

We Believe What We Pray: The Case Against the 1979 BCP

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer is the culmination of nearly a century of liberal theology. Liberal theology's main assumption is the idea that a genuine Christianity is *not based on the external authority of God's Word, the Scriptures*.

Specifically, liberal theology has these characteristics:

- Its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially in the natural and social sciences.
- Its commitment to individual reason and experience as the final authority.
- Its conception of Christianity as solely an ethical way of life.
- Its favoring of moral concepts of the atonement of Christ's death on the cross.
- Its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people. ([The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion](#), p. xxiii)

It's important for Diocese of the Living Word (ADLW) Anglicans to be reminded what liberal theology is when we consider the 1979 Book of Common Prayer because our first principles, our meaning, our historical standards, and our theologies are *miles* apart. J. Gresham Machen explains:

But manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism--that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity ([Christianity and Liberalism](#) p. 2).

...it may appear that what the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category (pp. 6-7).

We Believe What We Pray: The Case Against the 1979 BCP

One major symptom of such a destructive shift is the “air-brushing” out of the scriptural definition of sin from the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Consider this comparison in the wording of the 1662 and 1979 Office of Morning Prayer.

Preface: Morning Prayer 1979:

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear this holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him, let us kneel in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

Preface: Morning Prayer 1662:

DEARLY beloved brethren, **the Scripture moveth us** in sundry places **to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness**; and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by his infinite goodness and mercy. **And although we ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before God**; yet ought we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul. Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as many as are here present, to accompany me

We Believe What We Pray: The Case Against the 1979 BCP

with a pure heart and humble voice **unto the throne of the heavenly grace**,
saying after me:

Confession: Morning Prayer 1 1979

Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our
own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to
have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to
have done.

But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults,
restore thou those who are penitent,
according to thy promises declared unto mankind
in Christ Jesus our Lord;
and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

A General Confession: 1662

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father, We have erred, and strayed from thy ways
like lost sheep, We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own
hearts, We have offended against thy holy laws, We have left undone those things
which we ought to have done, And we have done those things which we ought not
to have done, **And there is no health in us:** But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon

We Believe What We Pray: The Case Against the 1979 BCP

us miserable offenders; Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults,
Restore thou them that are penitent, According to thy promises declared unto
mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord: And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy
holy Name. Amen.

Absolution: Morning Prayer 1 1979

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant you absolution and
remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of
life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Absolution: 1662

**ALMIGHTY God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the
death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live;**
and hath given power, and commandment, to his Ministers, to declare and
pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their
sins: **He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and
unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel.** Wherefore let us beseech him to grant us
true repentance, and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him, which we
do at this present; and **that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure, and
holy; so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy;** through Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen.

Consider the **bold-faced text** in the 1662 historical standard. These deletions show
liberal theology at work. Sin in the 1979 Book is presented as the wrong use of
freedom and the making of bad choices, of a “separation from God”; it is not also
presented as a permanent, disabling disease of the soul or as a personal moral
offense against God himself and thus there is no sense of the bondage of the
human will to sin and a bias towards evil in the heart that renders us so hopelessly

We Believe What We Pray: The Case Against the 1979 BCP

lost and in desperate need of God's saving grace. Such a doctrine obviously does not require of the Savior a full, complete substitutionary sacrifice and atonement for sin!

The destructive nature of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer is in its *cumulative* effect. In other words, repeated reading and use by a congregation will shape the way a congregation *thinks*. We pray what we believe. We must recognize that when a liberal uses a Christian term or symbol, it has been *radically reinterpreted* to mean *something completely different* from what orthodox Christianity asserts as its meaning. *There are two radically different assumptions at work*. Liberalism reads the Scripture so differently a radically revised Book of Common Prayer was necessary. ADLW Anglicans congregations should discontinue both its regular and occasional use; they should *pulp* any remaining copies.

Henry Jansma
Mt. Ephraim, New Jersey
Michaelmas 2015 (rev. 2019)