

Creation in Church of England Liturgies

4

Before looking at external resources available for the creation season, it is worth looking at to what extent the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* and *Common Worship* material mention or celebrate God's act of creation.

Three common texts remind us of God as creator: the Lord's prayer ('Our Father'), and the Gloria said at the end of Psalms and Canticles ('As it was in the beginning...') both *imply* that God is creator; while of course the Creeds make an *explicit* statement. In what follows, similar distinctions could be made between texts, but we shall not go into such detail.

The Book of Common Prayer

The order for *Morning Prayer* is where we find the greatest number of creation references. Here the first canticle is the *Venite* (Psalm 95), set for every Sunday (except Easter Day), which asserts, 'the sea is his, and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.' One of two options for the second canticle is the *Benedicite*, which calls on all of creation to bless the Lord and 'magnify him for ever.' One of two options for the third canticle is the *Jubilate*, where we recall that 'it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves.'

By contrast, the order for *Evening Prayer* is devoid of creation references, other than the three common texts mentioned above. And the order for *Holy Communion* adds no further allusions to the creation, except in the confession where God is said to be the 'Maker of all things.' It is interesting to note then, that the BCP Sunday service used *least* in the contemporary church, is the one which has the *most* links to God as creator; not that this is an argument for the wholesale re-introduction of Matins up and down the land! But a reminder that in losing BCP *Morning Prayer*, some valuable theology became less evident.

The BCP General Thanksgiving, which can be used at any service, includes the words: 'We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life...' And we should not forget the prayers *For Rain* and *For Fair Weather*, though these are rarely used in public worship today.

However, in the Sunday and festival Collects there are very few references to God as Creator. The collect for Ash Wednesday, to be read every day in Lent, is addressed to God, 'who hatest nothing that thou hast made'; and the Good Friday prayer for 'Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks,' although

much-criticized, begins with the same comforting assurance of God's love. The collect for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity addresses God, 'whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth.'

Common Worship¹⁹

The Sunday and festival collects alone in *Common Worship* yield richer pickings, with about one in six making reference to creation in some way. The Additional Collects score slightly less; and the post-communion prayers less still, with only five references to creation.²⁰ In the *Common Worship* lectionary, the second Sunday before Lent has a creation theme, and the collects and post-communion pick this up clearly. The second Sunday before Advent has a 'last things' theme, and the additional collect for this Sunday expresses the hope that 'all creation will one day be healed in Jesus Christ our Lord.' You may want to use these prayers at other times in the year when you have a creation focus.

In the Common Worship regime, *Morning Prayer* and *Evening Prayer* are but special examples of *A Service of the Word*, and there is great freedom for choosing material to use within that framework, so it is not fair to try and compare the CW provision for these services with that in the BCP.

The order for Holy Communion, however, is more tightly prescribed, so comparison is valid, and it is easy to find more references to creation in CW than in the BCP. For brevity, we look here only at the unalloyed text of *Order One*. References to God's act of creation are found in the Eucharistic Prayers:

- Prayer A: 'through him you have created all things from the beginning'
- Prayer B: 'though whom you have created all things'
- Prayer D: 'all creation worships you'
- Prayer E: 'you made the world and you love your creation'
- Prayer F: 'by the breath of your mouth, you have spoken your word, and all things have come into being.'
- Prayer G: 'From the beginning you have created all things' and 'that eternal splendour for which you have created us.'
- Prayer H: 'Father, Lord of all creation, in your love you made us for yourself.'

In summary, all eight prayers at least nod at the theme of creation, with the exception of prayer C, the one directly derived from the BCP. For those with

the ears to hear, prayer F hints at the involvement of all three persons of the Trinity, with ‘breath’ pointing to the Spirit (Gen 1.2, if you choose your translation!) and ‘word’ pointing to the Son (John 1.1).

The Resource Section of *New Patterns for Worship* has suitable materials under the heading ‘God in creation.’ This heading has items in the following Resource sections:

- Invitations to Confession B6
- Confessions B42, B53
- Kyrie Confessions B56
- Canticles (3 versions of the *Benedicite*) D29, D30, D31
- Responsive Forms of Intercession F47, F48, F49
- Praise Responses G25, G26
- Thanksgivings G61, G62, G63, G66
- Short Prefaces G89
- Closing Prayers J10
- Blessings J69, J70

There is also a fully worked-out service ‘All Creation Worships’ on page 158.

The *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* volume, in its section on the Agricultural Year, has a sub-section on ‘Creation’ as well as materials for Plough Sunday, Rogationtide and Harvest. The bank of creation material here overlaps with, but is not the same as, the material in *New Patterns for Worship*. We find:

- penitential material A1–B3
- a gospel acclamation G1
- a form of intercession H1
- an introduction to the peace J1
- two prayers at the preparation of the table K1, K2
- three prefaces (two short, one extended) L1, L2, M1
- blessings, acclamations and short passages of Scripture P1–S4

Much of the rest of the material in the Agricultural Year section could also be used when your worship has a creation theme—it is worth taking a look at.

For Reflection

- Had you not read this chapter, which of the references to creation in Church of England liturgy would you have been able to recall?
- Is it better to remind worshippers of creation themes every week, or to focus on those themes in a particular season? Or should we do both?

- Take a look at the material listed above in *New Patterns for Worship*. Have you ever incorporated these texts in your worship? Could you do so in the future?
- Look up one of Jeremy Cline's re-dubbed collects (at latequartet.blogspot.com), and compare it with the original.

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