Eucharistic theology of the BCP in its historical context and remarks on its influence today.

The Rev’d Dr Brian Douglas  
Rector, St Paul’s Manuka  
Senior Lecturer in Theology, St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Canberra  
Fellow of St Paul’s College, University of Sydney

I begin with twin assumptions: first that Anglican Eucharistic theology and practice is multiform rather than uniform and second that the Eucharistic theology of the Book of Common Prayer reflects this multiformity.

The first assumption that Anglican Eucharistic theology is multiform is pervasive in the Anglican tradition and reflected not only in the strongly held positions of various church parties and their practices of celebrating the Eucharist, but also in more critical analyses examining the theological and philosophical assumptions underlying the Anglican Eucharistic tradition.

Some comments first about the multiformity of the Anglican Eucharistic tradition more generally. The assumption that Anglican Eucharistic theology is multiform rests not only on recent research but also on the extensive narrative discourse of individuals, parties and their hermeneutics relating to the Eucharist in the Anglican tradition. Space is not available to go into detailed case studies here but it is perhaps sufficient to say that the discourse of the Anglican Eucharistic tradition presents a variety of understandings about what happens in the Eucharist. Some adopt the sacramental principle based on realism, connecting signs with what they signify in a real way while others reject this principle and its philosophical assumption of realism and adopt a nominalist separation of entities where signs are not seen to be connected in a real way to what they signify. Realists argue that sacramental signs or symbols are instances or vehicles of what they signify and as such participate in or instantiate what they signify so that the particular signs and symbols really convey what they signify. Realists therefore see the possibility of multiple exemplification or localization. Hence a realist in regard to Eucharistic theology would argue that the Eucharist as a sign itself and the particular signs of bread and wine really convey what they signify, that is the nature, life and identity of Christ. In the 1662 BCP Eucharist for example a realist would argue that when the words: ‘Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood,’ that Christ is really present and received in the Eucharist and the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine, although this is of course distinguished from any fleshy notions of Christ’s presence. Rowan Williams, using realist assumptions based on an incarnational theology, argues the signs of the Eucharist are as much carriers of Christ’s life and identity as are Jesus’ literal flesh and blood. Nominalists deny this realist analysis of sacramental instrumentality and argue that all we have are particular signs and symbols which function in a metalinguistic manner to remind us of past and completed transactions without any real participation in or instantiation of
what they signify. Paul Zahl argues in this way against the idea that Christ can ever be present in any objective manner in the elements of the Eucharist on the grounds that ‘no physical object can be impregnated with divinity’.  

Realists would also argue that Christ’s sacrifice is dynamically remembered in the Eucharist such that the effects of that sacrifice are re-newed and re-presented. Gregory Dix for example speaks ‘of “re-calling” or “re-presenting” in the Eucharist before God the sacrifice of Christ, and thus making it here and now operative by its effects in the communicants’. Realists interpret the words of 1662 BCP Prayer of Consecration in this way when they say that Christ ‘did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again’. Nominalists deny this analysis and argue that there is no realist connection between Christ’s sacrifice and the Eucharist since they reject the notion of multiple exemplification or localization as incoherent. Peter Jensen, for example, describes the Eucharist as a meal that takes place at millions of places around the world on a weekly basis where the aim is to ‘share a meal in memory of a certain man’. This meal is described as ‘a sort of perpetual wake’ which ‘has lasted for two thousand years so far’. He also describes the Eucharist as ‘a projectile launched from antiquity into our own time; it constantly turns up amongst us and says, “never forget this man”’. Jensen’s central thought here seems to concern remembering and eating and drinking as an act of faith, will and mind. He speaks here of ‘remembering’ in the sense of bringing to mind a past event, completed in the past but remembered in the present with thanksgiving but without sacramental instrumentality and without the idea of multiple exemplification or localization. For Jensen the Eucharist is ‘a perpetual and effective reminder of the sheer stature of Jesus Christ’. The Eucharist therefore functions as a reminder which acts as the moment of remembering a past and completed action and the giving of thanks for the benefits of that action in people’s lives without any realist linking between the signs and what they signify.

