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Introduction to the *Journal's* Summer Issue

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The Summer 2019 issue of the *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* honours David Jasper's *The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual Poetics* (London: SCM Press, 2018

David Jasper has made a wide range of contributions to theology and to scholarship over more than four decades, during which he has also been active in the ministry of the Church. After a curacy in the Diocese of Oxford, he became Chaplain to Hatfield College, Durham, where he first established the Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology. After a period as Principal of St Chad's College, also in Durham, David began his long association with the University of Glasgow. He served as Dean of the Faculty of Divinity when there still was one, and thereafter as Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies before it was further reduced to a subject area in the School of Critical Studies. He was promoted to a personal Chair as Professor of Literature and Theology, and on his retirement from the University appointed Professor Emeritus. As well as his positions in Glasgow University, David Jasper is Distinguished Overseas Professor in the Renmin University of China, Beijing. In addition to earned doctorates from the universities of Durham and Oxford, he holds an honorary doctorate from the University of Uppsala in Sweden, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. As well as being Canon Theologian of St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow, and Convenor of the Doctrine Committee of the Faith and Order Board of the Scottish Episcopal Church, David has served the church as a priest, assisting in parishes in the dioceses of Oxford and Durham, and until recently at St Mary's, Hamilton, and St Andrew's, Uddingston, in the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway.

The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual Poetics reflects a breadth of experience and expertise in language and literature, in theology, and in Christian ministry and worship. The three essays that follow, all by scholars whose lives have crossed with David's during his time in Durham, offer perspectives on this work from Anglican liturgical specialists.

Bridget Nichols, Lecturer in Anglicanism and Liturgy at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, Dublin, explores the potential in drawing together insights from the study of liturgy and of ritual. Ritual studies have been an area of significant development in anthropology, where the scholar is an outside observer, and have naturally found their way into religious studies, but have as yet not been used to best advantage in theology, and in

particular in the study of liturgy, where the scholar is (usually) an inside practitioner. The use of language in ritual contexts, the relationship of ritual (and therefore liturgical) language to ordinary language, and the dynamics of language (word and text) and ritual, are shown to be vitally important to understanding the nature of worship. This is directly relevant to addressing issues of contemporary worship, particularly where ordered liturgies and prescribed words are not always appreciated.

Bryan Spinks, Bishop F. Percy Goddard Professor of Liturgical Studies and Pastoral Theology at Yale Divinity School, addresses issues raised by David Jasper in *The Language of Liturgy*. The nature of poetics, its relationship to doctrine, and its use in and with liturgical prose are discussed. The particular hazards of interference by theologically illiterate and poetically deaf members of Synods in the processes of liturgical revision – particularly as experienced in the Church of England – are cited as an example of how not to go about it.

Gordon Jeanes, Rector of St Anne's, Wandsworth, in the Diocese of Southwark, explores how the *Book of Common Prayer* came to shape not only the worship of the Church of England, and of many Christians in other parts of the world, but to influence the English language itself. This was far from inevitable, but through the turbulent centuries of the English Reformation and its aftermath, the established Church acquired the characteristics now regarded as quintessentially Anglican, and the text of its liturgy evolved into the theologically ambiguous and comprehensive text which has become a classic of the English language.

It is hoped that these essays, and David's response, will assist this church in thinking through issues relating to the language used in our worship, and inform our thinking as we seek appropriate forms of liturgical expression for the coming years.

What Makes Liturgical Language Ritual Language?

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Introduction

The title of David Jasper's enquiry into the qualities and characteristics of distinguished and durable liturgical language, and the techniques that produce them, brings together two fields which are almost always treated separately in liturgical studies: language and ritual.[1] This conjunction promises welcome attention to the performative nature of liturgy, when the textual record is translated into actions in which bodies, space, voice and gesture all contribute to what we understand as worship. In fact, there is very little discussion of performance in Jasper's book beyond the evidence for patterns of worship in very early documents: this is, in the end, a book about language, and 'ritual' functions adjectivally, to specify a particular kind of language, with its own poetic criteria. Those criteria, well applied, might deliver distinguished material for performance, but that is not the primary interest of the argument. Yet even bringing the words 'liturgy' and 'ritual' has implied that ritual considerations are significant in conversations about liturgy. The difficulty for liturgists, is that 'ritual' is a word that easily lends itself to imprecision, and even to a certain romanticizing trend. Defining terms before proceeding to apply the insights of ritual studies is an urgent task. This article offers a very preliminary investigation of a single question. Its aim is to define some contours for the further exploration that is necessary before any far-reaching conclusions emerge.

'What makes liturgical language ritual language?' This question lies close to the heart of any discussion of the *practice* of liturgy which attempts to overcome the separation of language and non-verbal performance that, consciously or unconsciously, creeps into attempts to describe liturgy as performance or action. The investigator must find a way of talking about liturgical language as a contributor to continuity and identity in recognized patterns or traditions of worship, but not a definer; as a fully integrated part of the total liturgical act, and not as a script to be performed by worshipping communities. To approach liturgical language in this way alerts us to its latent potential to create new ways of understanding the world and the self in relation to others and to God.

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[1] David Jasper, *The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual Poetics* (London: SCM, 2018).

Studies devoted to liturgical language and the hermeneutical methods to be applied to liturgical texts offer much of great interest towards understanding the history, nature and literary effect of language used in liturgical rites, particularly the power of metaphor.[2] They have little to say, though, about its ritual function as part of a total action in a particular context and set of conditions. Perhaps, as liturgical study in general has widened its embrace, adding to the classic philological, historical and comparative research of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries new interests in sociology and anthropology, attention has turned increasingly to the work of anthropologists and ritual studies experts.[3] The challenge is to know where to start, and what tools to use.

In 2007, the liturgical historian, Paul Bradshaw, and John Melloh, a university teacher of homiletics and liturgics, offered their own response to the challenge in the form of a reader in ritual studies for 'students of Christian worship'.[4] They gathered a comprehensive collection of primary essays, some of them written by the great luminaries of the ritual studies world, like Catherine Bell and Ronald Grimes, whose background lay in anthropology, others by scholars with declared liturgical interests – Margaret Mary Kelleher and John Witvliet in particular. The anthology spans a period of about 30 years, from the mid-1960s to the late 1990s, and is a splendid introduction both to the idea of liturgy as a form of ritual practice, and to the contribution that ritual studies might make to liturgy. But anyone seeking an extended treatment of liturgical language in the context of ritual would not be able to extract very much. That is not a criticism: it may even underline the artificiality of the question. Anthropologists and ritual studies experts, who tend to start their investigations from observation and practice

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[2] To offer just a few examples, Gail Ramshaw, *God Beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God Language* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995); *Liturgical Language: Keeping it Metaphoric, Making it Inclusive* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996); *Reviving Sacred Speech,* 2nd edn (Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 2000); Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1988).

[3] Introducing a recent collection of graduate conference papers, Catherine Pickstock suggests that there is a discernible '"ritual" or "liturgical" turn within theology' which is opening up a number of new avenues and approaches. 'Ritual: An Introduction', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 79.3 (2018), 217-21, 217. While the conflation of 'ritual' and 'liturgical' is to be questioned and even resisted, the attention given to ritual itself is significant.

[4] *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship*, ed. by Paul F. Bradshaw & John Melloh (London: SPCK, 2007).

and not from written texts, are more nuanced and reticent than liturgists in their treatment of the distinction between language and non-verbal action elements of ritual acts.

Among these scholars, Catherine Bell has arguably become the liturgist's ritual theorist. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, first published in 1992 and reissued in 2009, after Bell's death, explicitly claims not to propose a new definition of ritual studies, but to re-examine the assumptions that the field has developed.[5] Particularly important in establishing a foundation for talking about language is Bell's preference for 'ritualization' over 'ritual' as the term for 'a particular cultural strategy of differentiation, linked to particular social effects and rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures'.[6] Ritualization, Bell says, 'is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian activities'.[7] Her interest in using the term is that it 'attempts to correct the implications of universality, naturalness, and an intrinsic structure that have accrued to the term "ritual"'.[8]

Bell's study draws on other sources, some of them referring to studies of the ritual practice of particular groups, others adopting a theoretical perspective on ritual itself. They include Stanley Tambiah's oft-cited re-examination of Malinowski's research on the magical language used by Trobriand islanders, Roy Rappaport's essay on 'The Obvious Aspects of Ritual', and Thomas Csordas's study of North American Catholic Charismatics.[9] None of these works isolates language as a separate category, though all of them present views on the way ritualized action involving language works. Thus Tambiah reacts against Malinowski's theory of ritual language as magic, necessary to the effect of a performance but meaningless in itself. His own conclusion is that sacred language does have power, and that there are analytical tools available to investigate this. Important for our discussion, is his insistence that both word and action are meaningful and necessary in ritual performance. Rappaport is interested in ritual as

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[5] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[6] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[7] Ibid., p. 74.

[8] Ibid., pp. 222-23.

[9] Stanley J. Tambiah, 'The Magical Power of Words', *Man* n. s., 3.2 (1968), 175-208; Roy Rappaport, 'The Obvious Aspects of Ritual', in *Ecology , Meaning and Religion* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1979), pp. 173-221; Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma & Creativity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

communication. Csordas proposes a more complex approach that sees ritualized behaviour not simply as the acting out of a cultural identity, or as communication or the achievement of objectives, but as ultimately *creative* of selves and communities. What follows now, is a survey of some of the issues that arise out of these rich and rewarding discussions: performative language; ritual language and ordinary language; text and performance; communication, the ordering of time; and creativity or generativity.

Performative language
No discussion of language in ritual omits the work of J. L. Austin on speech acts or, to use his own word, performatives. [10] Austin classifies acts of language which directly or indirectly bring about a state of affairs into several groups, and goes on to show how the success of these acts may be affected by context, conditions for proper completion, correctness of procedure, and the appropriateness of the agents. His descriptive terminology has stimulated research in a number of disciplines, including liturgical studies and anthropology. [11] If it has proved to have certain limitations, its originality remains undisputed.[12] The anthropologist Stanley Tambiah makes considerable use of Austin, especially in framing an alternative to a magical interpretation of ritual language – the idea that certain words have power just by being uttered and not because they have meaning in the semantic sense. He concludes that word and action are both essential to the performance of ritual, not least in relation to the perception of time:

> Thus it is possible to argue that all ritual, whatever the idiom, is addressed to the human participants and uses a technique which attempts to re-structure and integrate the minds and emotions of the actors. The technique combines verbal and non-verbal behaviour and exploits their special properties. Language is an artificial construct and its strength is that its form owes nothing to external reality: it thus enjoys the power to invoke

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[10] J. L Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, 8th repr. 1992).

