedly a declaratory one) in the Prayer Book Morning and Evening Prayer, and it was required by law to be used by deacons, and presumably by captains of ships at sea, and schoolmasters, and so on. When the office of 'reader' came into use in the nineteenth century, it seems that the licences issued to them restrained them from saying the Morning and Evening Prayer absolution (which must have been on the theory that it was 'priestly'), and usually expected them to say the Collect of the Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity, which has become the norm. It has never seemed

to me that it was open to anyone to monkey with the text of an 'Act of Uniformity' service in this way (even the 'Shorter Services Act' of 1872 gave no permission to shorten or alter the penitential introduction to Morning and Evening Prayer), but that is slightly beside the point. The question is: 'How much better or worse off have the congregations been who were "absolved" by a layman using this collect?' The naughty answer starts to form in one's mind that they were no worse off, but were supposed to think they were . . . (Whereas, if the reader had used the authorized form, they would have been worse off, but would not have known *that* . . .)

A similar matter has always existed in relation to deacons taking weddings. The law of the land clearly allows clerks in holy orders to officiate, and the Prayer Book has never given them any option but to pronounce two 'blessings' in the service. Many—including bishops from the middle of the last century onwards—have then concluded that deacons should not perform weddings (or, more rarely, could perform them but without using the blessings—which would again have been a breach of Uniformity). But the legal position is surely established that deacons can and must give so-called 'priestly' blessings? And the law of the Church of England *is* its theology . . .

Closer inspection still shows that the Prayer Book always allowed lay persons to address each other in this grammatical way. Could not a layman say 'The Lord be with you'? And could not a congregation respond 'And with thy spirit'? And if the fall-back position from this proved to be that the subjunctive of the verb to be ('The Lord *be* . . .') is after all allowable, then it should be noticed that the best-known Anglican blessing of all ('The blessing of God Almighty . . . be amongst you and remain with you . . .') is only a hairsbreadth away from this position! And a similar feature is found in the words of administration at communion. The 1662 words include this grammatical form very clearly ('The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, *preserve* . . .'). Ah well, perhaps we should not have allowed laypersons to distribute the elements, or perhaps 'preservation' is neither blessing nor absolution, nor anything? But the principle is getting harder and harder to assert.

When we turn to the ASB, matters are worse. A reader may use the post-natal thanksgivings (pages 212 to 225), but he must give a blessing (sections 15 and 28). And a layperson may be the emergency minister of baptism (page 280, section 107) and not only may, but again *must*, pronounce a blessing (section 108). Whatever else is missing, this must be in! (And even more paradoxically, no such blessing is provided in the main material for infant baptism). And the provisions for the words of administration at communion are even more explicit—'The body of Christ keep you in eternal life'. And the wedding blessings are no less overt.

So do we have a principle? If a layman can say to another layman out of church 'God bless you' (or 'God forgive you [? because I never will]'), and a layman can say similar things to other laymen in church, where is our principle? We could easily go as far as the New Zealand Anglicans, who have looked up the origin of 'The Lord be with you' in the book of Ruth, and have discovered that the true response is 'The Lord bless you'. Have they erred? Or was there no principle there in the first place? I believe not.

Of course arguments will remain that the word 'priest' in the rubrics of the Prayer Book is restrictive (but it is not—it occurs in Morning and Evening Prayer elsewhere than the absolution, and all over the place in the baptism service). Or there will be an attempt in theology to pin some weight upon 'Whose sins you forgive . . . etc.' in John chapter 20 (I handled this in my discussion of 'I absolve you from all your sins' last year). But we are back with an innocent turn of grammatical phrasing, and no legal or theological point whatsoever hangs on it. There might be argument about the senior person present at a particular liturgical event having the right and duty to pronounce solemn and weighty liturgical pieces—but that still brings us back to the question 'Yes, but what when that person is a deacon, or deaconess, or American woman priest, or churchwarden, or reader, or whatever?' And I take leave to doubt the question can be answered?  
Colin Buchanan

## THE FEBRUARY SESSION OF SYNOD

Liturgical matters emerged in various ways. At question-time we learned that the 'ASB Reference Group' is unlikely to sanction the production of an 'Altar Book' with the eucharistic text in the middle, where the book would most naturally open for it. Sales of the ASB in its first twelve months have been 574000 of the pew edition with psalter, 64000 without psalter, and 9000 of the 'Altar Book' (which represents one for each of two-thirds of the parishes of the Church of England). The Rite A 'separate' has sold 338000 copies in its first twelve months. A 'desk edition' of the ASB is due later this year. 760 parishes have applied for permission to print their own editions. I personally asked (with reference to the Parliamentary allegations mentioned above) whether the House of Bishops had any policy about sending deacons to training parishes which would ensure they had a good grounding in the use of 1662 (with the implication that the bishops themselves might be responsible for exposing deacons to the much-regretted 'over-enthusiasm for the ASB' if they did not watch this point). The Archbishop replied that there was indeed no such policy, but the young men would not be at risk thereby if the Colleges could be relied upon to give them a good grounding in the BCP prior to ordination!