In the context of Anglican Eucharistic theology this distinction between realist and nominalist philosophical assumptions has consistently functioned as a multiformity of theological and philosophical view: that is, whether or not Christ is present in the Eucharist in a real way by sacramental instrumentality and whether or not the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice are in some way renewed in the present in the context of the Eucharistic celebration.

This leads us to the second assumption: the multiformity of Eucharistic theology in the Book of Common Prayer. A hint of multiformity is given in the Preface of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer where we read that the task of the liturgical reformers was ‘not to gratify this or that party in any their unreasonable demands’. Brian Cummings has recently pointed out that ‘when theologians and divines assembled to revise the Book of Common Prayer for new use under Charles II after 1660, they did so with contradictory energies’. Cummings contends further that ‘while it was proclaimed by parliament to constitute an “Act of Uniformity”, its real effect was anything but’. The multiformity of Eucharistic theology and practice expressed in the Book of Common Prayer therefore extends beyond mere party spirit and is much deeper as a multiformity of differing philosophical assumptions.
Let’s use a couple of examples from the 1662 BCP. First we will consider the use of the word ‘offertory’ in the Eucharist of the 1662 BCP.

The word ‘offertory’ was used in the 1662 BCP rubric directing the priest ‘to begin the offertory’ as he had been directed in the 1549 BCP. No such direction had been in the prayer book of 1552. In the 1662 Eucharist the bread and wine were placed on the altar at this stage, although there was no direction to ‘offer up’ the oblations as the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637 had done or as was in John Cosin’s suggested, but not taken up, format of the Book of Common Prayer, called The Durham Book. The rubric at the Offertory in 1662 nonetheless clearly states that the bread and wine are to be placed on the altar at this place in the service. A little further on in the Prayer for the Church, the prayer asks God to ‘accept our alms and oblations, and to receive these our prayers, which we offer unto thy Divine Majesty’. The meaning of the word ‘oblations’ has been the subject of some debate with some seeing the word referring to the bread and wine, offered to God, while others do not. Evan Daniel argues that ‘there is little doubt, therefore, that “oblations” refers to the bread and wine, here formally offered, though not consecrated, as an oblation to God’. This opinion is supported by others. However, others argue that the word ‘oblations’ referred to money apart from the alms, given for pious purposes and not to the bread and wine placed on the altar. Donald Robinson for example argues that ‘the Offertory in the Book of Common Prayer is the Ofertory of alms and oblations as sanctioned by clear scriptural teaching, and this Offertory has no connection with the action of the sacrament itself’. There is a clear difference of opinion, however the fact remains that at the Offertory, bread and wine were directed to be placed on the altar by the priest. What this has meant for generations of Anglicans using the Eucharistic liturgy of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer suggests a multiformality of Eucharistic theology and practice based on different philosophical assumptions about what happens in the Eucharist.

This ceremony of the Offertory in 1662 was additional to the earlier editions of the prayer book (1552, 1559 and 1604) and represented a specific form of setting these elements apart for holy use. For those with realist assumptions underlying their Eucharistic theology the use of the word ‘offertory’ is suggestive of Eucharistic sacrifice, where the offered elements become the vehicles of receiving the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice. Note that this in no way suggests that Christ is offered again or that his sacrifice on the cross is in some way inadequate and needs the addition of a Eucharistic offering. Rather realist interpretations suggest to some that the signs and symbols of the Eucharist are vehicles which convey the benefit of Christ’s sacrifice by participation in or instantiation of the identity of that once and for all event in the context of the Eucharist. Others however do not accept such a realist position and view the use of the word ‘offertory’ in a purely utilitarian manner as indicating that bread and wine are placed on the altar in readiness for the consecration and sharing of the elements. Such an analysis rejects any realist assumptions regarding Eucharistic theology.

Another significant indication of a multiformality of Eucharistic theology in the history of the Book of Common Prayer relates to the Declaration on Kneeling or the so-called Black Rubric, found at the end of the Eucharist in the 1662 BCP. In the 1552 Book of Common Prayer a ‘Declaration on Kneeling’, commonly called ‘The Black Rubric’, is found at the end of the Eucharist. This declaration, printed in black
instead of the usual red for rubrics, was inserted as the 1552 BCP was being printed and was an attempt, by persons unknown, without the authority of Parliament, to deny any connection between kneeling and the corporal presence of Christ in the sacramental elements of bread and wine. A very thorough analysis of the history of the insertion of the Declaration can be found in MacCulloch’s biography of Thomas Cranmer. MacCulloch argues strongly that Cranmer was vehemently opposed to the insertion but was unable to prevent its inclusion in the 1552 BCP.