[11] A recent example is Benedikt Kranemann, 'Les actes de parole sur l'eau dans la liturgie baptismale' *La Maison-Dieu* 273 (2013).

[12] R. A. Yelle, for example, suggests that Austin's concept of 'performance is too restrictive'. Instead, 'ritual sometimes performs by constructing a persuasive illusion of efficacy'. 'Ritual and Religious Language', in *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), p. 636.

> images and comparisons, refer to time past and future and relate events which cannot be represented in action. Non-verbal action on the other hand excels in what words cannot easily do – it can codify analogically by imitating real events, reproduce technical acts and express multiple implications simultaneously. Words excel in expressive enlargement, physical actions in realistic presentation.[13]

Roy Rappaport, a fellow-anthropologist, would tend to see language and gesture as reinforcing each other in a total act designed to achieve communication. But not just anything is communicated. Ritual does not waste its time in conveying trivial messages:

> If a message is communicated by participation in ritual, it is in its nature not vague. Moreover, there is no point in mobilizing the formality, decorum, and solemnity of ritual to communicate messages that are of no importance or gravity.[14]

Thomas Csordas notes the playing out of power relationships in ritual. He shows how both speaker and hearer are repositioned by the act in which ritual language is used. For the Catholic Charismatic communities on whom his research is based, the authority for speaking, and the attribution of divine authority to the source of ritual speech, are critical to the way that participants understand hierarchy within the community and their identity as a holy people. He cites the work of Meredith McGuire who:

> observes that insofar as ritual language is regarded as having a divine source (as an inspiration or spiritual gift) its performance alters the relationship of the speaker to his utterance by altering the sense of responsibility for what is said, the sense of freedom/ spontaneity with which it is said, and the sense of its authoritativeness and expected consequences for others. Ritual performance also alters the hearing of language, both insofar as 'hearers focus on the expressive content of speech, and actively impose metaphorical, allusory, and poetic expectations on the

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[13] Tambiah, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
[14] Roy Rappaport, 'The Obvious Aspects of Ritual', in *Ecology,, Meaning and Religion* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1979) pp. 173-221 (p. 190).

content' and insofar as ritual performance invites its own confirmation and validation by asserting its divine origin.[15]

How is ritual language related to ordinary language?
None of the scholars I have mentioned suggests that the linguistic element of ritual performance is in itself an unusual or rarefied language. This gives pause for thought, when the subject matter under consideration includes liturgical language. Any reflection on the stereotypical positive and negative responses to the kind of language encountered in relatively formal and prescribed acts of worship will suggest that both originate in the assumption that it is *not* ordinary language. On the one hand, there are the admirers of a dignified register that is clearly distinguishable from everyday speech. This group subdivides into two – those who find much to salute in a contemporary liturgical idiom defined more by tone and reference than by a distinctive form of language, and those who hanker after a sound that is vaguely categorized as 'traditional' and therefore depends on the use of words no longer common in everyday speech. On the other hand, there is the constituency which decries the irrelevance of all formal liturgical language to current concerns and often cites it as the enemy of the action of the Spirit in worship.

Although it cannot be dealt with in any detail here, the increasingly assertive use of 'authentic' and 'authenticity' to evaluate acts of worship appears to be linked to a strong desire on the part of some worshipping communities to reject all authorized and prescribed forms. By generating the form and language of their liturgical practice from grass roots, they argue, their own identity and experience of God find a voice.[16]

Some of the perceived difference between ordinary and special or distinctive language may be explained straightforwardly as the difference between written and oral ritual language. Catherine Bell writes that

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[15] Csordas, *op. cit.*, p. 198. He cites Meredith B. McGuire, *Pentecostal Catholics: Power, Charisma and Order in a Religious Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

[16] Even in an era which has seen liturgical uniformity give way to a plethora of alternative provision, this raises complexities in ecclesiology and catholicity. See Steve John Taylor, 'The Complexity of Authenticity in Religious Innovation: "Alternative Worship" and its Appropriation as "Fresh Expressions"', *M/C Journal* (an online journal of media and culture) 18.1 (2015) 1-5, at http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/933 [accessed 27 November 2018].

> [w]hen fixed in writing, prayers are 'repeated' verbatim at the expense of adapted invention, opening a gap between the language of ritual and the language of daily life. The exaggeration of this gap through the use of archaic language may lead to the emergence of archaicization as a basic strategy of ritualization.[17]

But the divide between orality and literacy cannot explain everything. Repetition and the entrenchment of out of date, if not actually archaic vocabulary and idiom are as much or more of a risk in worshipping communities which pride themselves on spontaneity and inspiration. It is worth noting the observation of the French liturgist, Louis-Marie Chauvet, who observes that it is not so much words themselves that are hard to understand or very different from everyday speech. Rather, 'it is sometimes their interweaving in an expression which makes them inaudible or strange: "He is seated at the right hand of the Father"; "It is right and good"'.[18]

Before we generalize, however, and suggest that in any ritual situation speech tends to become rarefied in more or less obvious and definable ways, from tone of voice, to sentence construction, to exotic or quaint vocabulary, there is another view to consider. R. A. Yelle, who writes on linguistics, says of the relationship of ritual to ordinary language that it does not always function to create difference:

> [A]t least some types of ritual language do not operate by reinforcing a difference between ritual and ordinary language, but rather by attempting to overcome any difference or gap between ritual language and its context of use. Ritual tries to construct a language that is directly connected to, and even capable of influencing reality.[19]

He illustrates this with folkloric sayings (interestingly, often rhymed) like, 'Rain, rain, go away, come again another day'. Comparable illustrations from Christian liturgy may be harder to find, since prayer by definition seeks divine action in, and influence on, phenomena and situations, and does not address phenomena themselves. There are different ways of asking for this, however, and some of the prayers offered in the *Pastoral Services* volume of the *Common Worship* series as additional resources around the time of a

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[17] Bell, *op. cit.,* p 137.
[18] Louis-Marie Chauvet, 'Are the Words of the Liturgy Worn Out? What Diagnosis? What Pastoral Approach?', *Worship* 84.1 (2010) 25-37, 27.
[19] Yelle, *op. cit.*

marriage or a bereavement are examples of excellent attempts to meet ordinary needs in ordinary language:

From the material offered for marriage, here is a prayer 'For grace to live well':

> Faithful God,
> giver of all good things,
> give *N* and *N* wisdom and devotion
> in the ordering of their life together.
> May they dwell together in love and peace
> all the days of their life,
> seeking one another's welfare,
> bearing one another's burdens
> and sharing one another's joys;
> through Jesus Christ our Lord.[20]

From the resources for the funeral of a child, here is a prayer for bereaved parents:

> Father,
> you know our hearts and share our sorrows.
> We are hurt by our parting from *N*, whom we loved:
> when we are angry at the loss we have sustained,
> when we long for words of comfort,
> yet find them hard to hear,
> turn our grief to more patient faith,
> our affliction to firmer hope
> in Jesus Christ our Lord.[21]

Neither prayer succeeds in reproducing a totally natural idiom (words like 'dwell', 'sustained' and 'patient faith' signal a drift into the ecclesiastical register of 'insiders'). Yet for the most part, they are intelligible to relative 'outsiders' to regular church practice and combine simple and immediate petitions with something of the cadence and respectful tone of a formal utterance.

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[20] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Pastoral Services* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p. 162.
[21] Ibid., p. 305.

Is a liturgical text a form of ritual language only in performance?
Reading these prayers aloud invites a further question: Is a liturgical text a form of ritual language only when it is performed? Historians of liturgical rites will instantly understand Catherine Bell's observation that

> [t]extual codification and standardization also opens a gap between what is written and what is done by promoting an ideal of uniformity and the elimination or marginalization of alternatives. Frequently the result is a written ideal quite alienated from what is in fact being done in common practice.[22]

This might suggest that the use of such texts shows ritual to be 'a secondary enactment of prior mental states or belief convictions, the rote imitation of prescribed acts, or the performance of a script'.[23]

Yet having offered a series of examples from different well-defined cultural groups, Bell concludes that

> textualization is not an inevitable linear process of social evolution, as Weber's model of rationalization may seem to imply. The dynamic interaction of texts and rites, reading and chanting, the word fixed and the word preached are practices, not social developments of a fixed nature and significance. As practices, they continually play off each other to renegotiate tradition, authority, and the hegemonic order. As practices, they invite and expect the strategic counterplay.[24]

The implications for the study of liturgy are intriguing, and in particular for the role of liturgical historians who are the interpreters of the development of traditions, the complexity of which is now much better known, thanks to the work of Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson, Gabrielle Winkler, Bryan Spinks and others. Bell's depiction of a dynamic relationship between texts and rites, and the practices generated in acts of worship (speaking, chanting, etc.) also opens the way to fruitful dialogue between historians and those concerned to realize the liturgy in a variety of settings, well-resourced and otherwise, who may stumble across historical questions in meeting a practical need.

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[22] Bell, *op. cit.,* p. 137. See also Leo Howe, 'Risk, Ritual and Performance', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6.1 (2000), 63-79 (p. 65).
[23] Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
[24] Ibid., p. 140.

How does ritual language communicate when it is performed?
Another aspect of the shift from pragmatism to a more subtle appreciation of the mechanisms of communication in ritual language emerges from Robert Yelle's work on ritual and religious language. He asks, 'If the same functions may be served alternatively by either verbal or nonverbal modes of ritual, then why should the co-ordination of these modes be so frequent?' This is how he answers his own question: 'One of the characteristics of ritual is that it builds in redundancies that attract attention or otherwise heighten the communicative force of its message. These redundancies may occur not only within but across semiotic modes.'[25]

Redundancy clearly does not mean excess, literary elaboration, or duplication, and Yelle in general sets a very high value on poetry. He notes particularly that this is neglected by Austin, who gives no account 'of the contribution of poetry to ritual performance.' 'We have already seen,' he continues, 'that many types of ritual language employ poetry in order to augment if not to bring about the performance or pragmatic function of ritual.' [26] By 'poetry', I take it that Yelle implies devices like strategic repetition to achieve rhythmic effects, metaphor and scriptural allusion.[27] Responsive forms of prayer allow the use of refrains and develop the incantatory character of much liturgical performance.

