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Blessing and Glory and Thanksgiving: the Growth of a Canadian Liturgy

William R. Blott

Toronto, ON: Anglican Book Centre, 1998

149 pages, \$14.95 Softcover

Life is full of ironies. One of the first things we learn from Blott's book on the growth of Canadian Anglican liturgy is that the first Anglican worship service in Canada was held in 1578 by the explorer Frobisher in an unknown location off Baffin Island. How ironic that Lutheran naval chaplain Rasmus Jensen should lead the first Lutheran service scarcely forty years later, in roughly the same territory. In this lush and fertile nation, what is our common fascination with the North? There are many other similarities between our two traditions some of which we know well.

However, there are some things we do not share. This book, by retired Anglican priest William Blott, is the story of the *Book of Common Prayer* in Canada. It documents one of our unshared stories: the growth of the indigenous Anglican liturgical tradition in Canada. The focus of Anglican worship has always been on the Eucharist, whether its frequent celebration was supported or disputed. The source of Anglican liturgical life has always been the *Book of Common Prayer* (*BCP*) in its various revisions. Lutherans need to remember that for Anglicans, it is the prayer book and not any theological confessional statements which are the touchstone of Anglican teachings. Over the centuries, changes have been introduced into the *BCP*, but none which would violate its fundamental principles and practises. Indeed, Blott observes laconically that revisions to the *BCP* have moved "with all the speed of continental drift" (16).

By the end of the nineteenth century, many Canadian Anglicans recognized that major revisions were needed to this venerable book, to make it indigenous to the Canadian church and more useful for worship in a new century. The process, as Blott points out, was inevitably but not vindictively political. The Canadian Anglican communion in the nineteenth century was made up of both high church and low church factions, but most of the bishops were of the high church party. This engendered much strife in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The process of providing a Canadian revision of the *BCP* began

only in 1896. This initial effort was plagued from the beginning by geography and finances. In fact, because of these barriers, no actual meetings were even held! This overture was defeated in 1905 by conservative bishops who claimed that no important revision was necessary. The process began again in 1908, prodded by the recent Lambeth Conference, which included a similar initiative.

It is curious today to read about the hold which Calvinist and Zwinglian theology had on the Anglican church only 100 years ago. The Eucharist was then considered an "occasional service." This was one of the foci of the first revision, authorized in 1915. This revision, the result of a laborious and painfully democratic process, produced a minimum of change to the inherited *BCP*. The main issue was Eucharist versus Morning Prayer as the principal Sunday service.

The resulting revision, published in 1918 and leaning toward the low-church preference, failed to bring about any eucharistic renewal. It was largely ignored by the high-church faction, which continued to use older resources or those from other Anglican provinces. Theologically, the issues were in the eucharistic prayer itself. The points of contention were the *epiklesis*, which the low-church people deplored, and the *oblation* or offering of the eucharistic elements, which the low-church faction feared would once again turn the Holy Communion into a Roman Mass.

The 1918 revision proved to be unsatisfactory, and so further attempts were made. However, the same tensions between high and low factions continued. In frustration, many priests began to create their own revisions. But the idea of a general Canadian revision of the *BCP* was kept alive by a few enthusiasts. The proposals were always conservative: there was never any suggestion of violating the traditional *ordo*.

The second revision, which began in 1943, is described by Blott as a more amicable process, full of hard work by those involved, and free of party rivalry. The result was a provisional rite which was ready for testing in 1952. However, it met with criticism from all sides. This resulted in 1955 in a revision of the revision. This was presented for approval in 1959, and began to be used in 1962. However, Blott observes that there was really only one revision of the *BCP* by Canadian Anglicans: it began in 1918 and was only completed in 1962.

The ongoing problem facing the revisers, Blott says, was of "two

theologies in unresolved conflict, using the same liturgical expression” (130). With this in mind, he says, the shift to seeing Eucharist at the normal Sunday liturgy demonstrates a slide towards the high-church position. It is this theology which is embraced by practically all Canadian Anglicans today, however they many choose to massage the *ordo* of the BCP to reflect their own personal taste. Blott concludes by reflecting on the conservative and evolutionary nature of liturgical change. It is impossible, he says, to codify or nail down liturgy for all times and places, as some Anglicans tried to do in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In these post-Vatican II days of liturgical renewal, it is hard to imagine that these were the raging issues of another time. But they were for Anglicans in Canada, as they were for Lutherans in North America. Some of us can remember, the same debate over *offertory* and *sacrifice* raging in the days of the Inter Lutheran Commission on Worship which preceded the 1977 Lutheran Book of Worship! There is a tantalizing reference (131) to the “Muhlenberg Memorial” in the American Protestant Episcopal Church” and its influence on Canadian Anglican liturgical revision. Lutherans who think of the Anglican liturgical tradition as an unchanging monolith will find this book interesting reading. One might look for the similarities and the differences between Lutherans and Anglicans and discover yet more ground we share in common!

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A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers

David W. Bercot, Editor
Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998
704 pages, \$44.97 Hardcover

In recent years, the ante-Nicene Fathers, sometimes called the “early Christian writers,” have enjoyed a renaissance of sorts in terms of