

The *Methodist Worship Book* (1999) - new models for the Eucharist

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The Methodist Worship Book (Petersborough, April 1999), the new Service Book of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, succeeding *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975, is the last in a row of Service Books since John Wesley's *The Sunday Service* (1784). Wesley had been following The Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* (1662), its style being rather didactic. The 1975 Service Book broke with that style, and exchanged Cranmer (sixteenth century) for Hippolytus (third century): the classical structure of the Eucharistic Prayer was restored. However, 1975 had only one Eucharistic Prayer; the need of further developing this style of celebrating the Eucharist, was felt more and more.

The Preface of the new *Worship Book* (p. VII) opens in this way:

The Church is called to offer worship to the glory and praise of God. From the earliest days of the Church, Christian people have gathered together for this purpose as 'a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' and to 'proclaim the mighty acts' of God (1 Peter 2:5,9).

All true worship is God-centred. As we acknowledge the mystery and glory of the eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are moved to offer our praise and to confess our sins, confident of God's mercy and forgiveness. God's acts of grace and love in creation and salvation are recounted and celebrated, and we respond with thanksgiving, intercession and the offering of our lives.

The *Worship Book* starts with the material for Daily Prayer and for Morning, Afternoon or Evening Services. Then it moves on to the celebration of Baptism and Holy Communion.

In this article, we shall concentrate on the latter. Special attention will be given to the matter of the epiclesis, as the actual discussion in England on the role of the Holy Spirit at the Eucharist, compared with the liturgical developments in many Churches outside the United Kingdom, seems to move in the opposite direction.

1. Entry into the Church

This title refers to Baptism (of adults or young children), Confirmation and Reception into Membership. Five services are offered, for several occasions: baptism of both adults and children in one service, with confirmation of the adults. Secondly, baptism and confirmation of adults. Then baptism of young children. Fourthly, confirmation and reception into membership, of persons

previously baptized. Lastly, the combination of the third and fourth rite in one service. Here we see that baptism of those who can answer for themselves is prior to baptism of children, though children's baptisms will occur more frequently. In this, the *Worship Book* makes plain that the 'normal' separation in time between baptism (child) and confirmation (adult) is a later development.

2. God's 'Yes' first

Another principle of these rites is God's prevenient grace. The Introduction to the Baptismal Services states that "before and without any response on our part, Christ died for us" (p. 60). The insight that God's 'Yes' to us comes before our 'Yes' to Him, has deeply influenced the structure of the rite. In earlier Service Books, the baptismal promises (by the candidate, or by the parents of the child) came before baptism. But now they come afterwards.

First, the minister reads some biblical texts regarding baptism (from Matthew 28 and Acts 2). The only thing which is then asked of the candidates or the parents, is a request for baptism. To the quoted words of Christ or St. Peter, the response is: "I thank God, and I ask to be baptized" or "We thank God, and ask that our child be baptized." Then follows the Thanksgiving over the water, and the Affirmation of Faith: the candidates (or, for a young child, the parents) declare to turn away from evil and to turn to God; and the Creed is said by everyone present. Then the names of those to be baptized are asked and called out, and the actual Baptism takes place, which is followed by the Aaronic blessing, said or sung *by the whole congregation*. Only after this, the newly baptized or the parents (and, possibly, godparents) promise their commitment to the Christian life and worship for themselves or their children. This again is confirmed by the congregation, which also has to make a promise: so to maintain the Church's life of worship and service that they (the baptized) may grow in the grace and the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

I recognize this whole pattern profoundly. In the Uniting Protestant Churches of Holland, new baptismal rites came out some years ago, and we had the same discussions both about putting adult baptism first, and having the baptismal promises after baptism, to emphasize that God's grace comes before our response of faith. And we also wanted to give the congregation their part in the promises (and in the whole rite). For instance, joining in the Creed will be for everyone a remembrance of one's own baptism. In this way, the Creed effectively expresses the faith of the whole Church. New to me was the possibility of having the Aaronic blessing said by all. I already experienced this in practise, in a Methodist baptismal service last June, and it moved me to join in this blessing.