The content of ritual communication needs as much reflection as the strategies required for success. Roy Rappaport, as we have discovered, insists that the means available in the ritual repertoire are always used to convey messages of importance. Wade Wheelock, on the other hand, argues that the point of ritual communication is not to convey information at all, but to situate the participants. The repeatability of ritual, which in turn produces apparently the same situation over and over, is essential to this proposal. As Wheelock explains,

> [t]he repeatability of the situation has a double foundation. First, the physical entities involved – the human participants, the various objects – have an ongoing existence, enabling them to be repeatedly brought together in time and space. Secondly, the roles and relationships which govern and define the interaction

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[25] Yelle, *op. cit.,* pp. 637-638.

[26] Ibid., p. 636.

[27] An excellent rhetorical account of the poetic devices that continue to find their way into contemporary liturgical composition can be found in David L. Frost, 'Liturgical Language from Cranmer to Series 3', in *The Eucharist Today: Studies on Series 3*, ed. by R. C. D. Jasper (London: SPCK, 1974), pp. 142-67.

of the assembled entities also have an ongoing existence. They are existing elements of the culture that can be repeatedly used to give order to an aggregate of objects collected at a particular time and place. The utterances of a ritual can be repeated because they are the chief means by which the physical and the cultural entities unite in the production of a situation. In sum, this is not to say that situating speech is noncognitive, only that the cognitive aspect does not exhaust its function.[28]

Wheelock sees the situating role of language in religious ritual as 'particularly acute'. This is because it is unlike 'everyday social settings' in which the 'context, objects, and human participants are, for the most part, identifiable from their tangible characteristics before any words are spoken.' The situations generated by religious ritual are not nearly so easily discerned. There are two reasons for this:

first, the common role of invisible 'spiritual' beings or abstract forces, which of course have no perceptible presence in the situation; and, second, the tendency to give many of the objects or actions comprising the situation a 'symbolic' import.[29]

I am not sure that Wheelock accounts satisfactorily for occasions when some information which works in a more explicit way than situating the participants in a symbolic landscape, orientated to a divine presence, is necessary. For example, the recitation of a eucharistic prayer, including a richly imagined account of the narrative of salvation in a proper preface, or the blessing of baptismal water are both actions in which speech and gesture work powerfully together, symbolically and interpretatively. They are dealing with more than *this* situation, because they connect worshippers backwards across time to their forerunners in the faithful relationship with God, and forwards to the coming of Christ in judgement and glory.

Ritual Language and the ordering of time
The ordering of time is a particular kind of ritual situating, with certain informative characteristics. In one sense, this will strike liturgists as self-evident. Acts of worship belong to particular times of the day, week or year, occupy defined periods of time, and enact their own internal progression,

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[28] Wade T. Wheelock, 'The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50.1 (1982) 49-71, 63.
[29] Ibid.

with formational consequences for those who participate. The process becomes familiar through repetition of prayers and structures, and there are linguistic and performative devices that will guarantee that regular participants become embedded in their practice. The repeatability to which poetry and situation alert us is not only a matter of regenerating a familiar context, however, albeit a context capable of bearing new meaning under different circumstances. Performances refer beyond themselves, as well as containing an internal chronology. Leo Howe describes the phenomenon in this way:

> A concentration on a single performance leaves out of account the way that the effects it generates have a bearing on future performances, and how they become part of the context in which future performances are situated [. . .]. If . . . 'performance is whatever happens to a text in context', then the stress on the latter risks missing the contribution the former makes to linking successive contexts into broader sequences of action. Any especially memorable performance (successful or otherwise) may become a bench-mark, not only for evaluating subsequent ones, but also for influencing how they are actually conducted. Actors' claims to be doing something new, better or different, are perforce framed by the ways things have been done in the past and the results these have brought forth. Performances, however improvised they may appear, are never isolated activities; they are always in relation to or against previous performances which act as remembered precedents.[30]

Internally, rituals reorganize the time their participants inhabit, connecting them both to historic events and characters and engaging them in commitments and aspirations which look towards a future as yet unfulfilled, but of course, in Christian understanding, paradoxically fulfilled already. The shorthand definition of anamnesis as 'remembering the future' is a striking summary of what I am trying to say.

We have already heard Tambiah's reminder that

> [l]anguage is an artificial construct and its strength is that its form owes nothing to external reality: it thus enjoys the power to invoke images and comparisons, refer to time past and future and relate events which cannot be represented in action.[31]

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[30] Howe, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.
[31] Tambiah, *op. cit.,* p. 202.

Thomas Csordas records a 'call-and-response' litany, derived from the Jewish seder, and used by one of the Catholic Charismatic communities he studied. Here is a flavour of it:

> If you had only walked with us in the garden . . .
> **that would have been enough for us**
>
> If you had only promised to redeem us after we fell from your grace . . .
> **that would have been enough for us**
>
> If you had only showed yourself to our father Abraham . . .
> **that would have been enough for us**
>
> . . . .
>
> If you had only baptized our children in the Holy Spirit, and not spoken to us about being your servants in the whole world . . .
> **that would have been enough for us**
>
> O Lord you've done so much. And you haven't stopped there, you've continued to do more and more.[32]

Csordas observes how the prayer places the community 'in the flow of "salvation history"' and notes that the 'transition from mythical to contemporary events assimilates the community to ancient Israel, identifying it as a New Testament chosen people'.[33] Many similar examples could be found in ritual texts familiar to all of us.

Reinforcing and generating identity:
Ritual language as creative and creating language
What these forms point to, in addition to the manipulation of time by ritual, is the creation of identity. The dark side of this, in Csordas's illustration, is to show how the community has differentiated itself internally, increasing the distance between leaders and membership. He believes that 'the narrative dramatizes [the leaders'] current distance from the rank and file with the

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[32] Csordas, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.
[33] Ibid., p. 107.

rhetorical subtext "Look at the amazing thing God has made of us from such humble beginnings."'[34]

But that does not negate the strong sense of group identity, as a holy people chosen out of the world, yet still very much connected to it, which communal recitation of this litany is able to construct. It does not need to be underlined that the words themselves are not enough. Identity is formed out of vocalizing the words in a particular context, with different roles assigned to members of the group, and accompanied by gesture or posture not described in this account.

On the optimistic side, Csordas goes on to find in ritual language something vital and generative. He begins his discussion of ritual language in Charismatic communities with two possible directions:

> If charisma is a rhetorical process that transforms self and habitus, and if the locus of charisma is in the language and performance of religious ritual, a central hermeneutic task must be to determine the way language and performance achieve their transformative effect. Can the characteristic persuasiveness, the metaphorical vividness, and the evocation of the sacred in ritual language justifiably be said to be creative, orienting the self towards new patterns of engagement and experience? Or, on the contrary, is such language primarily the servant of a linguistic and cultural status quo, lacking the creative potential inherent in the language of poetry or even in everyday speech?[35]

He chooses the creative option and then retraces his steps through discussions of the relationship between ritual gesture and ritual language in the work of earlier anthropologists – Marcel Mauss, Maurice Bloch and Stanley Tambiah. In the arguments of Bloch and Tambiah, he finds the same absence of boundary 'between verbal and bodily acts in ritual'. He goes on to show that 'both Bloch and Tambiah acknowledge a continuity between ritual language and ritual gestures, including the manipulation of objects. Both are forms of representation, but both – including language itself – are forms of action and performance as well.' Csordas's own findings among his Charismatic subjects confirm this position. 'Ritual language takes its place among techniques of the body (Mauss 1950) as a tool for reordering the

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., p. 157.

behavioral environment, cultivating the dispositions of the habitus and creating a sacred self.'[36]

Conclusion

Csordas's choice of 'ritual language' rather than 'liturgical language' to describe the phenomena of a particular kind of Charismatic worship is telling. What he is describing requires a range of reference more encompassing than what is generally understood by 'liturgical'. In one key respect – the dynamic relationship in ritual between language, gesture and performance – 'ritual' appears to do what 'liturgical' cannot do. I do not think, however, that this means giving up the question that has motivated this survey, 'What makes liturgical language ritual language?' On the contrary, it should spur liturgists who are already drawing on some of the resources of ritual studies to be more rigorous in asking how such interdisciplinary study might develop into more than a way of corroborating arguments and become something more adventurous. A few topics capable of becoming directions for further investigation, have been tentatively identified (the relationship of language to action; its ability to indicate the movement of time; its communicative range; its symbolic role in defining group identity; and its participation in something more creative – the forming of new selves, worlds, experiences). Their strategic potential might lie in negotiating the notorious conundra that face liturgists, especially those who study contemporary liturgical life: the apparent binaries of theory and practice, text and performance, and the production and location of 'meaning' in liturgy.[37]

Does this mean that the urgent matter of poetics, which is central to David Jasper's recent study, must become a secondary issue while less obviously aesthetic considerations are given priority? I think there are strong grounds for a more optimistic view, and this has everything to do with the way liturgical rites are experienced by those who participate. It is in what interrupts or distracts in ritualized behaviour that the most significant

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[36] Ibid., p. 262. The idea of technologies of the self is a relevant area of enquiry, too large to be embarked upon here. A very useful summary of its development in the work of Michel Foucault and Talal Asad can be found in Nathan D. Mitchell, *Liturgy and the Social Sciences* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

[37] This is not unexplored territory in liturgical studies, as the work of Martin Stringer, Gail Ramshaw, Joyce Ann Zimmerman and Juliet Day testifies, but their research demonstrates the difficulty of achieving precision or even of making firm theoretical propositions.

questions can arise – when the sheer beauty of an image or whole prayer stops us in our tracks, as it should in this proper preface for Christmas:

> In this mystery of the Word made flesh
> you have caused his light to shine in our hearts,
> to give knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.
> In him we see our God made visible
> and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see.[38]

Or when an ordinary human longing, as ordinary as the need to be held in love, meets what it did not know it was imagining in a vividly evoked image:

> he opened wide his arms for us on the cross;
> he put an end to death by dying for us;
> and revealed the resurrection by rising to new life.[39]
>
> Father of all,
> we give you thanks and praise,
> that when we were still far off,
> you met us in your Son and brought us home.[40]

Unlike the anthropologists whose studies have informed much of the thinking in this article, liturgists are usually *insiders* in their own practice, rather than participant observers. How this might become a strength in discovering more about what that practice is, remains to be explored.

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[38] Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000) p. 303.

[39] Ibid., p. 188.

