

BCP 2004

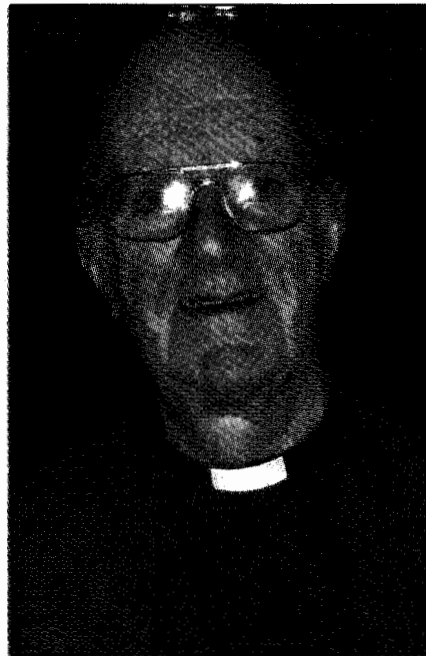
Why a book? Why this book?

By Canon Brian Mayne

"THE CHURCH should use overhead projectors or PowerPoint for the congregational parts of the service!" "Books are out!" Such assertions are being made. However, I don't see Waterstones or Easons closing down. At the beginning of the project for a revision of the Prayer Book, it was seriously suggested that by 2004 only a 'central' Book of Common Prayer would be needed - the standard to which at ordination and subsequent licensing clergy promise to adhere in conducting public worship; every parish would download Sunday's liturgy from the worldwide web site to be reproduced as a local leaflet or projected on a screen! Maybe that kind of thing will be the shape of the future, but it is not for now. It is either leaflets, booklets or a book. There may in addition be a small number of congregations where twenty-first century illiteracy may present problems which require tackling at that level. However, for ninety-nine per cent of Church of Ireland worshippers the medium of print is the norm for organizing their worship life.

Worship books are unlike ordinary books which are written to inform or entertain, for worship books occasion an event in the community of faith - its encounter with the living God. The Sunday liturgy is crafted out of three books: the Bible, the hymnal and the worship handbook we call the Prayer Book. Through the Bible we listen to God speaking to us. With the hymnal we sing our praise as music gives depth to our praise, transporting us into an extra dimension. The controversy over changes in wording in Church Hymnal 5th Edition has made us all aware of the force familiar words have in lifting hearts and minds to God. It is the Book of Common Prayer that organizes the words offered to God - how his words are proclaimed to the people - and contains words to encourage and challenge God's people in their discipleship. It loosens people's tongues in praise, praise and petition and draws them to God.

The authorised Prayer Book expresses the mind of the Church on how we worship and in what we believe. It



should hold the diverse congregations of the Church together, although not with a straitjacket of absolute uniformity. Some people look back with nostalgia to a 'golden age' when the worship of every parish was identical. That age never existed. There was variety in the style in which services were organized, although perhaps not as much as in the twenty-first century when parishes seek to make Sunday worship relevant to people living in changing situations.

The 2004 revision of the Book of Common Prayer has been revised to accommodate variety in worship forms. It attempts to reconcile the 'divide' that exists at present between 'APB' and 'BCP' congregations. It recognizes the two main integrities as equal, providing worship forms in traditional and contemporary language. Within the rites themselves flexibility is built in, for example, in traditional language Morning and Evening Prayer provision is made for canticles to be sung in metrical or other forms, for example, from the Church Hymnal. Rectors and churchwardens will need to look at the varied options and decide which to adopt.

Reading from the Bible is organized with the ecumenical Revised Common Lectionary adapted for use in the

Church of Ireland. But the readings are not printed, partly for space consideration, partly to give freedom to use the various translations approved by the House of Bishops. It is a fact that very few people under the age of fifty respond to the Authorised Version. Language is changing so rapidly that the New International Version, *the* translation of the 1970s (which we had in APB) is about to be replaced in 2004 with a completely fresh translation. The NEB (1970) and the RSV (1952) have both been updated.

In the new prayer book are found services side by side for the late evening, traditional language Compline and modern language Late Evening Office. The traditional language baptism rite is retained, although it is expected that most congregations will use the contemporary form. Provision is made for occasions when baptism is central to the service as well as when it is desired to 'slot' it into Morning Prayer or Service of the Word. Rich provision is made for ministry to those who are sick, with the emphasis differing from that of previous prayer books and reflecting the place a ministry of healing has in the 21st century church.

The Book of Common Prayer also seeks to stimulate personal prayer and recover something of the way earlier generations were spiritually fed by using their prayer books. It is not just a book for the pew in church but for the bedside to enable personal daily encounter with the living God.

The 2004 edition will be a fine example of 21st century typographical art and design. Having seen personally the state of the art machines of the printers and binders in Belgium who print and bind Bibles for many countries, I believe that it will have the feel of something beautiful, fit for a beautiful purpose - the worship of our glorious God and Saviour.

Canon Brian Mayne, who retired as rector of the Lecale Group, Diocese of Down, in 2001, is editor of the Book of Common Prayer 2004.