3. Holy Communion

The basic model for the Sunday Worship is a Communion Service. The introduction to the 'Orders of Service for Holy Communion' explains: "One of the keynotes of the Methodist revival was John Wesley's emphasis on 'The Duty of Constant Communion' and it is still the duty and privilege of members of the Methodist Church to share in this sacrament" (p. 114).

4. Seasonal design: complete Orders

The specific character of each period of the Church Year has been constitutive in designing the *Worship Book*. Completely worked out models for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, Lent and Passiontide, Easter Season, and Pentecost and Times of Renewal in the Life of the Church are given: from the opening sentence on, everything is seasonally articulated, e.g. the acclamation to the intercessions, the prayer after communion, and the introduction to the blessing.

There are also complete Orders for special services. Baptism and Confirmation come first ('Entry into the church'). Then the models for Holy Communion are given, not only the seasonal ones but also three for Ordinary Seasons. Then the other services follow: the Holy Week, the Covenant Service (a yearly ceremony instituted by Wesley), the Ordination of Presbyters and Deacons, Admission of Local Preachers, Commissioning Services (for various lay ministries), Marriage Service, Pastoral Services, Healing and Reconciliation Services, Funeral and Related Services, Blessing and Dedication Services.

The decision to make 'a prayer book without turning pages' has resulted in a book with a difference. No repetition of a fixed Order, with some seasonal variations here and there. On the contrary, from the beginning till the end every service breathes the specific atmosphere of the actual occasion, period or day of the Church Year.

5. The Lord's Supper

In this design, the liturgy of the Holy Communion has, of course, the colour of the Season. This will show in the introduction to the Peace, the breaking of the bread, the invitation to draw near, and in the acclamation to the breaking of the bread. The Eucharistic Prayers have variations in the preface, the post-sanctus and the epiclesis. After the institution narrative we hear the classical acclamations but also new ones (e.g. at Christmas: "Christ is born. The Saviour has come. God is with us"). The doxology, too, varies with the period of the Church Year.

Concerning the Holy Communion Orders for the 'Ordinary Seasons': the first form has a preface with insertions for Trinity Sunday and for Saints' Day.

The second form has been designed for communion services with children (although this is consciously not mentioned); it is the only form with musical notes. A sung Eucharist is not common among Methodists (they take it as 'Anglican') – to encourage them, the music consists of already known and beloved tunes.

The third form has responses to the anamnesis ("Amen. Come, Lord Jesus") and the epiclesis ("Amen. Come, Holy Spirit").

Next to the Orders to celebrate the Holy Communion in Church, there are models for the Communion in a Home or Hospital, and Extended Communion, which means sharing bread and wine after the service with those who could not be there.

In the specific Orders, we find six more Eucharistic Prayers: for Maundy Thursday, Covenant Service, Ordination of Presbyters, Ordination of Deacons, Marriage, and Healing and Reconciliation Services.

6. Humble Access

The *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) contains a 'Prayer of Humble Access' which is still used today, in a modified form:

We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. (...) Grant us (...) so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood, (...) that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us.

Cranmer put this Prayer directly after the *Sanctus*; he could do so, because he had left behind the classical structure of the Eucharistic Prayer. Contemporary Service Books, which have restored the Eucharistic Prayer, often put the Prayer of Humble Access before communion. In the *Methodist Service Book* (1975) it had this position; a shortened version, the language considerably modernized (B15):

Lord, we come to your table, trusting in your mercy and not in any goodness of our own. We are not worthy...

This *Worship Book* (1999) first offers the text which is closer to the 1662 version ("We do not presume"), and then the 1975 version. The Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee, in a lecture during the Methodist Conference (June 1999), described the return of the "powerful, Johannine imagery" of 1662 as an "example of our being less afraid than a generation ago of such evocative language."

The use, however, is restricted: because of the penitential tone it is not to be used at the High Feasts, but only in the 'purple' seasons (Advent, Lent) and –

for those who love it and want it more often – in Order One for Ordinary Seasons.

Its position: in two Orders before communion, and once (in Advent) before the eucharistic rite as a whole: between the Intercessions and the Peace (cf. both positions in the 1980 *Alternative Service Book of the Church of England*, rite A en B).