[40] Ibid., p. 182.

A Response to *The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual Poetics*

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In his *The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual Poetics*, David Jasper notes:

> Liturgical language, like all theological language, but perhaps especially so, is odd and strange. […] The words that are uttered in the liturgy are never quite what is said in everyday speech for, like poetry, the language of worship defamiliarizes and makes strange, thereby shifting and disturbing the very categories of time and place that bind us to our place in history.[1]

Few would want to dissent from these sentiments, and most of those who worship in the so-called 'liturgical' churches desire good, poetic and resonating language. The challenges to producing such a desired result, though, are almost overwhelming, particularly in the Church of England.

Although 'poetic' language seems to be a frequently voiced desire, there is no agreement on what might constitute good poetic language in liturgy. William McGonagall's *The Tay Bridge Disaster* (1880) is certainly a poem but has the reputation for being the worst poem in the English language. The Scottish draft liturgy authored by William Cowper (not to be confused with the English poet of the same name) in 1617 requested of the bread and wine: 'Lord blesse it that it may be unto us ane effectual exhibiting instrument of the Lord Jesus'.[2] It is an excellent theological expression, reflecting the use of 'exhibit' by Bucer and Calvin, but outside a doctrinal treatise, surely presents a liturgical parallel to McGonagall. In the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, there is a distinct difference between the prayers of Alexander Brunton of New Greyfriars, Edinburgh, in *Forms for Public Worship in the Church of Scotland* 1848 and the poet minister Lauchlain Maclaren Watt in his *Prayers for Public Worship* 1924 for use in Glasgow Cathedral. In the texts of the 'classic' period, the anaphora of St John Chrysostom represents an accomplished piece of Greek rhetoric. Daniel

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[1] David Jasper, *The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual Poetics* (London: SCM Press, 2018), pp. 4-5.

[2] Text in Bryan D. Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies and the Stuart Divines* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), p. 196.

Sheerin has shown that this anaphora exhibits many of the features of artistic prose, especially those associated with the so-called Second Sophistic. It was composed for public recitation, yet with linguistic restraint, and is very far from being an off-the-cuff prayer. The later parts of the canon missae of the Roman rite are noted by the concern for the Latin *cursus*, but this whole prayer, once translated – especially into English – seems dislocated and matches the descriptions by Thomas Becon – an hotch-potch […] a very beggar's cloke, cobbled, clouted and patched.[3] Poetry and rhythm in one language rarely carries over in translation to another.

David Jasper has drawn attention to the text of the Prayer Book and Shakespeare and the metaphysical poets, who were inspired by its text. However, the poetry flows from the liturgical text, and not from the poets into the liturgy. An example of the poetry flowing into the liturgy and the poetry itself inspired by liturgy is St Ephrem the Syrian. For Ephrem, the creation was open to the divine use as signs and symbols, and he knew that words which allude burst beyond any attempt to contain them by some literal strict definition. Speaking of the incarnation Ephrem wrote:

> Glorious is the wise one who allied and joined Divinity with humanity. One from the height and the other from below he mingled the natures like pigments, and an image came into being: the god-Man.[4]

Or again:

> All these changes did the Merciful One make,
> Stripping off glory and putting on a body;
> For he had devised a way to reclothe Adam
> In the glory which Adam had stripped off.
> Christ was wrapped in swaddling clothes,
> Corresponding to Adam's leaves,
> Christ put on clothes, instead of Adam's skins;
> He was baptized for Adam's sin,
> His body was embalmed for Adam's death,
> He rose and raised up Adam in glory.
> Blessed is he who descended, put Adam on and ascended.[5]

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[3] *Prayers and Other Pieces of Thomas Becon* (Cambridge: 1844), p. 266.

[4] Kathleen E. McVey, Hymns on the Nativity 8.2', in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 119.

[5] Ibid., p. 190.

Ephrem writes in Nativity Hymn 4:

> By power from Him (God incarnate) Mary's womb became able
> To bear the One who bears all.
> From the great treasury of all creation
> Mary gave Him everything that she gave.
> She gave him milk from what he made exist.
> She gave him food from what he had created.
> He gave milk to Mary as God.
> In turn, He was given suck by her as human.
> Her arms carried Him, for He lightened His weight,
> And her bosom embraced Him, for he made Himself small.[6]

On the Eucharist he wrote:

> Your bread is far more honorable than Your body [...] Behold,
> Your image is portrayed with the blood of the grapes upon the
> bread and portrayed upon the heart by the finger of love with
> the pigments of faith.[7]

The tradition of Ephrem was carried over by Jacob of Serug. Jacob wrote:

> Blessed is she in whose small barren womb dwelt
> The Great One by whom the heavens are filled and are too small
> for Him.
> Blessed is she who gave drops of milk from her members
> To that One at whose command the waves of the great sea
> gushed forth.
> Blessed is that one who carried, embraced and caressed like a
> child
> God mighty for evermore, by whose hidden power the world is
> carried.[8]

In the cases of Ephrem and Jacob, their poetry was taken over and incorporated into parts of the liturgy – especially Ephrem. The use of imagery is impressive but does not migrate well into Western liturgical expression. Something akin to it was in the ASB and survived into Common

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[6] Ibid., p. 102.
[7] Ibid., pp. 149-50.
[8] Jacob of Serug, *On the Mother of God*, trans. Mary Hansbury (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1998), p. 41.

Worship: 'The Tree of shame was made the tree of glory: and where life was lost, there life was restored.'

A major problem is not so much the inability of revisers to appreciate and attempt poetic language, but the procedures of liturgical revision. In composition of services of the Book of Common Prayer, Cranmer apparently had advisers, but seems to have been the sole author. Some of his shortcomings were rectified by the 1662 revisers. The method, though, was very different from modern liturgical authorization. Whatever the Church of England Liturgical Commission may produce, there are two ways in which the material is received for use in the Church. If the material is not replacing services that already exist, the material is debated by General Synod once, and no amendment is allowed, and the services are then commended by the House of Bishops. That was the procedure *for Lent, Holy Week and Easter.* But services that are alternatives to those in the *Book of Common Prayer* go to Synod for debate, then to a revision committee. The revision is then debated in Synod, and if no parts are referred back to the revision committee, services return to the House of Bishops. Any parts referred to the revision committee once more go to Synod, and then to the House of Bishops. The final texts are determined by the House of Bishops, and the final texts then are voted on by the General Synod and must be approved by a two-thirds majority in each of the three Houses of Synod. Checks and balances are a good thing, but often members of Synod and members of the revision committee represent a particular constituency of the Church, and home in on pet doctrines, as though everything that could be said has to be said, and the liturgical text takes on the role of a creedal statement. This method frequently disrupts and destroys the poetic quality of the liturgical text.

At least with respect to the ASB 1980, it is important to understand its context, as well as that of the Series 3 services which prepared its way. This was the first serious endeavour in the Church of England to write liturgy in the modern vernacular. In many ways 1980 was itself an experiment. Critics never tired of attacking its language – and indeed, it was in many places flat and uninspiring. The *Daily Telegra*ph was one of the constant critics, and the irony was that it was because the ASB seemed to have been written in the manner and style of that newspaper. It was for an educated readership, written mostly in direct and unambiguous prose. What was fitting for such a newspaper, however, was not best suited to liturgical prose. Where the proposed language was poetic, it was usually ruined by the Synodical proposals. Obvious examples now are the prayers of David Frost for Series 3 Holy Communion, and where Synodical members with no obvious liturgical training, and only their own self-belief in their abilities at modern English liturgical composition, overturned the Confession, and then, with the jibe 'the Little Flower has been at work again', jettisoned the alternative

Humble Access prayer too. The confession which was adopted is now infamously known as the 'Cockin Confession', after Canon Cockin. The text was reputed to have been drafted in the men's toilet on the back of an envelope. The alleged place of composition might be an urban (or lavatorial) myth, but the constipated piece of prose that resulted deserves such a mythological origin. Fortunately, the Frost prayers were rescued for alternatives in the ASB and have lived on into Common Worship. An example of linguistic wrecking during the compilation of Common Worship was Eucharistic Prayer 4 of the original new 6 prayers that were submitted to Synod. Notes on this prayer correctly note that it was drafted by a secondary school teacher and an English expert.[9] I was the school teacher; I taught RE at St. Peter's School Huntingdon as well as being Chaplain at Churchill College, an affiliated lecturer (in liturgy) in the divinity faculty at Cambridge, and was already a DD. A colleague in the English department who had noted gifts for language worked with me on this prayer. In the revision committee the flow was interrupted to 'strengthen' the doctrine. Ultimately, with the other five new prayers, it was rejected by the House of Laity in Synod – it was a new House of Laity, and a majority determined that they themselves had not requested these! I am reminded of Gerard Fiennes book, *I Tried to Run a Railway*, which illustrates how other policies, politics and agendas intrude to disrupt the possibility of a successful mode of transport.[10]

Having liturgical experts on a committee certainly does not guarantee the best language or even the best ideas, and poets and those with obvious skills in English composition should be included in revision projects. It is within the revision and synodical process where problems enter, with a free-for-all, regardless of qualifications or abilities. A better way needs to be found, for if there is one thing worse than Liturgical Commission language it is General Synod language. The hope must be that David Jasper's timely book will not fall on deaf ears.

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[9] Colin Buchanan and Trevor Lloyd, *Six Eucharistic Prayers as Proposed in 1996*, Grove Worship Book 136 (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1996), p. 32.
[10] Gerard Fiennes, *I Tried to Run a Railway* (London: Ian Allan, 1967).

How Did the *Book of Common Prayer* Become a Classic?

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Counter-historical speculation is not much approved of among scholars, but it is worthwhile to wonder for a moment how we might view the *Book of Common Prayer* if it had remained an historical artefact of the reign of Edward VI. If the re-establishment of Catholicism had survived the reign of Mary Tudor, or if the Protestant Reformation under Elizabeth I had taken a more explicitly Reformed direction, or if in the following century the Commonwealth had not ended in the restoration of the *status quo ante* under Charles II, the Prayer Book might then seem to us a curiosity of history, little known. Scholars might regard such a volume as they do a Lutheran *kirchenordnung*. It would represent a cultural and religious cul-de-sac, its possibilities unimagined. Perhaps a nineteenth century compiler of medieval spirituality might have printed a Prayer Book Collect to accompany its Sarum Latin original.