On the same day we debated the Charismatic Movement report for the second time. The debate was splendidly, and very positively, led off by the Bishop of Birmingham, who secured the adjournment last time. Acting on a hint received I moved a small amendment, and the motion then went through in this shape:

That this Synod

- (a) commends the Report of the Working Group to the dioceses and parishes for study in the wider context of spirituality as a whole;
- (b) requests the House of Bishops to refer it to the Doctrine Commission for a report on the doctrinal issues involved.

This went through overwhelmingly. It now would be up to any member of a diocesan Synod who wished to debate the Report to cite this resolution and ask his Bishop's Council to put the Report on the Synod's agenda.

The next day the Archbishop of Canterbury gave a presidential address about the visit of the Pope at the end of May. The liturgical matters

involved in this would no doubt include the contents of the final report of the last Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), the report being due out (so the Archbishop told us) next month. But the real interest at the Synod session centred on the service to be held in Canterbury Cathedral on 29 May. The Archbishop told us it would have three parts: a welcome, an affirmation of a common baptismal faith, and an affirmation of a common vision and hope for the future.

It is apparently unprecedented for the Pope (or indeed for any Pope) to go to any liturgical event outside of the Roman Communion in the West (Popes have been to Eastern Orthodox events on rare occasions), and the Archbishop stressed that the fact that an *ad hoc* service was being used rather than an Anglican eucharist allowed Free Church leaders to be participants, rather than guests. (*NOL* will be represented at this Canterbury service on 29 May, and, although 31 May is a Bank Holiday, a report will be in the May *NOL* which will emerge from the press as early as possible on 1 June!)

Synod also learned officially from a document *Progress with Covenanting* (The Church's Council for Covenanting, 1982) that the eucharistic prayer on the Covenanting inauguration had indeed been re-written (see the fuss in *NOL* two years ago), though no new text will be released until after the major votes by the denominations in May, June, and July, this year.

## This month's booklet . . .

. . . is Pastoral Series no. 9, *Good News down the Street*, by Michael Wooderson. It is a straightforward account of how principles of evangelism by personal contact 'down the street' led into specific introductory courses for enquirers, and led in turn to a real inflow of converts into the church in Aldridge of which he was in charge till 1981.

## . . . and that new Spirituality Series

gets launched with *Living in Trinity*, by Peter Adam. This is a description of how life, ethos, and spirituality (both individual and corporate) go astray when there is no true doctrine and understanding of the Trinity at the heart of them. The analysis is followed by the true correctives . . . The series is well launched with this booklet.

## . . . and also *Theological Renewal*

reaches issue no. 20 this month, and the issue contains the articles on the demons (partly in relation to exorcism) provoked by the review of Michael Green's *I Believe in Satan's Downfall* in the last issue. (*Theological Renewal* comes out three times a year, and costs £2.90 for a postfree subscription, or £1 for a single copy, or £2.50 to increase the *NOL* subscription to include it, or 90p per issue sent with standing orders for booklets.)

## . . . and next month's

is Liturgical Study no. 29, *The Liturgical Portions of the Didascalia*, edited by Michael Vasey and Sebastian Brock.

## . . . and a new catalogue

is planned to come with next month's *NOL*.

**14p** per copy (£3 by post for the year 1982)

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## SUBMERSION IN FULHAM

[Fulham, like Limehouse, is on the Thames, but that was *not* the solution followed by Richard Griffiths, Vicar of St. Matthew's, C.O.B.]

When Angus, the young teenage son of our London City Missionary asked to be baptized there was no problem until he insisted that it must be by immersion or not at all, for the excellent reason that he wanted to do it the same way as Jesus did. I have become increasingly keen on immersion because of its symbolism, so I was right with him. But I was also convinced that it should be done in his own church building: baptism is not the preserve of the Baptists so why should we go cap-in-hand to them for the use of their baptisteries? The first problem was to find a suitable tank: a plastic or fibreglass roof tank is all right for still water, but might split under the strain of baptism. In the end we got the loan of a bath through a local Christian (not a member of St. Matthew's) in the building trade. Draped with communion linen it looked fairly un-bathlike (it had no taps). The service (one of our regular quarterly baptisms) included an infant baptism too. I would have liked to dunk baby Alexandra, but her parents, themselves newly drawn into the St. Matthew's fellowship through our tight baptism policy, were understandably unwilling.

