

Elements of the Book of Common Prayer

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There is no denying the essential contribution of the Prayer Book to Anglican spirituality and the insights and theological method which make up our “Anglican Patrimony”. I would suggest that this contribution has six major themes. The first is a vision for unity. Arising out of the tragedy of the English Civil War and the repression of the Protectorate the Prayer Book looks to be a vehicle for community and communion, and looks for this in the call to unity of Christ the Lord. The primacy of unity is the source of the “via media”; it is also the cause for the second “theme” of the Prayer Book which is penitence.

Personal yet corporate The prayers of the General Confessions in the Prayer Book are among the most beautiful in terms of language, but they have the genius of being at the same time profoundly personal and yet corporate. The Prayer Book liturgies are unique in their frequent expression of penitence. The Prayer Book leads a community in an ever-deepening need for God, a spiritual poverty which, as the Beatitudes teach us, is the key to the Kingdom. Related to penitence is the third theme of intercession.

The father of Catholic renewal, John Keble, often exhorted clergy and people not to forgo the prayers for state and church which have prominence in the Prayer Book offices. Here the vision and hope of a nation united in faith and bound by religious practice is taken up in a drumbeat of prayer every morning and evening and at every Eucharist. Add to this the Litany (the first liturgical text in English), and in the prayers and thanksgivings for all sorts and conditions of men,

individuals and parishes were given tools for the task of intercession, a task which itself is a source of unity.

The fourth theme of the Prayer Book is praise. The most striking example of the note of praise that resounds in the Prayer Book is the Te Deum which becomes part of the daily prayer of the church (not just reserved for Sundays or feasts).

The fifth theme is the centrality of Holy Scripture. The lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer deliberately liberates the Bible from all liturgical constraints. It is given whole and without dilution. The Prayer Book creates a liturgical setting where the Word stands over "The Lamp" (Page 3 Advent 2011) and under all things.

Finally, the Book of Common Prayer is Eucharistic. The Eucharist stands at the heart of the Prayer Book and the hope was that it would stand at the heart of every English community.