This scenario would not just have left the Prayer Book as an unknown text: if it had not been heard continually week after week by a large percentage of the English-speaking population, in all likelihood the English language would have developed in a different way than it has through the last four centuries. In such a hypothetical case the Prayer Book might have seemed quite foreign to modern ears. But in reality, as a public shared text with an official and indeed sacral context it must have been massively influential. We must ask therefore whether it is not so much an example of literary merit as a benchmark of standard English. It would not need to have been supremely excellent in its day, only sufficiently good. Status, time and repetition would have done the rest. And, almost by logical necessity rather than by intrinsic merit, other texts are found wanting.

Reflection of this kind helps remind us how much of the life of the Prayer Book is tied up both with its original context and with later unforeseeable political events and theological twists and turns. (Diarmaid MacCulloch enjoys reminding us that Thomas Cranmer would have considered Anglican Cathedral Evensong an abuse or a perversion of his original intention.[1]) For the *Book of Common Prayer* has survived, not as a source for anthologies, but as a text which has had a number of revisions great and small, and is still used very widely right up to the present day. In

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[1] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996) , pp. 629-30.

some ways it has achieved a status which divorces it from its origins. Stella Brook reminds us that the Prayer Book is closer in time to Chaucer than to us, yet (unlike Chaucer) its common editions use modern spelling and punctuation, encouraging us to treat it as modern English.[2]

But the very survival of the Prayer Book is in many ways due to the chances of history. Much of this is due to events of major political and religious importance against which the Prayer Book itself counted as a mere playing card to be held or thrown away.

There is an irony in that the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I had very clear theological programmes (in which the Prayer Book was composed and then banned) but neither lasted long enough to make an indelible impact on the population, whereas Elizabeth's initial religious settlement seemed at the time to have something of the provisional about it, but then developed no further, and subsequent attempts at reform by church leaders were resisted by the monarch. By the end of her long reign the Book had grown familiar to its many users and gained their affection, from Sir Christopher Trychay the traditionalist vicar of Morebath to the churchwardens and congregations described by Judith Maltby.[3] Maltby describes how the Book provided continuity

Backed by the laws of parliament and the protection of the 'godly prince', the most pervasive agent of change, the Book of Common Prayer, gained a place in the religious consciousness and even affections of the English laity. Its success may be explained in part by the element of continuity it gave its users along with innovation. […] A goodly proportion of the English people became 'people of the book' – but as much of the Prayer Book as of the Bible. For conformists that association represented no conflict, but rather a happy alliance at best, a manageable partnership at worst.[4]

Despite the Laudian reforms, which many regarded as an assault on Prayer Book use rather than its defence, the Book retained its followers and was widely used under the Commonwealth despite being officially banned. But it is difficult to be precise as to why the book was appreciated or by how many. It had critics, of which more below, but were its supporters motivated by quality or did they simply like stability and order?

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[2] Stella Brook, *The Language of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), p. 15.

[3] Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 180-81; Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[4] Maltby, *op. cit.,* p. 17.

With the restoration of Charles II, memories of the excesses of the Laudian reforms were overshadowed by the troubles of recent years, and the new regime was now in a position not only to restore the Book but to revise it in the Laudian direction which had previously met such opposition. But here we must not be blinded by sentiment. For the imposition of the 1662 Prayer Book brought with it the Great Ejection of those clergy – about a tenth of the total – who could not conscientiously use it. The Church of England of Charles II was very different from that of his grandfather. The Prayer Book was no longer the shared text of a nation but henceforth was identified with party and with privilege. A proposal for a further revision of the Prayer Book in the 'Liturgy of Comprehension' of 1689 was no less and no more than an attempt to unite the Protestant opposition to James VI and I, and it was abandoned when the threat was removed.

Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were proposals for revision, but they were outweighed by political and religious conservatism. So the long history of the *Book of Common Prayer* in many ways reflects the inability of reforming political authorities to enact serious change, whereas conservative or even reactionary governments have enjoyed the good luck of lengthy stability. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century the Book was the symbol and means of Anglican political hegemony in England, and access to the universities, Parliament and the military was fenced about by the Test Acts. Memory of that period is written into the consciousness of the Free Churches to this day and is woven into the political and class divisions of our society.[5]

In this paper I do not wish to explore any further that monopoly which established its cultural supremacy, and as a theologian I cannot enter into any meaningful discussion about its literary merit. Instead I want to discuss some of the features which gave it the necessary flexibility to meet the needs of a significant proportion among the first generations of the English Reformation and indeed of later ages.[6] In that respect there is something of

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[5]Bryan D. Spinks, *The Rise and Fall of the Incomparable Liturgy: The Book of Common Prayer, 1559-1906* (London: SPCK, 2017), pp. 92-94; Susan Durber, 'Voices from the Rift', in *Wrestling with a Godly Order: Encounters with the 1662 Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by James Steven (Salisbury: Sarum College Press 2015), pp. 67-80.

[6] Much of the argument in this article depends on my earlier work on Cranmer, in 'Cranmer and Common Prayer', in *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: a Worldwide Survey*, ed. by Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 21-38; and *Signs of God's Promise: Thomas Cranmer's Sacramental Theology and the Book of Common Prayer* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2008).

a 'Goldilocks' quality about the Prayer Book: other liturgical creations were easily branded too hard or too soft, too hot or too cold, but something in this book tempered it to the tastes of a sufficient number of people so that calls for its removal were only successful once in the seventeenth century. Quite probably much of its general acceptance would have been due to its literary merit, though early campaigns against it tended to focus on issues of ritual (e.g. the marriage ring and the sign of the cross at baptism), its theology or the very principle of set liturgical prayer.

The features I want to focus on can be viewed under two headings. The first is one very important characteristic of the Book, that it is not a one-off creation. Much of it is a translation of earlier sources; and indeed the Book itself was revised and improved over a very long time, and as such it has proved to be surprisingly adaptable beyond and contrary to the intentions of its first editor.

The second feature is that it contained many theological ambiguities which meant that, however inadequate it may have seemed from the standpoint of its many critics, it was rarely outstandingly offensive to the majority. Rather it proved unusually malleable to those who wished to read their own preferences into the text. As such again it has proved curiously protean in its use and interpretation.

The long evolution of the Book of Common Prayer
C. S. Lewis attributes much of the glory of the Prayer Book to it being a work of translation rather than of original writing. 'The qualities which raise it above the period are due, in the main, to its originals.'[7]

The main source was the medieval liturgy, namely the Roman Rite in the version of the Use of Sarum which was the most common use in England before the reign of Henry VIII but was typical of the myriad uses across western Catholic Europe. Differences between them were minimal, and the common texts go back as far as the eighth and sometimes even the fourth or fifth centuries AD. The passage of time would have seen the weeding and polishing of many texts.

Besides the medieval Latin liturgy as a source for the Prayer Book, English Books of Hours and Primers have been identified, and the liturgical creations of Continental reformers, both Lutheran and Reformed. And a small number of out-of-the-way sources such as the Greek liturgies and the ancient Spanish Mozarabic rites demonstrate wide reading. We need not presume that all of this was Cranmer's own work, though the annotations in his extensive library show his own considerable learning. The Ordinal was

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[7] C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 204.

largely based on work by Martin Bucer and we know Peter Martyr Vermigli contributed an exhortation to the Holy Communion service, and no doubt there were many other hands.[8]

But the wide range of sources is not due simply to plucking nice prayers from books. The whole project was subject to strict editorial control under the firm hand of Thomas Cranmer himself and displays the story of a long twisting journey through the early English Reformation. His work was not conducted in a context of academic or prayerful calm and harmony; rather it reflected several changes of direction and the need to appease or counter powerful interests.

The translation work seems to have begun in the mid 1530s, particularly the 'occasional offices' of baptism, marriage and the like. Hugh Latimer had spoken in Convocation of these services being translated for the benefit of those taking part.[9] And the baptism service that comes down to us shows considerable evidence of Lutheran influence. This was a period in which those in positions of influence were much interested in a reformation in a Lutheran direction, matching secular concerns as Henry dallied with an alliance with the Schmalkaldic League of Lutheran states. However he was not to be pushed into a religious position he disliked, and reform of that kind had to be put back into the drawer. Nevertheless the 1549 Holy Communion service would have looked to contemporaries very much like a conservative Lutheran revision of the medieval rite, and it may well be that its form dates from the 1530s too. The reign of Henry was the context of two failed schemes for the reform of the Daily Office, both closely modelled on medieval forms but one with a more Lutheran flavour (probably from the late 1530s) and the other (probably later) with a more traditional feel. These were not published in their time, but lay behind the Morning and Evening Prayer of the 1549 Prayer Book. These services were translations and simplifications of their Latin antecedents. Thus it was that the Church of England was the only Protestant church whose Sunday service, with Mattins, Litany and Communion followed later by Evening Prayer, was modelled on the medieval services.[10]

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[8] For the many sources see e.g. Frank Edward Brightman, *The English Rite*, 2 vols (London: Rivingtons, 1915); Geoffrey Cuming, *The Godly Order: Texts and Studies relating to the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1983).

[9] Hugh Latimer, Sermon before the Convocation of the Clergy, 9 June 1536; the second sermon in *Sermons*, ed. by G. E. Corries, Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), pp. 55-56.

[10] Spinks, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Alongside the Lutheran links, and even more to the fore when the German initiative was abandoned in around 1539, was the central Henrician scheme of Catholicism without the Pope, and that gave an added attractiveness both to traditional English forms and also Greek and Spanish originals which otherwise might have seemed eccentric. These could be seen as 'Catholic', or at least not Protestant, but not 'popish'. Examples of this stage would be the unpublished draft of the Daily Office mentioned above, and also the English Litany, published in 1543 for use in processions. It was largely a simplification of the Latin original, developing a rhythm which worked in English but still including an invocation of the saints. (With appropriate revisions it would be included in the 1549 Prayer Book and its later editions.)

And then with the death of Henry and the accession of Edward VI, reform proceeded in a different direction, away from the traditionalist Catholic and Lutheran connections towards the Reformed as typified by Strasbourg, Switzerland and Geneva. But by contemporary standards it was a very unusual sort of reformation. On the Continent, reform attracted considerable popular support. But in England, outside the civil and ecclesiastical government there was little appetite for reform in a Lutheran direction, let alone the more radical Reformed option that the authorities now looked to. Many powerful figures were committed still to a Catholic reform summed up in the Henrician benchmarks of the Act for Advancement of True Religion and the doctrine contained in the *Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man* of 1543, commonly known as the King's Book.[11]

And so it was that by the time the first Prayer Book approached publication, Cranmer and whatever team he led had more than a decade of experience in drafting and translating, very little of it published and much originally designed for different ends than what the archbishop now had in mind.

