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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Anglican Eucharistic Rites Today in the Light of Modern Scholarship

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Abstract
Liturgical revision in the Anglican Communion has proceeded relatively slowly since the days of Gregory Dix. While some changes have occurred, especially in the use of modern language, in other ways most rites remain uninfluenced by changes in society and by recent advances in scholarship.

Keywords: Anglican; communion; Eucharist; offertory procession; scholarship

The greatest influence on the form of eucharistic rites in the twentieth century was undoubtedly Gregory Dix in his major work, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, first published in 1945. There he not only insisted that the Eucharist was essentially an action, and not just words recited, but that:

> the last supper of our Lord with his disciples is the source of the liturgical eucharist, but not the model for its performance. The New Testament accounts of that supper as they stand in the received text present us with what may be called a 'seven-action scheme' of the rite . . . With absolute unanimity the liturgical tradition reproduced these seven actions as four: (1) The offertory; bread and wine are 'taken' and placed on the table together. (2) The prayer; the president gives thanks to God over bread and wine together. (3) The fraction; the bread is broken. (4) The communion; the bread and wine are distributed together.[1]

Dix could only say 'With absolute unanimity', however, because he eliminated from discussion all possible instances of rites that did not fulfill his criteria. So, for example, he refused to allow that the prayers in *Didache* 9–10, in which the cup preceded the bread, could have been a true Eucharist, and relegated it to an *agape*.[2]

[1]Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre, 1945), p. 48.
[2]Dix, *Shape*, p. 91.

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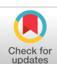

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Dix's theory was chiefly criticized for failing to distinguish the first action – the ritual taking of the bread and wine into the celebrant's hands – from any preliminary offertory or 'preparation of the gifts', but it was in general positively received, and some signs of it having been swallowed can be seen in the revised Anglican eucharistic rites produced in the second half of the twentieth century. In particular, the Church of England's experimental *Series 3* Eucharist, first produced in 1973, underneath the heading 'The Taking of the Bread and Wine' came directions that 'the offerings of the people may be collected and presented … the bread and wine are brought to the holy table' and 'the president takes the bread and wine'. The eucharistic prayer that follows is entitled 'The Thanksgiving' and the next two sections 'The Breaking of the Bread' and 'The Giving of the Bread and the Cup'.

By the time of the appearance of the *Alternative Service Book* in 1980, however, its dependence on Dix had been modified in favor of the influence of the new Roman Catholic rite. The heading was now given the title 'The Preparation of the Gifts' and included the placing of the bread and wine on the holy table, the possibility of praising God for his gifts, and of the collection and presentation of the offerings of the people. 'The Thanksgiving' became 'The Eucharistic Prayer' with 'The Taking of the Bread and Cup and the Giving of Thanks' as a subheading while later the heading 'The Communion' was followed by the subheading 'The Breaking of the Bread and the Giving of the Bread and Cup'.

The Offertory Procession

Dix was also a great proponent of the 'offertory procession', a custom that dominated the twentieth-century Liturgical Movement, in which bread and wine were carried through the church and handed over to ministers at the altar (specifically deacons, according to Dix). This offering was said to be based on 'ancient practice' and was symbolic of the people's oblation of themselves, their life and work, to be taken and used for the Eucharist. Later scholarship has shown this to be a modern invention with no early historical roots for the practice or for its alleged meaning.[3] The usual custom in ancient times was for bread (and sometimes wine) to be brought by the people from their homes and handed in to deacons before the service began. At the time that it was needed, the deacons gave it to the president without any obvious ceremony. As for symbolizing their life and work being offered to God, there is no trace. The people had always contributed food to share at the eucharistic meal, and they continued to do so even after the meal was abandoned. Nevertheless, the modern offertory procession became extremely popular and has been widely adopted by Anglicans. Indeed, where it is practiced, it has become the most visible feature of the rite, overshadowing any of the supposed Dominical actions.

On the other hand, the whole idea of 'offering' at this point has been questioned by some, because it has made it appear that the bread and wine are our gifts to God, and not God's gift to us. As the second-century theologian Irenaeus insisted, Christ instructed 'his disciples to offer to God of his own, created things, not as though God needed them, but that they themselves might be neither unfruitful nor ungrateful'

[3]See Paul F. Bradshaw, 'Gregory Dix and the Offertory Procession', *Theology* 120 (2017), pp. 27-33.

