

UNIT EIGHT

MODERN LITURGIES

- In many churches today, people are expressing doubts about the pastoral usefulness of the great Reformation liturgies.
- Many older congregations use them happily, but younger members often want more contemporary language and simplicity of style and content.
- Another problem is created when denominations revise liturgies in ways that ignore or bypass the principles of the Reformation prayer books.
- For some, the lack of freedom and creativity that a set liturgy seems to provide is also a problem.

SOME REASONS FOR USING “AN AGREED LITURGY”

- In I Corinthians 14:40, Paul speaks about the need to conduct the public worship of God ‘in a fitting and orderly way’ – this involves several factors.
 - Intelligible speech in prayer, praise and prophecy – content to which everyone can say ‘Amen’.
 - Opportunity for members of the congregation to make a contribution for the benefit of the whole.
 - Contributions to be limited and orderly because of time and the need to reflect on what is said and done.
 - Ministries to be offered and received in humility and love.
 - God’s character as the God of peace and not disorder to be demonstrated.
- These principles do not necessarily mean that things should be done in the same way every time, but the need for some kind of liturgical uniformity can be argued on *theological grounds*.
- The Reformation ideal was to express biblical theology in a liturgical form – although the Reformers variety in the degree of freedom they allowed, they were all keen to maintain liturgical standards.
- Using a common liturgy was a way of fulfilling Paul’s injunction to ‘make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:3).
- Agreed liturgies also provide a degree of similarity for those moving from one congregation to another.

- Several other things can be expected from modern liturgies:
 - Gospel perspectives in the forefront of every service.
 - Systematic Bible reading and biblical exposition at the centre.
 - Prayer that is not simply narrowly congregational in focus.
 - Provision for a number of people to share in ministry to the congregation.

PRAYER BOOK REVISION IN ENGLAND

- After several decades of experimentation, the Church of England published *The Alternative Service Book* in 1980, to supplement but not supersede the Book of Common Prayer.
- Morning and Evening Prayer
 - The *penitential opening* of the Prayer Book services is considerably reduced in the Alternative Service Book.
 - Some argue that modern, briefer forms of confession give people little time to consider the seriousness of what they are doing.
 - The sermon may be preached after the second lesson so that it is *more closely linked to the Bible readings*.
- Holy Communion
 - Two different orders are provided — Rite A is in more modern language and allows a great deal of variation, Rite B is in more traditional language and allows much less variation.
 - Rite B
 - Begins with the Preface ('Lift up your hearts') and a modified version of the 1662 Prayer of Consecration.
 - The paragraph about offering *ourselves as a living sacrifice* is removed from the 'Prayer of Oblation' and made the basis of a new prayer of dedication, to be said at the end of the service.
 - *'This our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving'* could be a problematic phrase if it leads people to identify it with the offering of consecrated bread and wine.
 - There is no justification from the New Testament for offering and material sacrifices to God — where sacrificial language is used with regard to Christians in the New Testament it applies to 'lips' and 'lives' offered to God in gratitude.
 - Another problem in Rite B is the inclusion of an explicit prayer for the dead, suggesting that they are in some imperfect condition and are constantly in need of our prayers, which is contrary to biblical teaching.
 - Rite A
 - Allows for a number of different orders of service in more contemporary language.
 - The confession and absolution can be at the beginning of the service as in Morning and Evening Prayer, or in the traditional position before the consecration.

- Different forms of intercession and thanksgiving are possible, allowing for more congregational participation.
- There are four new, rather long, eucharistic prayers, but these are broken up by responses to be said by the congregation.
- It has been suggested that these prayers could be problematic, implying a transformation of the bread and wine or introducing a notion of 'eucharistic sacrifice'.
- There are forms of service in the Alternative Service Book that evangelicals can use quite happily, but the book has also reintroduced teaching and practices which were abandoned during the reformation.
- Recent Developments
 - The English Liturgical Commission issued a number of trial services and books in preparation for a revision of the Alternative Service Book in 2000.
 - One of these, *Patterns for Worship*, included clear outline structures for services, indicating what must be used and what is flexible, as well as resource material and a commentary showing how things might be used.
 - This allows for services that reflect local culture but also retain some common features and content with other churches, and also promotes greater involvement of the congregation.
 - Another revision is *An English Prayer Book*, a complete revision of the Book of Common Prayer which offers several helpful alternatives.

PRAYER BOOK REVISION IN AUSTRALIA

- Historical Background
 - Until 1961 the Anglican Church of Australia could only adopt changes that were made in England, in 1962 a new constitution allowed the church to order and revise its own forms of worship.
 - In 1978 *An Australian Prayer Book for use together with The Book of Common Prayer 1662* was authorised, generally including two forms of each service — a conservative revision of the 1662 form in modern English and a more radical form, with a different structure and new content.
- The Second Order of Communion (1978)
 - As in other modern versions of the Lord's Supper, there are more opportunities for the congregation to participate in the service.
 - The horizontal dimension to our meeting together is further emphasised by many of the responses.
 - The Thanksgiving makes several references to Christ's return and highlights the teaching of I Corinthians about proclaiming the Lord's death 'until he comes' — giving more emphasis to this than the Book of Common Prayer.

- The headings divide the service into five clear sections: The Word and the Prayers, Preparation for the Lord's Supper, The Thanksgiving, The Communion and After Communion.
- Another Order of Service for Prayer and the Hearing of God's Word (1978)
 - This alternative to the traditional form of Morning and Evening Prayer is designed 'for public worship on less formal occasions', and has been popular for family services or youth services.
 - Terminology is simple, and greater flexibility is allowed.
- A Prayer Book for Australia (1995)
 - A number of experimental services were issued as the Australian Anglican Church moved towards the publication of a revised prayer book in 1995.
 - Some raised problems similar to those in the Alternative Service Book in England, namely implications of eucharistic sacrifice and the transformation of the bread and wine.
 - New orders of marriage fell short of expressing the biblical distinction between the roles of husband and wife, and attempts to avoid sexist language created some strange forms of expression and addresses to God.
 - Many of the difficulties were ironed out in the process leading to the final publication of the book.
 - The book provides three versions of Morning and Evening Prayer and three versions of Holy Communion, following this pattern:
 - More complex and formal first orders – modern versions of the 1662 services.
 - Second order services – modifications of material found in the 1978 book.
 - Third order services – the most simple and direct in language and structure.
 - These were not designed to express doctrinal differences, but to provide liturgical alternatives.
 - The third order services are adapted from *Experimental Sunday Services* (1993), and include *A Service of Praise, Prayer and Proclamation*, *The Third Order of Holy Communion* and *The Thanksgiving*, which follows something of the pattern of the Second Order of Service.