The very conservatism of much of the book can be explained by the political need to bring the people along on the path of reform. Echoes of phrases from the King's Book have often been noted: were they an attempt to woo devotees of the Henrician settlement? If so, Cranmer was to be quickly and rudely disabused. The general population, while it might have welcomed translations into English particularly of the baptism and marriage services, was in no mood for the removal of patterns of religious practice which had stood it in good stead for generations. Simpler traditionalists

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[11] Readers of David Jasper's book should be aware that he often confuses the King's Book with the separate and very different *King's Primer* of 1545.

could see what had been lost, and the more learned could read the theological signposts clearly enough.

It is probably the long history of revision up to 1549 that gave the Prayer Book one of its distinctive features already mentioned: the large quantity of material based on medieval Latin originals. This was common in the more conservative Lutheran *kirchenordnungen* as well as appealing to Henrician Catholicism. (A well-read theologian on opening the 1549 Book could easily have had the impression at first that it was Lutheran.) But the work was not completed with the 1549 edition. Through the successive editions the Latin-based material largely survived but was often revised and improved from a stylistic point of view. We can take, as David Jasper does, the collects as an example.

The Latin originals of the collects included many stylistic features such as antithesis and chiasmus which were natural to good Latin style. These were often retained in the English translations. At the same time the terseness of the Latin, very much a strength of that language, was softened in the English by filling out with additional words including often the famous 'Cranmerian' doublets.

The classic Latin features were taken into some of the new compositions among the collects in Cranmer's Prayer Book. The favourite for analysis is the Collect for Advent Sunday which Jasper refers to several times, and has been a feature of Prayer Book studies at least from Geoffrey Cuming onwards.[12] It is a very fine English composition steeped in the tradition of the Latin collect. Cuming's verdict on Cranmer's total work of collect composition is worth quoting:

> Cranmer has been the subject of much uncritical adulation for his versions of the collects. Sometimes, indeed, he has received credit in popular estimation which was really due to the revisers of 1661. Some of his collects are flat, and one or two downright bad, as he would have been the first to admit: his criticism of his own attempts at translating hymns from the Latin is well known. But considering the lack of good models and probably also the shortage of time (a good collect cannot be thrown off in one sitting), the standard of excellence he maintained is fully worthy of the praise which generations of Englishmen have gratefully bestowed upon it.[13]

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[12] Cuming, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

[13] Ibid., p. 62.

As Cuming points out, later revisions had a major role in establishing the excellence of many collects, and with this in mind perhaps a more typical example for study might be the fourth Sunday of Advent:

Sarum Missal	*1549/1552*	*1662*
Excita quaesumus domine potentiam tuam et veni, et magna nobis virtute succurre: ut per auxilium gratie tue quod nostra peccata prepediunt, indulgentia tue propitiationis acceleret.	Lorde rayse up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among vs, and with great might succor vs, that where as through our synnes and wickednes we be sore lette and hyndred, thy bountifull grace and mercy, through the satisfaccion of thy sonne oure Lorde may spedely delyuer vs: to whome with thee and the holy goste be honor and glory worlde without ende.	O Lord, rayse up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among vs, and with great might succour vs, that whereas through our sins and wickedness we **are** sore let and hindred **in running the race that is set before vs**; thy bountifull grace and mercy *may speedily* **help and** *delyuer vs*, through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord: to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory world without end.

The Latin original revolves around the contrast between divine speed (*succurre … acceleret*) and sin-induced slowness (*prepediunt*). This is expanded in the two antithetical phrases *quod nostra peccata prepediunt* and *indulgentia tue propitiationis acceleret*. God's saving grace gives speed again to a humanity hobbled by sin. In 1549 and 1552 the general sense of the Latin is retained but it is enlarged with considerable amplifications that both fill out the meaning (come *among us*) and also soften what would, if translated literally, be a starkly bald text in English. However it loses some of the directness of the original and the contrast between speed and slowness is weakened, first by 'succour' which is a literal translation but lacks the haste of *succurre*. Also the alteration of *indulgentia tue propitiationis acceleret* into 'through the satisfaccion of thy sonne oure Lorde may spedely delyuer vs' creates a rather lengthy clause at this point in the prayer. (It also introduces a confusion over the addressee: in Latin it is the

Son throughout.) [14] The 1662 version improves the collect by adding 'let and hindred *in running the race that is set before vs*': this makes more explicit the theme of divine haste and human slowness by evoking a Biblical image (e.g. 1 Corinthians 9. 24-5) which is then reinforced by bringing forward the phrase 'may speedily help and delyuer us'. The downside is that it leaves the final phrase 'through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord' hanging heavy, and modern versions, like the *Common Worship C*ollect for Advent 2, have probably done a good job in rebalancing the prayer by omitting it. One problem, alas, remains to this day: 'succour', although a literal translation of *succurre*, lacks the sense of haste in the Latin, and its use is archaic to modern ears.

This may seem a pedantic unpicking of this prayer, but it demonstrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of the English collect: that slavish obedience to Latin tautness is self-defeating; that antithesis and similar features tend to work better in Latin than in English, but images and allusions can be fruitful if creatively handled; also there has been an evolution within the Prayer Book tradition, in this case up to 1662 and even to the modern day.

It has to be admitted that Prayer Book language is not to everyone's liking. We should note, for instance, A.G Dickens's comments on the 1549 Prayer Book:

> One Anglican at least is prepared to admit that for him the Prayer Book sometimes seems a shade over-felicitous. Intoxicated by verbal beauty, the feeble spirit can find a barrier – or invent a sub-Christian cult – as readily as when confronted by images and incense. Idolatry is a term with wider connotations than the early reformers supposed![15]

And Cuming quotes Isaac Williams's comments as 'perhaps overstated' but 'certainly one valid insight':

> Through all these alterations there runs one prevailing tendency, to put into our mouths the language of servants rather than that of sons.

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[14] And see Cuming's comments on this collect, ibid.*,* pp. 58-59.

[15] A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation,* 2nd edition (London: BT Batsford Ltd, 1989), p. 244

Entire Collects, or expressions on them, which imply the privileges of the faithful, or spiritual rejoicing, as of sons, are dropped; and prayers substituted in a lower tone.

It is the same string which is touched upon in all these changes; instead of the spiritual rejoicing of the festival, the same chord is struck, simple, solemn, and deep; and if there are varied intonations, these are but the varied forms, the particular duties, of obedience.[16]

Jasper rightly draws our attention to passages in the Prayer Book which are based on English rather than Latin originals. Much of the Daily Office material has been identified by Cuming as based on the English Primers.[17] The marriage vows had been in English from the Middle Ages and were lightly updated by Cranmer but retained their ancient rhythm. 'To have and to hold', both in content and rhythm, seems to take us back to Anglo-Saxon poetry.[18] A couple saying the vows today are reciting a form of words more ancient than anything else in our language. The Preface to the Marriage Service was only lightly revised in 1928, losing some infelicitous phrases, and has a worthy equivalent in the modern Church of England marriage service as well as a strange imitation in the British civil ceremony, demonstrating both the strength of the religious liturgical original and the poverty of the state vision of marriage.

Some parts of the 1552 Book display the model of Reformed liturgies which could include lengthy prayers with monologues from the minister. Prime examples are the initial exhortation, confession and absolution at Morning and Evening Prayer. The confession has some memorable phrases (a friend says there should be a rubric directing a sad down-looking and shaking of the head at 'and there is no health in us'). But then is the confession followed by an absolution proper or an exhortation to pray for absolution? The conditional clauses are multiplied, the grammar is unclear, an anxious penitent left with the feeling that the possibility of forgiveness depends acutely on the wholeheartedness of one's penitence. This whole preliminary section was added to the Daily Office in 1552. It has a very different feel to the rest of the service, and it is this style of liturgical composition which can be seen through the second half of the sixteenth century. A perusal of the *Occasional Forms of Prayer* from the reign of

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[16] Cuming, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57

[17] Ibid., pp. 26-55.

[18] Kenneth Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing* (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 79-80.

Elizabeth I[19] demonstrates that the longer and discursive form of prayer all but superseded the traditional collects which no doubt were despised at the time as examples of the very shortcomings of the Prayer Book, 'an unperfecte booke, culled and picked out of that popishe dunghil, the Masse booke full of all abhominations'.[20] If Elizabeth had allowed a thorough revision of the Prayer Book, it would have produced something very different in style and temper from Cranmer's creation, quite possibly something more in the style of John Knox's *Form of Prayers* which were based more closely on Reformed patterns. Cranmer could be said to be a liturgical writer not without honour, except in his own age.

Theological ambiguity
While the *Book of Common Prayer* may now be praised for its literary merits, in the first generations it stood or fell by theological criteria. In the mid-sixteenth century this went far beyond approval by allies or condemnation by opponents: to have the correct view, particularly on eucharistic theology, was a matter of life and death. Cranmer had condemned people to be burned at the stake and would suffer that fate himself, and it was generally agreed that it was right and proportionate for the state to act thus. The fate of people's eternal souls depended on having a correct belief in such matters, and there was simply no room or tolerance for ambiguity on this issue.

It was for theological and political reasons that the Book was banned under Mary and restored (slightly changed) under Elizabeth. But what struck both its first readers and modern scholars was its theological ambiguity: it is by no means easy to ascertain what Cranmer himself believed or to what extent his theology was reflected in the 1549 and 1552 editions. Today there is a general (but not universal) consensus that both the man and the Book demonstrate a Reformed theology close to that of Bullinger, but the studies of previous generations have shown the difficulty of arriving at this point.

On pages 39-40 Jasper undertakes a detailed analysis of the 1552/59 (not 1549) prayer embracing the words of institution, and examines how the prayer embraces heaven and earth, the moment of Christ's once for all self-offering and the present congregation. He describes a unitive vision which has been the cornerstone of Anglican devotion from the sixteenth century and is well known and loved even today. The once-for-all moment of Christ's

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[19] E.g. in *The Prayer Book of Queen Elizabeth 1559 to which are appended some Occasional Forms of Prayer issued in her Reign*, ed. by Edward Benham (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909).
[20] *An Admonition to Parliament* (1572), quoted by Spinks in *Rise and Fall*, p. 23.

death is held in perpetual memory until the end of time; the story of salvation is recounted for each and every congregation regardless of where and when they meet. This picture was one that the archbishop shared with all his fellow Christians of his time, and indeed it is at the core of traditional Christianity.