7. The Lord's Prayer in a new translation

In most cases, the Lord's Prayer comes after the Eucharistic Prayer, the classical position. Sometimes it appears earlier, following the Intercessions. In the 1975 *Service Book* it already had this position, which many other Service Books will apply only for Services without Holy Communion.

More striking than its position is its wording. The classical version is printed on the right, as the second option. On the left, as the first option, we see the ecumenical translation (1988, 'Praying together') by the English Language Liturgical Commission (ELLC), which the Methodists principally have chosen for all major common texts, including the Lord's Prayer. Looking at the latter:

Some changes are predictable, such as 'your' for 'thy', and 'sin(s)' for 'trespass(es)'. Much more incisive is the new wording of 'And lead us not into temptation'. Exegetically, this is a difficult line, suggesting that God normally would lead us into temptation. Therefore, the negative 'lead us not' has now been replaced by the positive 'Save us from the time of trial'. This seems to be a criticism to the Greek text, being presumably a doubtful translation of the supposed Aramaic that Jesus would have spoken. So here we have a sympathetic paraphrase in stead of a troublesome translation. This proposal by the ELLC is hereby made official by the Methodists in Britain, as the United Church in Australia, the Anglicans of South Africa and Canada, and many other churches had already done. Still, it will probably evoke more comment than mine.

8. Inclusive language

Another 'hot item' is the need to revise the strongly masculine language in the tradition of the Church. In the discussions concerning the 1975 Service Book, the proposed corrections were restricted to the language about us: 'men' should become 'people' (including both genders and all ages); and if witnesses of faith from the bible were to be mentioned, they should include both men and women.

During the process, also the language about (in liturgy more often to) God became an issue. Liturgical texts and also church hymns often use terms like 'King', 'Almighty', 'power' and so on, much more often than the Bible itself does. Scripture also speaks about God in more motherly terms: an eagle

carrying her young, a source feeding us. Jesus compares himself with a hen, gathering together her brood under her wings (Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34). In him God is revealed as loving and gracious, suffering and self-giving. The predominance of masculine power-images does not do justice to this understanding of God.

This insight has led to a more biblical variety of ways to address God in the collects: not only as ‘Father’ or ‘Almighty God’, but also as ‘Radiant God’, ‘God of light and life’, ‘Loving God’, ‘Merciful God’, ‘God of tenderness and compassion’, ‘Gracious God’, ‘Faithful God’. Sometimes the collects are addressed to Jesus: ‘Son of the living God’, but also ‘Christ our friend’, ‘Good Shepherd of the sheep’, ‘Servant Lord’.

Once, in the Eucharistic Prayer for Ordinary Seasons (2), the preface begins with “God our Father and Mother.” In earlier drafts, Order 3 had this way of addressing, combined with the mentioning of several biblical witnesses (both men and women) leading up to the ‘Holy, holy’. The word ‘Mother’ evoked many complaints. Furthermore, the prayer should be shortened (in fact, all the draft texts were found too long and wordy). Out went the men and the women, leaving the inclusive address a bit isolated, which was then omitted, too. In this form the last draft came at the Methodist Conference (their ‘Synod’): without “Father and Mother.” But now the Conference missed it: what has become precious to several Methodists, should be expressed somewhere in the book. Eventually, it was put into Order 2; with this novelty the Methodist Church got into the media. However, this one time in a whole *Worship Book* cannot be more than a signal: that in future God should not have only masculine names.

9. Offering language

The preface mentions as features of worship the offering of spiritual sacrifices by a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), the offering of praise and of our lives. Which moments in worship express these forms of offering?