We used the Series 3 service (we will go over to ASB when our congregational cards get dog-eared), and dovetailed the Baptism of Children at Morning Prayer into the Baptism of Adults, so that Angus was able to declare his own decision and faith as a personal act of witness distinctly from Alexandra's parents and godparents. The order we followed was (with ASB equivalents in brackets) paras; 40(42) 45(47) 46(48) 12(12) 13(13) 50(52) 51(53) 17(18) 52(55) 53(55) 47(49) 19(20) 14(14) 56(58).

Alexandra with her parents and godparents was on my left (south side), Angus on my right. Alexandra was shrouded in her grandmother's baptismal dress, Angus wore only bathing trunks with a white towel draped over his shoulders. I first baptized Alexandra, signed her with a cross, and gave her back to her mother. Then Angus handed me his towel, stepped into the oath, sat down, and was immersed once as I said the words of baptism. He stood in the water for the signing of the cross. I then took Alexandra from her mother, and followed my usual practice of walking down the aisle with the baby in my arms, and Angus walking by my side, as the congregation turned inwards for the welcome.

Many people found it a helpful and challenging service. A number would like to see immersion used more often. Some years ago we abandoned the chancel of our large church, and are now in the process of getting platforms made for the worship area at the crossing (if we were cruciform). Already one of the churchwardens has a scheme for incorporating a baptistery into the platforms. I suspect that there would be more demand for immersion if the facilities were there.

## COLLECTS TO ACCOMPANY RITE B

7 March	Lent 2	'The King and the Kingdom: Conflict'	BCP Lent 2
14 March	Lent 3	'The King and the Kingdom: Suffering'	ASB collect
21 March	Lent 4	'The King and the Kingdom: Transfiguration'	1928 BCP Transfiguration
28 March	Lent 5	'The King and the Kingdom: The Victory of the Cross'	

O God, who by the cross and passion of thy Son Jesus Christ didst save and deliver mankind: Grant that by steadfast faith in his sacrifice we may triumph in the power of his victory; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

(adapted from the Scottish Prayer Book *Passiontide collects*)

4 April	Palm Sunday	'The Way of the Cross'	BCP Palm Sunday
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## LITURGICAL COELACANTHS

What is a bishop's mitre *for*? And on what principle should it come on and off? And can we trust that Alcuin Club book *Episcopal Services* to tell us? But again, what is it *for*!

## THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND YEARBOOK (AND THAT PARLIAMENTARY AGGRESSION)

*The Church of England Year Book 1982* (C.I.C., £8.50) has been published this month. Its recent practice of having an unsigned Preface continues in this edition, and the writer comments upon a feature or two of 1981. After reporting what happened on that infamous day in Parliament in April 1981, he goes on:

'Gradually, however, the situation has calmed. The Synod's Standing Committee, to the chagrin of some Synod members, neatly diverted the issue from the full Synod to the House of Bishops. The House, in turn, referred the matter for discussion diocese by diocese in Bishop's Councils, and called for a fresh edition of the guidance leaflet . . . There were signs that the Prayer Book Society was anxious not to press the matter to the point where disestablishment would become a live issue . . . Up and down the country, it begins to look as though there is emerging that balance between old and new for which the *Preface* to the ASB asks. There is evidence that the theological colleges, whose over-enthusiasm for the ASB was a particular complaint in the Parliamentary debates, are heeding the Bishops' request that 1662 should remain in use both in teaching and worship . . .

This *sounds* like the end of all controversy on the issue.

## LAUGHTER IN LITURGY

Graham Kings writes:

'At the beginning of a Rite A eucharist the president was unhappy with the microphone: tapping it he said "There's something wrong with this thing"—and the congregation responded "And also with you"!'

(This one rather breaks our rule—it looks suspiciously like a churchy joke rather than an account of an actual event. But we have heard it elsewhere. So—to our readers—did it actually happen?)

## MUSIC ON THE BENCH

We have rather sworn off hymnody since our younger sister *News of Hymnody* saw the light of day (issue no. 1 from January 1982 still available, no. 2 due in April). But two hymnodical events with episcopal connections have come to our attention in one month, and we cannot resist giving them a mention.

First comes Tim Dudley-Smith, the Bishop of Thetford, whose consecration we duly noted last year. He has produced, and published at his own expense, a book of 198 pages entitled *A Collection of Hymns 1961-1981: A Source Book for Editors*. This is not on general sale, and anyone writing to him for a copy ought to be able to show that he is an editor or a publisher. The author modestly reckons that no one will want to equip the pews of a church with a hymn book where every item was written by one man (even *Wesley's Hymns* were never quite that monolithic). But the reference character of the work is paramount—not only do we learn where the hymns were written ('in a garden on a sunny morning [on holiday], over a leisurely breakfast tray'), but also the scripture references from which they are drawn, the places they have already been published, the seasons of the year or other themes they best fit, and so on. It is a feast—but the gourmet who wishes to partake must first pass scrutiny with the author—a mere desire to sing TDS non-stop will not suffice.