However for Cranmer's contemporaries there was a gap in the middle of that vision. The all-important link in the Eucharist was communion with Christ in his Body and Blood. In the medieval understanding of the Eucharist Christ's actions in taking bread and wine, naming them his Body and Blood and commanding his followers to 'do this' in his memory was fulfilled in the Mass and focussed around the bread and wine being identified as his physical Body and Blood. And this became one of the chief controversial matters of the Reformation.

Matters of theological complexity often came down to small textual variants or ritual moments. The question, all-important in sixteenth century Europe, whether the bread and wine of the Eucharist was to be identified unequivocally as the physical Body and Blood of Christ, could be summarized in the liturgical text as to whether the priest prayed that the bread and wine 'became' the Body and Blood (i.e. is there a change?), and in the ritual whether the priest then elevated the (changed) wafer for the adoration of the congregation. In the 1549 Prayer Book one finds neither:

> O God heavenly father, which of thy tender mercie diddest geve thine only sonne Jesu Christ to suffre death upon the crosse for our redempcion, who made there (by his one oblacion once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifyce, oblacion, and satysfaccyon, for the sinnes of the whole worlde, and did institute, and in his holy Gospell commaund us, to celebrate a perpetuall memory of that his precious death, untyll his comming again: Heare us (O merciful father) we besech thee; and with thy holy spirite and worde, vouchsafe to bl✠esse and sanc✠tifie these thy gyftes, and creatures of bread and wyne, that they maie be unto us the bodye and bloude of thy moste derely beloved sonne Jesus Christe. Who in the same nyght that he was betrayed[…]

And although the priest was directed to take the bread and cup into his hands at the appropriate point in the institution narrative, there then followed the rubric: 'These wordes before rehersed are to be saied, turning still to the Altar, without any elevacion, or shewing the Sacrament to the people.' All of this ritual language and ceremonial came down to the problem that the priest prayed that the bread and wine 'may be unto us', and that

there was no elevation. To pray that the bread and wine 'maie be unto us' the body and blood of Christ has an ambiguity (does it mean that the bread becomes the Body of Christ or that it simply represents it?) which can seem helpful to modern ears, but it was far from that in its own time.

The first commentators were plainly irritated by the language of the first Prayer Book. As a fellow reformer who might be seen as an ally of Cranmer, Francis Dryander, writing to Bullinger in June 1549, commented favourably on the book but he complained about the retention of traditional ceremonies without a 'candid interpretation' and about the obscurity of the language:

> In the cause of religion, which is the most important of all in the whole world, I think that every kind of deception either by ambiguity or trickery of language is altogether unwarrantable. You will also find something to blame in the matter of the Lord's supper; for the book speaks very obscurely, and however you may try to explain it with candour, you cannot avoid great absurdity.[21]

On the other hand, the archbishop's great theological opponent, Bishop Stephen Gardiner, manipulated the same ambiguity in the most mischievous way by claiming it meant the opposite of what Cranmer intended![22] Gardiner was not known as 'wily Winchester' for nothing.

The central prayer in the Holy Communion service quoted above was thoroughly revised in 1552. It has no title or description and acts as a preamble to the words of institution and communion directly thereafter. The operative phrase in the prayer is no longer that the bread and wine 'maie be unto us' the body and blood of Christ, but it now asks God to grant that those who receive the bread and wine 'maye be partakers of his most blessed body and bloud'. Then follow the words of institution and, without so much as an Amen, the communion of the priest and people. It sounds magnificent. It is a prayer for grace for the communicants, an 'invocation' being the technical term, rather than a 'consecration' of the bread and wine: for the only event that takes place is the communion to which this prayer is a preamble. The communicants will all receive physical bread and wine, and the priest prays that they may also receive the Body and Blood of Christ, not physically in their mouths but spiritually in their hearts. Grammatically speaking, there is

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[21]Dryander to Bullinger, 5 June 1549, ET, *Original Letters*, 1(Cambridge: Parker Society), XXXV11 (1846), 351.
[22] *An Explication and Assertion of the True Catholic Faith*, in *The Works of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: Parker Society), I (1844) 55, 142, 229.

no reference to the bread and the wine being the vehicles, instruments or means by which the people receive the Body and Blood of Christ.[23] For that, in Cranmer's mature theology, can happen only in the heart, as it were, separately from whatever is received by the mouth. The separation of the sign and the grace is distinctive of Cranmer's own theology and of the 1552 Prayer Book, not only with the Eucharist but with baptism and with every service in the Book.[24] The words are spoken, the ritual takes place, but the grace is always conditional on the relation between the individual and God. The separation is not always obvious at first reading but, once one has learned to spot it, it is universal and explicit.[25] And in the light of 1552 one can look back and see that this was the implication of the ambiguous language in 1549.

So much for Cranmer and 1552. In 1662 a century had passed and the theological authorities were in a different place. 'Wrong' theology was very much disapproved of but no longer a matter of a death sentence. Roman Catholic transubstantiation was still opposed, but Anglican theologians were unhappy with Cranmer's sharp divide between the sign and the signified, and wanted to express a more intimate relation of the physical bread and wine to the spiritual grace. However politics made any particular revision difficult to adopt. Therefore they used a remedy based on ambiguity. The words of the prayer were not changed (apart from some stylistic improvement). However the prayer was given a title: 'The Prayer of Consecration', and that can only be taken as consecrating the bread and wine. To reinforce the point, the supper narrative was now accompanied by taking and breaking the bread and taking the cup in imitation of Christ's own actions, the priest laid his hands on each at the words 'This is my body […] this is my blood', and the whole is completed by an Amen. Thus the prayer is separated from the action of communion. Grammatically the words are still a prayer of invocation over the communicants; contextually they are now a prayer of consecration of the elements. And so they have remained ever

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[23] Jasper is wrong when he says that in 1552/1559 'the bread and wine become the "creatures" by which we partake of the body and blood of Christ' (p. 40).

[24] For more on this and the philosophical undergirding, see Cyril Richardson, 'Cranmer and the Analysis of Eucharistic Doctrine', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series 16 (1965), 421-37.

[25] Cf. the 1552 baptism service, where the priest prays, 'graunte that al thy seruauntes which shalbe baptyzed in this water, may receyue the fulnesse of thy grace'. It is clear that all are baptized, but not that all will receive the grace. See G. Jeanes, 'Cranmer and Common Prayer', pp. 30-31.

since, impossible to unravel in their actual meaning and so carrying the possibilities as well as the limitations of ambiguity.

It was in the nineteenth century that the complex linguistic and theological origins of the *Book of Common Prayer* reached its finest hour of contradictions. Even before the Oxford Movement looked to an ideological rediscovery of the Church's unity with its early centuries, Walter Scott's novels incited romantic clergy to repopulate their bare chancels with surpliced choirs, and the medieval heritage of Morning and Evening Prayer which had survived by accident in some cathedrals became a parochial reality. This medievalizing reached its finest moment in the Holy Communion service, or Mass, of the nineteenth century Anglo-Catholic movement where, recited by a priest in full eucharistic vestments, the bread and wine are consecrated and elevated for the adoration of the faithful, complete with candles, incense and bells, according to the rubrics of the Roman Rite, but with a prayer that was composed in accordance with the theology of Bullinger. As one priest said to me many years ago, reciting from memory the Prayer of Consecration with all its magnificent phrases, 'Golly, by then something must have happened!'

And so it is that 1549 and 1552 both lend their formulae ('may be to us'; 'that we may be partakers') to form the eucharistic language of modern Church of England liturgies. Their ambiguities, when noticed at all, are considered helpful in an age which generally is less concerned with precise theological categories and finds the Reformation disputes distasteful and embarrassing.

Very little of this article may seem relevant to the issues David Jasper raises in his book. But it sets out some of the context in which the *Book of Common Prayer* became what it is today.

Since the writing of the *Alternative Service Book*, there was a period in the Church of England in which old and new texts were brought together, and we see that especially in the main volume of *Common Worship*. There has also been a huge amount of new material of varying quality produced as if by some industrial process, much of it in response to congregations who cannot cope with even the simplified modern liturgy. It has been recognized since the 1990s that people respond to rich figurative language, and they appreciate metaphor and allusion. But how do we write a liturgy in a world when the riches of the Christian tradition are not generally taught from infancy, when the allusion is not recognized, and the metaphor has to be explained? When we consider the huge power that the Prayer Book enjoyed for most of a century before it was banned by Parliament, a time during which it was read weekly if not daily to the general population, and with the Bible its dominance if not virtual monopoly of the education and lives of generations, as well as its subsequent influence on the educated and

powerful elite from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth century, we may rightly wonder what chance any modern text would have in an age when the language of worship is the activity of a minority among a vast cacophony of literature and other media.

In Cranmer's day there was no real agreement as to what a liturgical language should look like. The reign of Elizabeth I, as mentioned above, preferred longer, more discursive prayers by the minister after the style of those working in the Reformed churches. The retention of medieval forms was held in great suspicion, and it was only their official status which preserved them for later generations. Would any contemporary creation enjoy sufficient time to be established and its quality appreciated? The work by David Frost has shown a way forward, though I do not notice the same popular enthusiasm for his prayers now that there was some thirty years ago.[26] Perhaps at some future date there will be a weeding of the vast amount of material on offer, and a refined liturgy come from it. We can be sure that the *Book of Common Prayer* will be present in it, both in actual prayers and in its legacy, which permeates later creations.

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[26] For David Frost's own thoughts on the *Book of Common Prayer*, see 'The Influence of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer on the Orthodox: Opening a Can of Worms?', in *Wrestling with a Common Order,* ed. by James Steven, pp. 81-100.

Response to the *Journal's* Summer Issue

DAVID JASPER
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and
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It is indeed humbling to read the essays in this issue by three scholars whom I have known at widely divergent moments in my life that for as long as I can remember has had a liturgical 'flavour'. It began in the days when my father, Dean Ronald Jasper, was working on the *Alternative Service Book* and attracting the wrath of many in the Anglican Tradition for this modern travesty of the beloved *Book of Common Prayer*. He was, at the time, the Chairman of the Church of England Liturgical Commission, having taught liturgy for many years at King's College, London. As I read Bryan Spinks's words, I call to mind the days when my father would come home after another battle in the General Synod of the Church of England, sometimes to the point of utter frustration and readiness to give it all up. But he saw it through, to the end a traditionalist who was at the same time convinced that we must worship in a manner appropriate to our time – and appropriate to God.

