

Anglo-catholic Matters

Anglo-Catholic liturgical practices are in conformity with Anglican formularies

Being an Anglo-Catholic parish in the predominantly Evangelical Diocese of Sydney is not always easy. We wish to be loyal and faithful in Christ to those set in authority over us. But sometimes we are misunderstood and our Catholic tradition is met with disapproval and hostility. However, this offers an opportunity to clarify and explain our faith and love for Jesus Christ and to commend the wonderful tradition which we have received and which enables us to grow in the Spirit.

Preliminary points:

We at St John's are authentically scriptural and Anglican.

We love Jesus and accept him as Personal Saviour, believe in his Atoning Death, Virginal Conception & Birth, Physical Resurrection, and acknowledge the Bible as the Word of God. Our tradition (e.g. the sacraments) strengthens our faith in these things & our Relationship with Jesus. We accept and teach Biblical moral norms of behaviour and lifestyle.

We are orthodox Christians. We are passionate about bringing people to Jesus and a life-giving relationship with him in the community of the Church, fed by the Word of God and the Sacraments.

The practices at St John's are not innovations, but are in continuity with the wider tradition of the Anglican Church down the centuries and with the longstanding parish tradition at St John's.

Some Issues:

We are certain that practices at St John's are in conformity with Anglican formularies.

The Anglican Tradition is Catholic

The Anglican Church of Australia's fundamental doctrine is enshrined in the canonical scriptures of the Old and New testaments, the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, the Book of Common Prayer 1662 and the Thirty-nine Articles.

The 1662 BCP is not wholly the product of the reforming Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, who was the author of the first two English Prayer Books (1549—still recognisably Catholic, and 1552—decidedly protestant). The BCP of Elizabeth I (1559) is based on Cranmer's 1552 BCP but in a more Catholic direction. The Latin Prayer Book of Queen Elizabeth (1562) is a translation of the English BCP but interprets the text in an explicitly Catholic way (e.g. the word 'priest' is translated 'sacerdos'—a sacrificing priest—rather than 'presbyterus'—an elder; the translation for 'holy communion' in reference to the consecrated bread and wine is 'Eucharistiam'—connoting the Real Presence).

The BCP of 1662 was revised and authorised after the English Civil Wars and the Interregnum of Oliver Cromwell when the BCP had been banned and the Church of England outlawed. It represents an overthrow of Puritan doctrine and the restoration of the Church of England as it understood itself in Charles I's reign. It reflects the sacramental and Catholic doctrine of the 'mature' or 'Classic' Anglicanism of Lancelot Andrewes and the Caroline Divines such as William Laud. While based on the BCP of Elizabeth, several notable changes made explicit a more Catholic doctrine, as described below.

Real Presence

E.J. Bicknell's standard commentary *The Thirty-nine Articles*, 1919, states the following concerning the doctrine of the Real Presence:

“On this view we hold that we receive through the bread and wine the Body and Blood of Christ, because in answer to the prayers of his Church and in fulfilment of His own promise, He has brought the elements into a mysterious union with himself. He has, as it were, taken them up into the fullness of His ascended life and made them the vehicle of imparting that life to His members. Thus He is in a real sense present not only in the devout communicants but in the consecrated elements. Of the manner of this union we affirm nothing. The Presence is spiritual, not material.

“This, in some form, is the teaching of the Roman and Eastern Churches, of Luther, of the Fathers and early liturgies, and has always been held by many within the Church of England. It would appear to be the most consistent with Scripture and the tradition of the Church, and also to be a safeguard of certain great Christian principles.”

The following changes were made to the Order for Holy Communion in 1662:

1. The title ‘Prayer of Consecration’ was given to the prayer over the bread and wine in the Order for Holy Communion, settling the question that there was actually a consecration of these elements, not merely a commemoration of the passion as the context for eating and drinking bread and wine in faith and remembrance.
2. The rubric was added ordering that if the bread or wine consecrated is insufficient, then more is to be consecrated using the relevant words on the Prayer of Consecration. This settled a controversy with the Puritans, who (in the absence of such a rubric) declared that further prayer was unnecessary, since there was in fact no consecration of bread or wine: “the words are for the believer, not the bread”. This rubric makes it clear that the words are for the bread, not the believer, since the ‘believers’ had already heard the words.
3. To the rubric permitting the use of ordinary leavened bread was added the provision that if any bread be left over, it may be taken by the priest for his own use. However, if it has been consecrated, it must not be taken out of the church, but reverently consumed by the priest and such others as he shall ask to assist. This is to safeguard the reverent treatment of the sacrament as being the Body of Christ. It must not be treated as ordinary bread, as it would be had it not been consecrated. (Evangelicals holding a receptionist view of the Eucharist see this as a prohibition against reservation. The context makes it clear that it is not about reservation, but the status of the elements. More of this below.)
4. The catechism states that the inward grace of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is the “Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful”. The “grace” is not ‘the faith of the recipient’, but the “Body and Blood of Christ”, and the Body and Blood of Christ are not just ‘received by the faithful’, but are also “taken” by the faithful.

