



Why do we use *The Anglican Service Book* at the Blessed Sacrament Altar for Rite I Eucharists rather than the standard pew edition of the *Book of Common Prayer, 1979*?

The Episcopal Church's process of prayer book revision in the late 1960's and 1970's had a political dimension, one which unfortunately reflected the bitter controversies of that period.

The Standing Liturgical Commission believed—both descriptively and prescriptively—that Rite II was and should be the wave of the future...and that all Rite I liturgies would and should be eased out of the life of the Church and disappear.

What made this belief politically volatile was that at the time—the mid-1970's—the “traditionalist” opposition accused the Commission of having this agenda, and they publicly and repeatedly denied it. Subsequently, however, a prominent member of the Commission, Fr Bonnell Spencer, OHC, admitted that the charge was true; and a semi-official history of the work of the Commission published in 1996 (Michael Moriarty's *The Liturgical Revolution*) has also admitted it was true. This has led to some traditionalists making ongoing charges of lying and cover-up by the “815” (national church headquarters in New York) establishment.

The 1979 Prayer Book is essentially a Rite II (i.e. Early Christian) book with a few of the liturgies also given in Rite I (i.e. medieval) form, principally for “older people” and for occasions such as weddings and funerals when many people are sentimental about tradition.

Furthermore, the Rite I Eucharist was deliberately set up—both in its rubrics (the italicized directions of how the liturgy may/must be celebrated) and its graphic design and layout—to help and encourage clergy to ease conservative parishioners from Rite I to Rite II in small steps to “make the medicine go down” more easily. The result was that, although it is completely legal and rubrical to celebrate Rite I in its authentic historic form, the layout in the 1979 Prayer Book was deliberately designed not to facilitate it, on the assumption that if something is bothersome people will eventually take the path of least resistance and stop trying to do it.

There are two things that most lay people in the Episcopal Church are not aware of:

- 1) The *Book of Common Prayer, 1979* says “In any ...of the services contained in this Book celebrated in the context of a Rite One service, the contemporary idiom may be conformed to traditional language.” Also, “When it is desired to use music composed for them, previously authorized liturgical texts may be used in place of the corresponding texts in this Book.” (page 14)
- 2) There is only one “official” Prayer Book in the Episcopal Church ... literally, one single book, and that is a leather-bound “Standard Book of Common Prayer” which is held by the Custodian of the Standard Book of Common Prayer, a priest who is a part-time staff member of the National Church. *All* other prayer books are “unofficial” and the Book of Common Prayer is now and always has been in this country put out by a number of publishing houses (Oxford University Press, Church Hymnal Corporation, Seabury Press, etc.) in many different editions (sizes; bindings; various selected texts from the Standard Book for use—generally by

the clergy—at the Altar or for ministrations to the sick in homes and hospitals, etc. or in large-print editions for the visually handicapped or for children). Every prayer book that is available to parishes and to individuals is “unofficial.” Very few people—bishops, priests, or lay persons—have actually ever seen an “official” *Book of Common Prayer*!

Except for the one single leather-bound “Standard BCP” the Episcopal Church never has had an “official” edition or publisher of the Prayer Book. What all publishers may do is submit their edition(s) to the Custodian of the Standard BCP, and if it conforms to the text and rubrics of that portion of the Standard Book which it covers, the Custodian issues a certificate which in that edition is printed just after the title page. What the Church requires is that parishes use the authorized text and rubrics of the Standard BCP in its “public worship,” not any particular book or edition.

The Anglican Service Book was put together by a group of parishes (mostly in the mid-Atlantic area) who wanted to continue to use Rite I in its authentic historic form for their parish liturgies and wanted to make it easy for their parishioners to participate in the liturgy. What they did is all completely legal and canonical ... it is simply another edition of the *Book of Common Prayer, 1979* which follows all the official texts and rubrical requirements. It simply does not include the optional Rite II elements which were printed in the body of the Rite I liturgy (which anyone wanting to use Rite I as Rite I always omits anyway) and “conforms” the contemporary language to traditional language in those liturgies which are only printed out in Rite II form in the Standard BCP but which the rubrics permit to be done in traditional form.

This was political in that these parishes “called the Standing Liturgical Commission’s bluff” as it were by actually going to the trouble of making the whole 1979 Prayer Book available in Rite I form—which the Commission fully permitted but never thought anyone would bother to do—so that people could easily and thus would use historic Rite I for their parish liturgies. *The Anglican Service Book* is, however, essentially just one of many specialized, completely canonical editions of the *Book of Common Prayer, 1979* that are published today.

We at St Paul’s, of course, are basically a Rite II parish (what the Standing Liturgical Commission had envisioned and wanted), but it is the Rector’s conviction—and one which most St Paul’s parishioners share—that any liturgy, Early Christian or medieval, can only “speak” clearly when it is celebrated within its own historic context and integrity. “Rite I-1/2,” as one of our parishioners once put it, simply doesn’t work as Rite I or Rite II.

When *The Anglican Service Book* was published we at St Paul’s decided to use it for our Rite I liturgies because it makes ‘real’ Rite I much easier to follow for the congregation. And even though it has a different color binding (we chose red for our standard pew edition books ... but those too come in a black binding) it is also an authentic, canonical edition of the *Book of Common Prayer, 1979*.