The 1552 Declaration read, in part, in relation to kneeling at the time of receiving the bread and wine: ‘Lest yet the same kneeling might be thought or taken otherwise, we do declare that it is not meant thereby, that any adoration is done, or ought to be done, either unto the sacramental bread and wine thereby bodily received, or to any real and essential presence, there being of Christ’s natural flesh and blood’.

The Declaration on Kneeling was significantly altered in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. This was done some argue, to avoid any confusion between the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist on the one hand and the doctrine of transubstantiation on the other but also to distinguish between a real and a fleshy presence on the assumption that these were not the same thing. Transubstantiation is specifically rejected by the Thirty-Nine Articles (Article XXVIII), however, there is no specific rejection of the ‘real presence’ of Christ in the Eucharist in the 1662 BCP, that is, where such real presence involves no change in the substance of the bread and wine. The use of the words ‘real and essential presence’ in the Declaration in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer could be inferred as rejecting any notion of a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the 1662 BCP the Declaration, some argue, seems to want to avoid such an inference and therefore the Declaration became in part: ‘yet, lest the same kneeling should by any persons either out of ignorance and infirmity, or out of malice and obstinacy, be misconstrued and depraved: It is hereby declared, that thereby no Adoration is intended, or ought to be done, either unto the Sacramental Bread and Wine there bodily received, or unto any Corporal Presence of Christ’s natural Flesh and Blood’.

Significantly the words ‘real and essential presence’ in the 1552 BCP were changed to ‘corporal presence’ in the 1662 BCP thereby rejecting the idea of any corporal or fleshy presence of Christ in the Eucharist but at the same time avoiding the rejection of a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Some argue that the change is merely verbal, and not theological, since the words ‘real and essential’ were no longer properly understood and could be misconstrued to mean the denial of any true form of real presence. Others however, argue for the change in wording as indicating an affirmation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Such difference of opinion seems to be based on the distinction between those who accept a realist notion of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist and those who do not.

Some argue therefore that the achievement of the framers of the 1662 BCP in changing the wording from ‘real and essential presence’ to ‘corporal presence’ was that they maintained the protest against transubstantiation, whilst at the same time removing any risk of the Declaration on Kneeling being misconstrued as a denial of the real presence. Any continued use of ‘real and essential’ would have been misconstrued into a denial of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist per se. ‘Corporal’ makes it clear that material body or a corporal or fleshy presence is meant
to be excluded and that such a fleshy presence is distinguished from the type of realism which suggests a real and essential but spiritual presence.\textsuperscript{39} The words of Rowan Williams referred to above suggest that he accepts the notion of a real and essential spiritual presence but not a fleshy or corporal presence\textsuperscript{40}. If ‘real and essential’ had been maintained in the Black Rubric then realism is excluded as a way of describing the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. By replacing ‘real and essential’ with ‘corporal’, fleshy realism is excluded as a way of describing the presence of Christ in the Eucharist but moderate realism\textsuperscript{41} seemingly is not. Of course others\textsuperscript{42} have not interpreted this matter in this way and argue that the change in terminology implies no change in Eucharistic doctrine from 1552 to 1662. It is precisely this difference in opinion which further illustrates the multiformity of view in relation to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the philosophical assumptions underlying these differences in the 1662 \textit{BCP}.