These parts of the 1662 BCP would therefore seem to rule out a purely ‘receptionist’ doctrine of the Eucharist as incompatible with Anglican formularies.

Reservation

Some Evangelicals in Sydney Diocese hold that the rubric in the 1662 BCP, stating that the consecrated bread not be taken out of the church but reverently consumed, forbids reservation. However the context makes it quite clear that it is about the status of the bread,

and is concerned that it not be treated in a profane manner or as ordinary bread, since it is in fact the sacrament of Christ's Body. (see above)

Were the revisers of 1662 forbidding reservation by this rubric? The rubric is modelled on a rubric in the pre-Reformation Sarum Missal, which similarly forbids the sacrament to be taken out of the church, but reverently consumed. Now no one would suggest that the Sarum Missal forbade reservation. On the contrary, it was enjoined and considered essential.

Moreover, the 1549 Prayer Book ordered the reservation of the sacrament for the communion of the sick. The 1552 and 1559 BCPs continued to allow this practice. The 1662 BCP, however, assumes a celebration of the Holy Communion to take place in the sick person's presence. Does this then forbid reservation? Or is it rather an acknowledgement that reservation was no longer widely taking place, and instead ensuring that the communion given was actually consecrated (since Puritans may well have administered unconsecrated bread—as some do in Sydney today—holding that it was the mental remembering of Jesus and the faithful reception that constituted the Holy Communion)?

We cannot ask the revisers of 1662 what they intended, but we can read their works. Bishop Sparrow in his commentary on the BCP regarded the rules of 1549 as still in force and enjoined the reservation of the sacrament for the sick. Herbert Thorndike in his defence of the Reformation of the Church of England wrote six years after his work on the 1662 BCP:

“The Church is to endeavour the celebrating of it (the Eucharist) so frequently that it may be reserved to the next Communion. For in the meantime it ought to be so ready for them that pass into another world, that they need not stay for the consecrating of it on purpose for every one. The reason of the necessity of it for all which hath been delivered, aggravates it very much in danger of death. And the practice of the Church attests it to the uttermost.”

The revisers of the 1662 BCP clearly did not intend the rubric on “not taking the bread out of the church” to mean not to reserve for the purpose of Holy Communion, but rather to direct people not to treat the sacrament as ordinary bread.

Agitation for explicit provision for reservation in the BCP went on throughout the 19th century. Eventually, the BCP of 1928 provided for reservation for holy communion for the sick. But since the rubrics of this provision forbade any devotions in connection with the Blessed Sacrament thus reserved, the provision did not gain the support of most of those who were seeking it, so they united with Evangelicals in opposing the 1928 Book—which was never formally adopted—relying instead on the provisions of earlier BCPs and ancient but still current canons.

St John's has had the practice of reserving the Blessed Sacrament for the sick for at least the last forty years. This was kept in a safe in the vestry. The parish has now installed a free-standing tabernacle or 'sacrament house' for the Blessed Sacrament inside the church. There is no doubt that this accords better with Anglican norms and practices, and that this would be the expectation of any bishop outside Sydney, where this practice would not even be considered especially 'Catholic'.

Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is now widely practiced in the Anglican Communion. A majority of cathedral churches in the Anglican Church of Australia have the reserved sacrament without controversy. It is no longer even seen as a sign of 'party' in the Church, with many Evangelical churches practicing ministering the reserved sacrament in 'Extended Holy Communion'. It may also be noted that John Calvin allowed this practice, showing that the reserved sacrament was not an innovation inimical to reformation principles.

Eucharistic Sacrifice

The doctrine of Eucharistic Sacrifice is genuinely Biblical, Anglican, orthodox and catholic.

For example, in one the Prayers of Consecration which are authorised in A Prayer Book for Australia 1995 , we read:

“Therefore, we do as our Saviour has commanded:

proclaiming his offering of himself
made once for all upon the cross,
his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension,
and looking for his coming again,
we celebrate, with this bread and this cup,
his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice
for the sins of the whole world.”

The Lord’s Supper is indeed a sacrifice, firstly of praise and thanksgiving, secondly as a proclaiming of the Lord’s single atoning sacrifice (1 Cor 11.26) and thirdly of ourselves, our souls and bodies. It is unfortunate that some evangelicals have been taught to downplay or renounce this aspect of Anglican doctrine and Biblical teaching, but it remains the teaching of the Book of Common Prayer and of the catholic faith.

Of course as Anglo-Catholics it is our clear understanding and teaching that the Eucharist is not in itself an atoning sacrifice (as evidenced by the repudiation of the idea of the “sacrifices of masses” in Article XXXI of the Thirty-Nine Articles). It is, however, clearly a memorial sacrifice, as the Bible teaches.

The point is settled by the joint declaration of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1897 in their letter to the pope defending the validity of Anglican Orders (*Saepius Officio*), which states definitively the Biblical and Anglican teaching concerning eucharistic sacrifice:

“Further we truly teach the doctrine of Eucharistic sacrifice and do not believe it to be a ‘nude commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross,’ an opinion which seems to be attributed to us . . . But we think it sufficient in the Liturgy which we use in celebrating the holy Eucharist, — while lifting up our hearts to the Lord, and when now consecrating the gifts already offered that they may become to us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, — to signify the sacrifice which is offered at that point of the service in such terms as these. We continue a perpetual memory of the precious death of Christ, who is our Advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for our sins, according to His precept, until His coming again.