(*Adv. haer*. 4.17.5; see also 4.18.1); and both he and other patristic authors saw the true offering made in the eucharistic prayer itself, called the *anaphora,* 'offering' in Greek, and not in any preceding ceremony. Michael Ramsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, also warned with regard to the procession that 'this sort of teaching about sacrifice can be a shallow and romantic sort of Pelagianism'.[4]

As Colin Buchanan has observed, 'Fancy a dud procession with two, four, or even six, silent laymen carrying materials which do not need to be carried, and fancy it all being over in 45 seconds, and calling *that* the 'layman's liturgy'! How could we have ever been so blind?'[5] Nowadays, the bread and wine are not usually truly the people's own gifts, except in the attenuated sense that their money in the collection has paid for them. Only the more risky option of letting members of the congregation take a turn at baking the bread each week could solve that problem. The common Roman Catholic custom of each communicant placing an individual little host, or 'hostette', in a ciborium as they arrive at the church, to be carried up by others in the procession, doesn't really achieve the sense of community action, as we shall note later. Even though an offertory procession is nowhere mentioned in the 1995 fifth *IALC Findings*,[6] that did not indicate that it had fallen out of use, but rather seems destined to outlast almost every other feature of the Anglican rite, even in the absence of a logical rationale for it.

The Four-action Shape

Research after Dix began to question the historical roots of the fourfold shape. The phenomenon of meals had already been an object of study among anthropologists and sociologists for many years, but it was really only from the 1970s onwards that their insights began to be applied to early Christian contexts. The Christian practice seemed to be part of many variations of the formal supper in the Greco-Roman world, the *symposium,* in which the meal preceded the consumption of wine by the assembled community. Thus, Jewish meal patterns were but one variation of this, and the Passover meal another. Those early Christian eucharistic meals, like that in the *Didache,* in which the cup ritual preceded rather than followed the bread ritual, were not anomalous, as Dix had concluded, but simply another variation.

The Australian Andrew McGowan's doctoral thesis, first published in 1999 as *Ascetic Eucharists*,[7] created quite a stir about eucharistic origins, as he argued that the use of water rather than wine in the celebration was another variation that marked a strongly ascetic tendency among some early Christian groups. More recently, Alistair Stewart has shown that in the ancient world breakfast consisted of just a small portion of bread, usually accompanied by water, but not wine.[8] Thus the

[4]Michael Ramsey, *Durham Essays and Addresses* (London: SPCK, 1956), p. 18.

[5]Colin Buchanan, *The End of the Offertory: An Anglican Study* (Grove Liturgical Study, 14; Bramcote: Grove Books, 1978), p. 40.

[6]David R. Holeton (ed.), *Renewing the Anglican Eucharist: Findings of the Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Dublin, Eire, 1995* (Grove Liturgical Study, 135; Nottingham, Grove Books, 1996).

[7]Andrew B. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

[8]Alistair C. Stewart, 'Ἀριστον μέν ὑδωρ: Ancient Breakfasts and the Development of Eucharistic Foods', *JTS* 71 (2020), pp. 707-17.

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transition of the Eucharist from an evening meal to an early morning gathering in the third century might well have shaped what was consumed, and it was only the insistence of leaders like the third-century Cyprian of Antioch, that the practice of Jesus must always be followed, that retained both bread and wine as normative. Moreover, other research has shown that the inclusion of an institution narrative in eucharistic prayers does not seem to have happened before the fourth century, suggesting that it was not the original reason for the shape of the Eucharist.[9] Thus, it turns out to be accidental, and not one that needs special emphasis.

The Fraction

Meanwhile, Bryan Spinks had argued that each of the four actions were not to be given equal weight: the 'taking' was done only in order that thanks might be given over the bread and wine and the bread was broken only in order that it might be distributed.[10] However, what often occurs is a highly symbolic fraction, in which only the priest's host is broken with great solemnity, the bread for the people already being in the form of individual hosts. The use of a single loaf for all is often rejected on the grounds either that 'it creates crumbs' or that 'it is time-consuming'. The need for presbyters or deacons to assist is already acknowledged in a number of ancient texts, as is the desire for all to share in one loaf. Thus, the church order known as the *Apostolic Tradition* directs, 'on the first day of the week let the bishop with his own hand, if it is possible, distribute to all the people, as the deacons break the bread' and later on, 'let the faithful who are present at the Supper take from the bishop's hand a small piece of bread before they break their own bread' (chs. 22, 25). Hence, it seems strange to dispense with one of the most ancient and clearly defined aspects of the Eucharist, with the result that all do not share in the one bread. The compromise of having larger wafers so that they may be broken into several pieces may help, but it does not replicate the members of the congregation 'sharing in one loaf'.