What these three essays remind me of acutely is that I am not myself a 'liturgist' by profession. I am happy to take correction from those far more learned than I am in liturgical history and tradition, but at the same time insist upon my own claim to contribute to the conversation and debate, not least at a time when the Scottish Episcopal Church is embarking upon the writing of a new Eucharistic liturgy, not to replace the service of 1982 but to add to it and offer a form of worship that is perhaps more suitable, it is to be hoped, for our own time.

The provision of worship within our tradition calls upon many voices from many disciplines to be heard. They do not always speak easily to each other. As an academic I am, at heart, a literary critic who found himself, rather to his surprise, becoming also a professor of theology (as well as an Anglican priest). My business has always been the interpretation of texts – poetic, dramatic, narrative. Bridget Nichols also calls upon the voices of anthropologists to be heard in matters of ritual, while Gordon Jeanes reminds us that 'liturgists' have more often been rooted in the discipline of the historian. Such was my father and other liturgists of his generation like Geoffrey Cuming. But neither should we exclude scholars of linguistics like David Crystal, cultural critics, poets, systematic theologians, sociologists –

and so on. The study and writing of liturgy is a many-splendoured thing. And I remain haunted by words that open an important book written within the Church of England, though now very old. I mean Percy Dearmer's *The Parson's Handbook* (1899):

> The object of this Handbook is to help, in however a humble way, towards remedying the lamentable confusion, lawlessness, and vulgarity which are conspicuous in the Church at this time.
> The confusion if due to the want of liturgical knowledge among the clergy, and of consistent example among those in authority.

Quoting these words may not gain me many friends in the church today, perhaps, but they remain to be reflected upon, and there is sufficient truth in them, perhaps, to warrant this issue of the SEI journal as a minute step towards eliminating the necessity of their survival. When they are no longer needed I will stop reminding people of them!

Bridget Nichols's essay considers the matter of ritual and performance. As I write this I find myself re-reading Richard D. McCall's book *Do This: Liturgy as Performance* (2007). Its author is a professor of liturgy – and also church music. Musicians must also have their say in the business. I was careful to subtitle my book *The Language of Liturgy* as 'a ritual poetics.' It is the mystery of that word 'poetics' which lies at the heart of my concerns - the 'poetics' of liturgy that ultimately embrace something broader than ritual. What kind of language should we be using in our liturgy and worship, in our celebration of the great mystery of creation, redemption and salvation? I find myself, now that I am retired, celebrating the Eucharist most Sundays in a different church – last week it was with a congregation of seven people in a small hall set up as a church. It was relaxed, friendly, at times funny, as we tried to sing hymns unaccompanied – and deeply moving, profoundly serious. Next time it will be in a large church with full choir and organ, and with robed servers in the sanctuary: a very different experience in some ways, but the same words being used though delivered and perhaps received in a different way. Or perhaps not, in the end, so very different. But in each case language must be employed and words uttered with infinite care and with a sense of the riches of the great Anglican tradition in which we worship and praise God. Words matter.

I am very grateful for this conversation, and grateful to Dr Nicholas Taylor and Dr Michael Hull for this issue of the *Journal*.

A Reflection on Mary Beard's Gifford Lectures[1]

BRIAN SMITH

Former Bishop of Edinburgh

I was invited to offer a reflection, or report, on the series of *Gifford Lectures* that took place in the University of Edinburgh in May 2019. These were given by Dame Mary Beard, Professor of Classics at Newnham College in the University of Cambridge. They were entitled: *The Ancient World and Us: From Fear and Loathing to Enlightenment and Ethics.*

We can begin by recalling Lord Gifford's intentions in founding the lecture series. Writing of them he expresses the hope that: 'The lectures shall be public and popular, that is, open not only to students of the Universities, but to the whole community without matriculation'.

Mary Beard's lectures were popular. Her style of delivery, and the use of works of art and cartoons to make her points, kept the audience's attention throughout the series. They were popular also in the sense that the large Gordon Aikman Lecture Theatre in George Square was filled for all the lectures, and no tickets were left unallocated!

Throughout, we were conscious of listening to a public intellectual of international standing. During the course of the series she had to cross the Atlantic to Yale, to receive an honorary degree from that university. We were also conscious that we were listening to a public figure on whom *Lego* had bestowed the significant honour of creating a model figure of her holding her publication *S.P.Q.R.* She delivered six lectures, in two sets of three, the two sets being separated by her transatlantic trip.

Lord Gifford, in his will, spoke of his intention to set up a series of lectures for: 'Promoting, Advancing, Teaching, and Diffusing the study of Natural Theology, in the widest sense of that term'. He went on to say that this would include: 'The Knowledge of the Nature and Foundation of Ethics or Morals, and of all Obligations and Duties thence arising'. It was within this area that we heard Mary Beard lecture to us.

Her style was relaxed and informal, the style of a classicist, on top of her subject, addressing an audience that would contain professional classicists, students, and lay persons. She described her intention in the

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[1] This article is not a summary of the lectures. The six lectures may be found at https://www.ed.ac.uk/arts-humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/gifford-lectures-2018-2019/mary-beard. For more on Brian's reporting of the Giffords, see 'Encountering the Giffords', *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 3.1 (2019): 56–59.

lecture series as having a tripartite focus, namely 'looking both at the ancient world itself, and how it has been studied and how and why it makes a difference to us'. She illustrated how we have in many ways used the world of the classics (ancient Greece and ancient Rome) to interpret our own world, and asked questions as to how such a use might have been misleading. How far did those who administered the British Empire in the nineteenth century draw examples of appropriate practice from what they believed about the running of the Roman Empire? How far did the portrayal of the 'heroes' of the classical world in white uncoloured marble in our museums subtly feed a philosophy of 'white supremacy' in nineteenth and twentieth century European politics?[2]

Several 'big themes' were considered. The series opened with consideration of Gladiatorial combat. What was going on in the arena, and how far was someone who might die there regarded as a human being with full rights and responsibilities? When elsewhere do we find one group of persons being used for the 'entertainment' of others?

She argued that in the history of Rome, political change was regularly tied to stories (myths) involving sexual violence and asked how this may have shaped our own understanding of power and consent. How was it that the ancient world could regard slavery as 'natural', and what does this say about our own possible 'blind spots'? Was Athens *really* the origin of 'democracy', or did it only give us the word itself? Has the idea of a continuity between the classical world and our own world made us blind to the ways in which other early civilisations contain roots of our own e.g. Egypt and other regions of Africa? What prejudices may have underlain such a blindness on our part?

For me the final lecture was the most provocative. Mary moved from a consideration of topics *within* classical studies to the study of 'classics' as a whole. How did it come about that within Britain (and she did comment that England and Scotland may be different here), the study of classics, and the ability to speak the 'dead' languages of Latin and Greek opened the gates to a place among the country's 'elite'? Speak and understand these dead languages and you have elite credentials, and you have a legitimate ticket of entry into positions of power and responsibility in the land; know no Latin or Greek and you are the most wretched of persons!

She spoke of her early familiarity with Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*:

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[2] Those interested in this theme may, in addition to listening to Mary's second lecture, also like to view: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkwUCUwt3Rs.

> [...] I ought to be glad
> That I studied the classics at Marlborough and Merton,
> Not everyone here having had
> The privilege of learning a language
> That is incontrovertibly dead [...]
> [...] We learned that a gentleman never misplaces his accents,
> That nobody knows how to speak, much less how to write
> English who has not hob-nobbed with the great-grand-parents of
> English.[3]

One cannot but be conscious of the thrust of her point here. From Latin cited in speeches by our politicians, to the Latin Crossword in *The Times*, classics is often portrayed as *the* badge worn by 'the elite' in our culture. How did this happen, and what are its implications for an egalitarian society?

Mary did suggest that Scottish perception on this might be different. Anyone reading G. E. Davie's study of Scottish universities in the nineteenth century, *The Democratic Intellect*, will be aware of different attitudes to classical studies in Scottish Universities, Scottish Schools, and those Scottish Schools which were influenced by an English curriculum.

But while highlighting a criticism as to how classics has been *used* in Britain, Mary is at pains to stress the importance of studying the classics, as enabling us to achieve a renewed and reinvigorated perspective on the ethical dilemmas in our own world. The form that many such dilemmas take in our world has been shaped by that classical world! She was thus fully supportive of those seeking to preserve a classics curriculum in schools. It is a curriculum that can justify its existence among the many other options for school or university study without any pretence to be *the* gate through which one might join 'the elite'.

As she began her lectures, I was reminded of the much-quoted start of L. P. Hartley's *The Go Between* (1953): 'The Past is a foreign Country; they do things differently there'. Mary concluded her series of lectures by telling us what she might like to say to parties of tourists (she gives the example of children with a teacher) pondering the Colosseum, tourists who tended loudly to draw naïve parallels or contrasts between ancient Romans and 'us'. She might like to have said to them: 'It was all so unimaginatively different, and all so long ago.'

In the light of the lectures, what conclusions might we draw for the study of theology in the SEI? First, and most obvious, is not to make unexamined assumptions about the ancient world of the Middle and Near

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[3] Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal,* Stanza XIII.

East. Understanding context is important. It is difficult, and it takes time. It is indeed far more different than we might expect!

But also, it can happen that by studying an ancient culture, and looking at what puzzles us within it, we can be rendered alert to anomalies in our own society and in our own view of things. Critical awareness can be enhanced by such studies, and it does not take an E. M. Forster to urge 'Only Connect' when we consider the spectacle of Gladiatorial games, and much reality television!

Thirdly, we need to be careful about giving more esteem to any one branch of our studies over another and deeming the person who is expert in it to be the 'truly elite theologian'. We might be tempted so to regard the linguist, or the philosopher, or the historian, or the teacher of spirituality and liturgy. To give in to such a temptation is a path of impoverishment. It must be corrected by the need to see the enterprise of theology (and the various components in its syllabus) as a collaborative discipline. All manner of studies and approaches are needed within it. No one can be expert in all. No one branch of it is an 'elite gate' for the one who would teach (in Lord Gifford's phrase) 'the true knowledge of God'. Sharing together, without any elitist pretensions is a good path towards such truth, and one of which I am sure Lord Gifford would have approved.