9.1. The offertory

After the Ministry of the Word, the Lord’s Supper follows. The hinge point between these two main parts is the Peace. Then, the Supper opens with ‘The preparation of the gifts’. A hymn may be sung, the offerings of the people are presented. Bread and wine are brought to the table. In most Orders, no prayer or other text is given. Only the Order for Christmas and Epiphany, and Order I for Ordinary Seasons have an offertory prayer. It has been written for this worship book by the Liturgical sub-Committee:

Lord and Giver of every good thing,
we bring to you
bread and wine for our communion,

lives and gifts for your kingdom;
 all for transformation through your grace and love,
 made known in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.
 (Christmas and Epiphany, 136; Ordinary Seasons I, 191)

This presentation (“are presented” and “we bring to you”) is no ritual in itself but only points to what is to come: the elements will serve for communion, after their ‘transformation’. Interestingly, this transformation also applies to our lives: all we give for God’s kingdom. Here we see Romans 12 in the background: presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This will more explicitly appear in the Eucharistic Prayers.

In the Order for the Easter Season, bread and wine are handled more ostentatiously. The minister takes the bread (and likewise the wine) and lifts it in the sight of the people, saying (and the people responding):

Here is bread, God’s good gift.
It will become for us the bread of life.

Here is wine, God’s good gift.
It will become for us the cup of salvation.
 (Easter Season, 168)

Here, too, bread and wine are viewed from the perspective of their functioning during communion. From the start, they are Gods gifts to us.

9.2. The Thanksgiving (or Eucharistic Prayer)

We find the word ‘offer’ at the beginning of several prefaces. After the dialogue “*It is right to give our thanks and praise*” the minister continues “...we *offer* you thanks and praise.”

More central, however, is *the offering of ourselves*, derived from Romans 12. It occurs in almost all Thanksgivings, in most cases directly after the institution narrative, in the so called *anamnesis* (memorial), followed by the invocation of the Holy Spirit (the *epiclesis*); in some cases, the *epiclesis* comes first. Some instances:

In union with Christ’s offering for us,
 we offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice.
 (Lent and Passiontide (after the *epiclesis*), 155)

And so,
 in remembrance of all his mighty acts,
 we offer you these gifts,
 and with them ourselves
 as a holy, living sacrifice.

You send forth your Spirit.

You bind us in love.

You renew the face of the earth.

(Pentecost and Times of Renewal, 181)

And so, God of love,

we remember that Jesus died and rose again
to make all things new.

Through his offering for us all,
we offer our whole life to you in thanks and praise.
(Ordinary Seasons [2], 206)

Therefore, recalling Christ's offering of himself
and celebrating this feast of our redemption,
we offer ourselves to you
through Christ our great High Priest.

(Ordination of Presbyters, 310 [In this service the Epistle reading is Romans 12:1-18])

Father, pour out your Holy Spirit
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us the body and blood of Christ.
In union with him, we offer ourselves to you,
that, strengthened by the Spirit,
we may be signs of your life and love,
as we await the coming of his kingdom of justice and peace.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ...

(Service for Healing and Wholeness, 415f.)

This emphasis on self-offering is in continuity with the recent tradition: the *Service Book* (1975) had only one Thanksgiving; after the institution narrative came the acclamation "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again", and then:

Therefore, Father, as he has commanded us,
we do this in remembrance of him,
and we ask you to accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we who receive your gifts of bread and wine
may share in the body and blood of Christ.

Make us one body with him.

Accept us as we offer ourselves to be a living sacrifice,
and bring us with the whole creation to your heavenly kingdom.

We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through him, with him, in him...

(*The Methodist Service Book* 1975, B14)

The memorial of Christ's self-offering evokes our self-offering, preceding or following the invocation of the Spirit. Already at their being presented, bread and wine are seen in perspective of what they are going to signify, and at the same time connected with the way we give ourselves. So, the combination of *receiving Christ's Body* and *being Christ's Body* (as St. Paul combines them in 1 Corinthians 10:16f.) plays an important part in the offering language which we find both in the *Methodist Service Book* and the *Methodist Worship Book*: Christ gave himself up for us – and we give ourselves through him (through his Spirit) to God, in dedication to his Kingdom.

10. Epiclesis on who or what?

The 1975 epiclesis (quoted above, *Service for Healing and Wholeness*) saw the work of the Holy Spirit restricted to the effects on the receivers: that they may share in the body and blood of Christ. The 1999 *Worship Book* reads: "Send your Holy Spirit, that these gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ." A somewhat ambiguous wording, which allows 'receptionists' to read it as something subjective (the Spirit effecting us), but also allows others to regard the elements to be changed more objectively.