Active Participation

Dix had presumed that each of the four actions would have been performed by the celebrant alone while the people remained largely silent, but the Liturgical Movement desired that the people should engage in more active participation, beyond the offertory procession. Thus, in addition to joining in singing the Sanctus, their participation in the 'great Amen' at the prayer's conclusion was stressed. Furthermore, eucharistic prayers began to add what Roman Catholics called the 'memorial acclamation', a congregational formula proclaiming the death, resurrection, and future coming of Christ. This was a novelty to Christians from Western liturgical heritage but became widespread as many churches followed the liturgical reform first taken by the Church of South India in 1950, adapting it from

[9] See Paul F. Bradshaw, 'Did the Early Eucharist Ever Have a Sevenfold Shape?', *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002), pp. 73-77.

[10] Bryan D. Spinks, 'Mis-Shapen: Gregory Dix and the Four-Action Shape of the Liturgy', *Lutheran Quarterly* (1990), pp. 161-77.

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ancient Syrian use, and later (and on a much larger scale) by the Roman Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, the acclamation is generally situated in eucharistic prayers immediately following the institution narrative, as it had been in the Syrian rites, and so in spite of the Liturgical Movement's emphasis that it was the whole prayer, and not any part of it, that effected the consecration, the acclamation now reinforced the importance of those preceding words. The 1979 American *Book of Common Prayer* not only retained that arrangement but also the use of the word 'celebrant', rather than 'President' or 'Presider', which were increasingly finding favor in other Anglican churches so as to show that the people together celebrated the Eucharist under the leadership of the priest rather than him or her acting on their behalf. At the same time, the American book observes that 'it is fitting that the principal celebrant ... be assisted by other priests' and that 'it is appropriate that the other priests present stand with the celebrant at the Altar, and join in the consecration of the gifts, in breaking the Bread, and in distributing Communion'. Increased clergy participation certainly, but nothing was said about any further involvement of the people, except in Prayer C where a responsive form is given, and in Prayer D where the acclamation is moved further from the institution narrative, even though in all the prayers the celebrant is instructed to lay hands on or hold the bread and wine during the related words.

The Church of England's *Alternative Service Book* similarly remained very conservative: any acclamations were entirely optional, and the president was allowed to use 'traditional manual acts' (unspecified) during the eucharistic prayer (notes 15, 16). Thus, it was not until the *Common Worship* eucharistic rite in the year 2000 that any signs of progress in this area can be seen in England. A choice of eight eucharistic prayers was then provided with various forms of acclamation encouraged, but only Prayer H provided congregational responses that were integral to its progress. In the light of such rubrics about the holding up of the elements, or in the absence of any directions at all, some churches continue to perform them either at the institution narrative or at the fraction. This not only emphasizes a 'moment of consecration' or adds undue significance to the fraction, contrary to the intended vision of the whole prayer as consecratory, and failing to understand the historical origin lies in a showing of the consecrated bread and wine to the people who were unable to see them.

Thus, an increase of responsive eucharistic prayers would increase the sense of participation desired by the Liturgical Movement.

The Eucharistic Prayer

Traditional scholarship stressed the underlying Jewish roots and character of the eucharistic prayer, especially the *Birkat ha-mazon.* This was in spite of the fact that the oldest known text of this is several centuries later, and the difficulty of explaining how a prayer originally said at the end of a meal, and which in rabbinic tradition marked the point after which no further food could be consumed, although wine might still be drunk, came to be used as a prayer of thanksgiving over both bread and cup at the outset before they were consumed. Furthermore, the function was

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quite different: in Jewish use it freed what was holy for profane use, whereas in Christianity it made what was profane holy.[11] In fact, very few signs remain of prayers influenced by Judaism. There is, of course, the well-known example of the prayers in the *Didache,* with two later developments of these, in the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* and in the pseudo-Athanasian rule for virgins, also of the fourth century, but apparently arising from Cappadocia. In addition, the ancient *Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari* shows some Jewish influence, but as there is disagreement as to which parts of it belong to its original core, that is less helpful than might be supposed.

The truth is that the great majority of extant prayers belong to a time after Jewish influence had faded or arose in a clearly Gentile environment. For example, the famous *Apostolic Tradition,* previously thought to have been the work of Hippolytus of Rome and so reflecting genuine Roman practice in the third century, has been shown to be misattributed. It now seems to be an accretion of material from different hands and historical periods from the second to at least the fourth century. As a result of it being thought to be both Roman and ancient, its eucharistic prayer has influenced the revision of a number of modern prayers throughout the Anglican Communion, as well as one in the Roman Catholic Church. Recent research, however, has revealed that it is made up of a number of different layers of material, resulting in what is known as a West Syrian type of prayer, and so hardly likely to be from Rome.[12]

What is more, the original core of the prayer, before further additions were made to it, is revealed to be not third century, but composed of theological language belonging to the second century. Its concentrates exclusively on the work of God's 'servant' Jesus Christ, his birth, death, and resurrection; offers the bread and cup in thanksgiving for having been made worthy; and prays for the gathering of the people in the unity of the Holy Spirit.[13] Later, further additions were made to expand and modify the meaning, including the institution narrative and a developed Epiclesis, but not the Sanctus.