The other notable event is the recent nomination to be Bishop of Chester of Michael Baughen, the Rector of All Souls, Langham Place. Here is a companion in rhyme to TDS—with a big hand in *Youth Praise*, *Psalms Praise*, and the forthcoming collection *Hymns for the Christian Year*. He gained a mention in these columns (not that we claim all the credit of Her Majesty's favour falling on him) when in 1978 he chanted from the floor of Synod in the course of a speech on the Psalter—his chanting being designed to show that happiness and misery sound identical to each other when sung to Anglican chant! He later got through Synod the motion that the ASB should have two pew editions, one with Psalter, one without. So he has left his mark on our liturgical history. Meanwhile, we wait with impatience for his consecration in June—no choir shall sing Coverdale at *this* event, surely? Happiness (and misery?) must flow from *Psalms Praise* contributions. We invite suggestions for MAB titles to be used at that service.

## COMMUNION IN PRIVATE HOUSES

All sorts of scandalized reactions have been reaching the press in the Church of England because that controversial Englishwoman/American priest Elizabeth Canham has been presiding at eucharists in England in private homes. How dare she? So goes the cry. How shameless and provocative of her! And so it is. She is forbidden to do any such thing by the Canons of the Church of England. But then—and here is the rub—every male priest is also forbidden. The whole enterprise of such celebrations is contrary to the following Canon:

## B40 OF HOLY COMMUNION ELSEWHERE THAN IN CONSECRATED BUILDINGS

No minister shall celebrate the Holy Communion elsewhere than in a consecrated building within his cure or other building licensed for the purpose, except he have permission so to do from the bishop of the diocese: Provided that at all times he may celebrate the Holy

Communion as provided by Canon B37 in any private house wherein there is any person sick, or dying, or so impotent that he cannot go to church.

There can be few parishes in the Church of England which are aware of this rule, and a question in Synod in November by COB did not elicit much response in terms of changing it. The law is no doubt at this point an ass (it often is). The difficulty seems to be that most Anglicans treat the law as an ass at the points where they want to break it, but as given on two tables of stone at points where they want others to keep it.

Perhaps we ought to forget that everywhere in England is in a parish, and let Mother Elizabeth declare any property she is occupying to be annexed for those purposes to the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. This might involve the loss of considerable numbers of houses (and even Deaneries?) to the American Church, but it would preserve the purity of the slightly shrunk Church of England which remained. Indeed, *by definition*, the reverend Mother would not be able to invade the Church of England, for wherever she put her foot in order to preside at the eucharist would prove to be ecclesiastically America. She would fail to enter any English diocese or parish, and all scandal would be at an end.

Meanwhile, what should the men in holy orders do? Presumably ask for block permission from their bishops to go where they will. But if they fail to get that permission, then they are more clearly in breach of the Canons than is blessed Elizabeth, for *they* are expressly forbidden, whilst *she* is nowhere in view.

## BULLY FOR US

We ventured to say in December that we would not want to blow our own trumpet particularly, but perhaps when a doughty anglican Catholic does it for us we may be allowed to publish the result. The Rev. Frank Eustace Pickard (quoted before in these columns) writes in *The Server* of Spring 1982:

' . . . it is undoubtedly true that for anyone who wants to follow easily what is going on liturgically these days, Colin Buchanan's monthly, *Notes on Liturgy* [well, he got one word out of three right in the title—keep at it, FEP], and his Grove Book publications represent the only possibility. (I tried myself unsuccessfully to make the Bishop of Chichester and the Church Union produce something from the catholic stable by means of occasional papers from a catholic "shadow" Liturgical Commission . . . but I left the executive of the CU and it was quietly dropped. Alas!) These Grove Books are well produced and scholarly. But as Fr. Heidt taught us last issue with another of Colin Buchanan's books, one has to watch for party political bias, (and why not indeed—all credit to the evangelicals)'

Well, we had asked for comment on the publications to mark our first ten years and here we have some (but FEP had best not read this month's editorial). Some other has come to hand:

Shakespeare: 'Surely some divinity doth inhabit this grove?'  
HRH: 'One is always glad to have one with one.'  
David Martin: 'This has the power to make ruts in my mind.'  
Hippolytus: 'Insufficiently sensitive to the formative centuries.'  
Archbishop of Canterbury: 'My pigs love 'em.'