One of the earlier drafts for the 1999 *Worship Book* had an epiclesis asking God to send his Holy Spirit "to infuse this bread and wine with life and power", a deliberate echo of Charles Wesley's hymn "Come, Holy Ghost, thine influence shed," with its lines "Thy life infuse into the bread, thy power into the wine." As a Dutch Reformed liturgist, I think this would have been a beautiful contribution by the Methodists to the international thinking on the epiclesis (and on the Eucharist in general). But apparently, to some Methodists of these days, the eucharistic spirituality of their founders, the Wesley brothers, is rather far away. During the consultation process, many correspondents found the proposed text theologically unacceptable; it was even regarded as a Roman theology foisted upon Methodists! For it was wrong, they claimed, to ask for the Spirit to be poured out *on inanimate objects*. So, out it went.

Neil Dixon, Secretary of the Methodist Faith and Order Committee (in his lecture during the Conference, mentioned above), called the loss of this epiclesis "one of the casualties of the consultation exercise." Perhaps to his comfort: exactly the same protest (no blessing of *inanimate objects*) arose in the General Synod of the Church of England, in July 1999, against the line in one of the Eucharistic Prayers "send your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts." The next Anglican Synod, in February 2000, deleted 'on us and on these gifts'. So, their new Service Book (*Common Worship*, November 2000) reads like the

Methodist Worship Book does: “send your Holy Spirit, that ... bread and wine ... may be for us ...” In both traditions, apparently many people are not able to see the Holy Spirit working on anything creational but on us human beings. I think they are utterly wrong.

From the first page of the Bible, the Spirit has everything to do with creation, with all things made out of dust, like we are ourselves. So in both churches, a valuable chance seems to have been missed to point out that the Eucharist is about sharing in God’s future, in the new creation, which involves not only us but all things. In a religion of incarnation such a thing should go without saying! If the Word has become flesh, if our mortal and creational life has been taken up by our Saviour, to be sanctified and eventually to become the first fruits of the new creation, then this new life is in heaven, taken up by the risen Lord at his ascension, where it is preserved until He comes. So at the Eucharist, as we proclaim His death until He comes, and are made partakers of his body and blood, we share precisely in this new life, to be poured out from heaven by the Holy Spirit on all creation. It is vital that this new existence is also symbolized by bread and wine – that they will both signify and convey the transformation of creation: God’s new earth which we welcome at every Eucharist.

This thought cannot be foreign to the recent Methodist tradition, for already in the 1975 epiclesis quoted above we find: “and bring us *with the whole creation* to your heavenly kingdom” (my italics). In the 1999 Worship Book, the very same phrase is spoken over bread and wine, in the epiclesis for Pentecost and Times of Renewal (p. 181). This is even strengthened by the combination of “these gifts” and “You renew the face of the earth” and again “these gifts of bread and wine.” So the symbols of this creation are already there. Why then couldn’t they also be, in the power of the Holy Spirit, part of that new face of the earth (Psalm 104:30) – the first fruits of the new creation?

If the creation cannot be influenced by the Spirit, then, in our era of deep concern about our environment, people are probably right to loose their interest in the Christian religion, and turn to New Age groups.

I hope that both Methodists and Anglicans will keep the rejected proposals in their files, for future revisions. In both traditions the pneumatological thinking is too strong to let this minimalization of the epiclesis be the last development.

11. Conclusion

Many liturgical texts have not been dealt with in this review: Morning, Afternoon and Evening Services; the Ordination Services; the Marriage Service; the Covenant Service, something typically Methodist; Healing and Reconciliation Services, worthy of an article on its own; the Funeral Service, etc. But this article is already long enough.

I want to congratulate my Methodist brothers and sisters on their beautiful *Worship Book*, which adds greatly to the existing liturgical material of the international fellowship of Christian Churches.

For their personal comments and useful background information I am very much indebted to Mr. Dudley Coates, Chair of the Methodist Publishing House Board; and to Rev. Neil Dixon, Secretary of the Methodist Faith and Order Committee, who gave me permission to use the text of his lecture.

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