For first we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving;

then next we plead and represent before the Father the sacrifice of the cross, and by it we confidently entreat remission of sins and all other benefits of the Lord’s Passion for all the whole Church;

and lastly we offer the sacrifice of ourselves to the Creator of all things which we have already signified by the oblation of His creatures.

This whole action, in which the people has necessarily to take its part with the Priest, we are accustomed to call the Eucharistic sacrifice.”

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

Some Anglican leaders in Sydney hold that articles XXV and XXVIII of the 39 articles forbid Eucharistic adoration, including Benediction. Catholic Anglicans disagree with this interpretation on the grounds both of historical context and the plain meaning of the articles. These articles state: “The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them”; and: “The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was not by Christ’s ordinance to be reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.”

However, what these articles say is no more than a statement of fact. Christ did not ordain the sacrament for adoration, but to be received in holy communion. That this is so is disputed by no-one. On the subject of adoration, however, Christ is silent. That is what the articles states, and no more than this.

Now it is true that Jesus did not become man in order to be worshipped, but to redeem us from our sins. He did this by dying on the cross for our sake (where his body was broken and his blood poured out). He instituted the Lord’s Supper as the perpetual setting forth of this Sacrifice and the means whereby we are refreshed and renewed by being made one in his saving death and resurrection through faithfully sharing in this sacrament (John 6: 54-58; 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17 and 11: 23-26).

Nevertheless it is notable that in the gospels when Jesus is worshipped and adored, he does not prevent the person from doing so, but accepts it as appropriate, for example the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7: 36-50) and Thomas the Apostle (John 20: 26-29). He does not forbid it, as would be expected if this were wrong. Indeed, Thomas is commended for addressing Jesus as ‘God’.

All Bible believing Christians are in agreement that we should worship Jesus (Phillipians 2: 6-11). Although Jesus nowhere demands to be worshipped, it is demanded by the truth revealed by the scriptures that Jesus is the Word of God who became flesh for us (John 1: 1-18) and who rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father in Glory. We must worship Jesus because “Jesus is LORD!” (1 Corinthians 12: 1-3). Why should this worship of Christ exclude the Sacrament of his abiding presence which he himself instituted and commanded to be celebrated? On the contrary, this is the very place where our worship of Jesus is most consistent with Jesus’ own teaching in the scriptures, the practice of the Early Church and the constant witness of the Catholic Faith down the ages.

Those who are opposed to Eucharistic adoration on the grounds that the articles prohibit adoration since what is not explicitly according to Christ’s ordinance is implicitly forbidden, should by the same argument be opposed to worship of Jesus. This would be a position totally against the teaching of the Bible.

At the time of the Reformation, when adoration of Jesus in the sacrament had replaced reception of Holy Communion as the primary expression of Christian eucharistic piety, there was indeed a misunderstanding of Christ’s purposes in instituting the sacrament. But when Christ’s ordinance is being faithfully obeyed, the adoration of Christ in his Sacrament can strengthen our love for him and an appreciation of his gift, and of the grace we are given in the sacrament to live our Christian lives.

Those who consider Benediction to be illegal in the Anglican Church may also have in mind the so-called ‘black rubric’ in the BCP concerning kneeling to receive communion. This was added by Cranmer without authority at the time of printing to the 1552 BCP. It was printed in black, not red like other rubrics, hence its name. It was omitted in subsequent Prayer Books

but printed in the 1662 book—with significant changes—perhaps to appease Puritans, who had lost out on every other point in the revision of the 1662 Prayer Book. The rubric states:

“It is here declared, that thereby no adoration is intended, or ought to be done, either unto the Sacramental Bread or Wine there bodily received, or unto any Corporal Presence of Christ’s natural Flesh and Blood. For the Sacramental Bread and Wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored; (for that were Idolatry, to be abhorred of all faithful Christians;)...”

This rubric in fact provides no difficulty for Benediction. The 1552 version had said “real and essential Presence” instead of Corporal Presence (ruling out a Catholic understanding of the Sacrament). The (authorised) change is therefore very important. Since the Presence is a Sacramental and spiritual—not a natural or corporal—presence, adoration to this kind of presence is not ruled out. The rationale for kneeling to receive communion earlier in this rubric gives equal warrant for Benediction.

Further, in Eucharistic adoration, there is no worship or adoration of bread and wine, even Sacramental Bread and Wine. It is Jesus who is worshipped and adored. The distinction is not a trivial one. It would be surprising if anyone, even visitors, at St John’s believed they were worshipping bread.

(While having no doubt about the legality and legitimacy of Benediction, for the sake of peace and unity with the diocese St John’s has agreed to suspend the provision of Benediction for the time being.)



Exposition at Evensong at St John’s





Benediction being given with the Blessed Sacrament