Since 1662, the \textit{Book of Common Prayer} has been widely used throughout the Anglican Communion and is often thought of, together with \textit{The Thirty-Nine Articles} of 1571 as the means to define the core beliefs of Anglicanism.\textsuperscript{43} While for some it is a ‘precious heritage’ it also has ‘a history which encompasses division and controversy as part of our collective memory’.\textsuperscript{44} In the Anglican Church of Australia, for example, the 1662 \textit{BCP} occupies a very important role in the ruling principles of that church. In the 1962 Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, the following words are found:

\begin{quote}
This Church, being derived from the Church of England, retains and approves the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in the Book of Common Prayer together with the Form and Manner of Making Ordaining and Consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons and in the Articles of Religion sometimes called the Thirty-Nine Articles but has plenary authority at its own discretion to make statements as to the faith ritual ceremonial or discipline of this Church and to order its forms of worship and rules of discipline and to alter or revise such statements, forms and rules, provided that all such statements, forms, rules or alteration or revision thereof are consistent with the Fundamental Declarations contained herein and are made as prescribed by this Constitution. Provided, and it is hereby further declared, that the above-named Book of Common Prayer, together with the Thirty-Nine Articles, be regarded as the authorised standard of worship and doctrine in this Church, and no alteration in or permitted variations from the services or Articles therein contained shall contravene any principle of doctrine or worship laid down in such standard.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

The 1662 \textit{BCP} is one of the formularies that is seen to define ‘the pedigree of the Anglican Church of Australia’\textsuperscript{46} and for some this pedigree has become normative to the exclusion of any other liturgical form which is seen to depart in any way from the form and doctrine of the 1662 \textit{BCP} which stands as the authorised standard of worship and doctrine in this Church. The Synod of the Diocese of Sydney has passed a resolution that states that: ‘no prayer book which clearly allows for interpretations or practices contrary to the doctrine and principles of \textit{The Book of Common Prayer} and \textit{The Thirty Nine Articles} should be authorised for use in this Diocese.’\textsuperscript{47}

The Anglican Church of Australia at the national level has historically also supported the use of the 1662 \textit{BCP} as the defining standard. The \textit{Preface} to the 1978 \textit{An
Australian Prayer Book (AAPB) \(^{48}\) affirmed the normative status of the 1662 BCP and stated that the new prayer book was for use together with The Book of Common Prayer, 1662, that it was supplementary to it and not a replacement of it.

This is however, not universally accepted within the Anglican Communion. As long ago as 1958 at the Lambeth Conference, the following judgment on the 1662 BCP was recorded:

> When in the past, there has been discussion on the place of the Book of Common Prayer in the life of the Anglican Communion, the underlying assumption, and often the declared principle, has been that the Prayer Book of 1662 should remain as the basic pattern, and, indeed, as a bond of unity in doctrine and in worship for our Communion as a whole. … Yet now it seems clear that no Prayer Book, not even that of 1662, can be kept unchanged for ever, as a safeguard of established doctrine. \(^{49}\)

In more recent times, The Virginia Report, the Report of the work of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, published in 1997, for the Anglican Consultative Council, sought to consider in some depth the meaning and nature of communion. In this report, the Eucharist *per se*, in its many forms and prayer books, and not the 1662 BCP in particular or in principle, was considered to be one of the meanings of communion in the Anglican Communion. \(^{50}\) At the international level of the Anglican Communion, it seems that it is the Eucharist, and not its particular liturgical expression that is considered to be normative.

The situation in Australia is somewhat different, perhaps because of our entrenched diocesanism. The publication of A Prayer Book for Australia (APBA) in 1995 acknowledged the contribution of the 1662 BCP and the 1978 AAPB but at the same time it nonetheless stated that: ‘the demand for a more contemporary liturgy has grown’. \(^{51}\) Some of these contemporary needs are stated as the need for less polished and complex syntax in services, the simplification of rubrics, the use of inclusive language and greater sensitivity to human need in liturgy. \(^{52}\) Whilst the need for the prayer book to conform to the standard of doctrine and worship contained in the 1662 BCP, is not explicitly stated in the Preface of APBA, the section of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, referring to the Church retaining and approving the doctrine and principles of the Church of England, contained in The Book of Common Prayer, is reproduced following the Preface of APBA. \(^{53}\) It seems that despite the expressed need for contemporary liturgy, the normative status of the 1662 BCP as the standard of worship and doctrine remains secure as a principle in the Anglican Church of Australia.