Comparative study shows that the third- and fourth-century Eucharistic had developed in a similar way, with the Anaphora of Addai and Mari and the prayer used at Jerusalem having acquired the Sanctus, but not yet an Institution narrative. Indeed, Addai and Mari never included such a narrative, and in spite of that deficiency has now been accepted as a valid text by the Roman Catholic Church. Both these prayers also dwell at length on the theme of the creation of heaven and earth, which may be the reason why they introduced the Sanctus. The prayer in the *Apostolic Tradition* added only the briefest mention of creation at a later stage in its redaction. Similarly, the mid-fourth-century Egyptian prayer in the Barcelona Papyrus includes both a creation motif and an allusion to the work of Christ before

[11]See Clemens Leonhard, 'Blessings over Wine and Bread in Judaism and Christian Eucharistic Prayers: Two Independent Traditions', in Albert Gerhards and Clemens Leonhard (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship: New Insights into its History and Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 309-26.

[12]See Matthieu Smyth, 'The Anaphora of the So-called "Apostolic Tradition" and the Roman Eucharistic Prayer', in Maxwell E. Johnson (ed.), *Issues in Eucharistic Praying in East and West* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), pp. 71-97.

[13]Paul F. Bradshaw, 'The Formation of the Eucharistic Prayer in the Apostolic Tradition', *Theology* 125 (2022), pp. 101-108.

moving on to the Sanctus and a developed epiclesis before finally reaching the institution narrative.

This comparative study has led to the general conclusion among liturgical scholars that in nearly every early known eucharistic prayer, the Sanctus unit, the institution narrative, and the developed epiclesis are all third or fourth-century additions to the earlier nucleus. This is certainly not an argument for removing them from modern prayer, but merely a demonstration of what is fundamental in ancient prayers, and what is secondary.

Should the prayer from the *Apostolic Tradition*, perhaps with more modifications, continue to be used as a model for the twenty-first-century church? It achieved primacy in the previous century because of its supposed antiquity and its alleged Roman provenance. Now that only the core can claim real antiquity and its provenance is in doubt, especially in its developed form, should it be accorded the same status? I do not believe so. Now that we have acquired a better understanding of the evolution of eucharistic prayers, if ancient archetypes are required to justify authenticity – and that itself is debatable – we have others from which to choose, ones that develop the theme of creation absent from that in the earliest version of the *Apostolic Tradition*, and it is gratifying to see some of these already incorporated into the practice of several churches in the Communion.

One such model would be the Barcelona papyrus, dating from mid-fourth century, to which I have already referred, although the developed epiclesis would need amending for Anglican use. Another possibility would be to look at the 'extended prefaces' included in the Common Worship eucharistic texts in England, which offer the opportunity to escape from the brief proper prefaces (often less than three lines) typical of most Anglican rites. This model allows a more extended narrative for particular feasts and seasons in the liturgical year.

Gendered Language

Finally a word needs to be said about inclusive language. Most provinces have moved to include modern English versions alongside their traditional Tudor language originals, a similar updating has been required in those provinces that ordain women. But the Episcopal Church in the USA has gone further than simply changing he to she. It has produced texts for optional use that adopt what is called 'expansive language', with regard to gendered language for God. Male pronouns for God have a long history in Scripture and prayer, but this owes more to habit than any belief about the identity of God. Christians do not believe God is male, yet we consistently lean on male pronouns for God in our prayers and conversation, which has unintentionally perpetuated many damaging patriarchal structures in our church. This is not only about the wound inflicted on women, who are subtly (and too often unsubtly) told that their sex is somehow less sacred, but also about an overall impoverishment of our understanding of who God is. For example, these revisions carefully replace the overabundance of male pronouns – among them – Lord and Kingdom – with other words. For example, in the Sursum Corda, where the text has said 'It is right to give him thanks and praise', this revised rite, which actually brings us closer to the intent of the original Greek, reads 'It is right to give

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our thanks and praise'. In the Nicene Creed, the reliance on 'he' for the Holy Spirit is replaced with 'who', which again is closer to the original Latin and Greek. And in the concluding doxology of the Eucharist prayer, 'by him, and with him, and in him', is replaced with 'by Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ', to convey the eternal and universal nature of our Savior rather than simply his maleness. This is something other provinces may want to consider.

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