This however raises a very important question which the Constitution of the Anglican Church does not answer. What exactly is the principle of worship and doctrine and how is this determined? If we answer that the 1662 BCP is the principle of worship and doctrine then we have the problem of very different interpretations of this book, particularly in relation to the multiformity of philosophical assumptions underlying the theology and practice of its Eucharistic liturgy, as is illustrated by the references to the offertory, the Black Rubric and the Articles above. This difference of interpretation is clearly shown in the Eucharistic liturgies issued by different bishops in Australia under the same authority of the Section 4 of the Constitution. \(^{54}\)
If we accept the assumptions that Anglican Eucharistic theology is indeed multiform and if the Eucharistic theology and practice of the BCP is also multiform, then it is very difficult to define a principle of worship and doctrine using the 1662 BCP unless a particular party hermeneutic is accepted as the standard. Either we are left with the statements of entrenched party positions and hermeneutic idealism or we accept that multiformity is the essential element, and therefore the standard of worship and doctrine in the Anglican Church of Australia. This latter position appears to be more critical than a position of hermeneutic idealism but in accepting this critical view as the standard we move away from any idea of maintaining a single, but I suggest imagined, principle of worship and doctrine such as the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia sets up using the 1662 BCP. Critical theory, together with the acknowledgement of the existence of hermeneutic idealism and the need for dialogue among the various parties and interests of the Anglican Church of Australia, may be a more useful way forward in the development of different Eucharistic liturgies and in acknowledging the inherent multiformity of Eucharistic theology itself. Such a way forward may release the 1662 BCP from the constitutional and diocesan prisons in which it has been incarcerated. Perhaps this is the greatest gift we could make to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer as we celebrate not only its 350th anniversary but also its continuing place in the life of the Anglican Church of Australia.

References


6 The metalinguistic analysis adopted by nominalists argues that talk about universals which are capable of multiple exemplification or localization is really only talk about particulars as separated entities. In such an account bread and wine are on earth in the Eucharist and Christ’s body and blood are in heaven without any participation in or instantiation of one in the other. See Loux, Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction, p. 54 and pp. 73-83.


11 Jensen, ‘Come to the Supper of the Lord’s table to share a meal’, p. 1.

12 Jensen, ‘Come to the Supper of the Lord’s table to share a meal’, p. 1.

13 Jensen, ‘Come to the Supper of the Lord’s table to share a meal’, p. 2.
16 Cummings, The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662, p. xiii
17 1662 Book of Common Prayer, Rubric regarding the Offertory, p. 241.
19 In the Prayer for the Church in the 1552 BCP Eucharist the word ‘oblations’ was not used and the prayer prayed: ‘We humbly beseech thee most mercifully to accept our alms and to receive these our prayers, which we offer unto thy divine Majesty’, Ketley, The Two Liturgies, pp. 270-271.
22 1662 Book of Common Prayer, Rubric at the Offertory, p. 244.
29 1662 Book of Common Prayer, p. 262.
30 Ketley, The Two Liturgies, p. 283.
33 Ketley, The Two Liturgies, p. 283.
35 1662 Book of Common Prayer, The Declaration on Kneeling or The Black Rubric, p. 262.


40 See page 2 above.

41 The distinction between ‘moderate realism’ and ‘immoderate realism’ is useful in this discussion. Moderate realism refers to a real presence which is not fleshy, whereas immoderate realism refers to a fleshy presence. See Douglas and Lovat, ‘The Integrity of Discourse in the Anglican Eucharistic Tradition’, especially pp. 856-858.


50 International Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, The Virginia Report, Anglican Consultative Council, London, 1997, pp. 11-12,


52 Anglican Church of Australia, A Prayer Book for Australia, p. viii.

53 Anglican Church of Australia, A Prayer Book for Australia, p. ix.


55 Hermeneutic idealism is defined as ‘conceptualising of reality that is totally dependent on one’s own (or one’s “communal groups”) beliefs, values and interpretations, whilst at the same time remaining blind to their causes, backgrounds and those wider connections that would contextualise them and help those holding them to see that they are in fact just one set of beliefs, values and interpretations in a sea of related and unrelated sets’. See Douglas and Lovat, The Integrity of Discourse in the Anglican Eucharistic Tradition, p. 848.


The eucharistic community and the ministry of the church. 20. iii. Zizioulas’s theology has certainly attracted the attention of many theologians over the past generation and the breadth and depth of his theological influence is even more remarkable when one considers that it is due principally to one collection of essays, published in English in 1985: Being as Communion. Not surprisingly, this dense and difficult work has been interpreted in a variety of.