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ALL HOLY DESIRES: AN ANGLICAN-EPISCOPAL THEOLOGY OF DESIRE AND
PRAYER BOOK LITURGICAL ASCETICISM

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Abstract:

This project, in response to the theological retrieval of desire conducted by Anglican theologian Sarah Coakley in her *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, descriptively analyses the place of “desire” in the language of the Daily Office and Eucharistic liturgies of the Episcopal Church’s Book of Common Prayer--the *regula* of Anglican Christians. It asks, “How do the liturgies of the Prayer Book address, direct, and ultimately entrust our desires to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit?” In the face of the descriptive, it also presents a constructive model for discipleship in “Prayer Book Liturgical Asceticism” a life of "common prayer" mediated through the Prayer Book. In the face of division in the Global Anglican Communion and anxiety around future Prayer Book revision, this preliminary exploration of this lens or orientation toward the Prayer Book aims to be hopeful, unitive, transformative, and thoroughly Anglican.

INTRODUCTION

With division across the Anglican Communion over women's ordination and same-sex marriage, concerns of gender, sex, identity, and human sexuality are at the forefront of the conversation of Anglican identity. Those in the Anglican communion whose approach to these concerns is more "traditional" versus those who may be more "radical" are claiming that there is a *true* way to live as Anglicans. The Episcopal Church, as an expression of Anglicanism in particular, holds that, at its best, the denomination is a "big" or "broad tent" church, ideally able to honestly hold both traditional and radical theological, social, and political stances while committed to worshipping together (with diverse worship styles) through the Book of Common Prayer.¹ Anglicans are united by "common prayer;" to engage in "common prayer" is to be disciplined in a particular way.

One of the most compelling proposals for how to more transformatively address these concerns and bring the church into a greater place of unity and sense of belonging comes from Church of England priest-theologian Sarah Coakley. Comprised of themes and explorations present throughout her decades of scholarship, Coakley began to elucidate this proposal more explicitly in the first volume of a planned three-part systematics titled *On Desiring God*. This systematics is a *retrieval* and *reiteration* of an understanding of Christian faith and theology that has *desire* as a primary subject. I am sympathetic to Coakley's overall project and the ways that it attempts to bring together more traditional and radical approaches to the concerns of gender,

¹ The 1979 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is the standard BCP of the Episcopal Church in the US (ECUSA). So, when "BCP" is used, the '79 book is what is being referred to unless otherwise noted. The term "Prayer Book" will also be used to refer to the *book* itself. The typical reference to a different Prayer Book will be to the 1662 English Prayer Book, which remains the 'Official' Prayer Book of the Church of England and standard across the Anglican Communion. When certain traditional language passages from the 1662 are present in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, Rite I, or traditional language services, will be what is presented in the footnote. If not present or altered, the 1662 Book will be referred to (or earlier editions, all via Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), all as "OWC").

sex, sexuality, and identity in the Christian tradition, but, as presented thus far, there are limitations to her proposal. There is little provided in her work that is programmatic or extends beyond the ‘self,’ helping churches to attend to whether individual contemplative experiences yield a transformed corporate life in their congregations.

To borrow an insight from Rowan Williams,

The theologian is always beginning in the middle of things. There is a practice of common life and language already there, a practice that defines a specific shared way of interpreting human life as lived in relationship to God. The meanings of the word ‘God’ are to be discovered by watching what this community does—not only when it is consciously reflecting in conceptual ways, but when it is acting, educating or ‘inducting,’ imagining and worshipping.²

It is “beginning in the middle of things,” in the context of a worshipping community within Anglicanism in the Episcopal Church (ECUSA), rooted in the Book of Common Prayer that I am exploring desire.

The theological retrieval of desire or *eros*,³ as particularly conducted by Coakley, emphasizes the *ascetic* shaping of desire. For her, this involves the repossession of the centrality of desire in what it means to be human. Coakley has made the bold claim that “the task for the Anglican Communion today is, at its deepest level, theological and spiritual: not merely to reconsider its subtle and distinctive heritage regarding scripture, tradition, and ‘reason,’ but to re-enliven its demanding vision of the devout life.”⁴ This demanding vision requires the re-ordering of all our loves. That demanding vision involves the contemplative *and* the liturgical.

² Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), xii.

³ *Eros*, one of four Greek words for “love,” is typically limited in presentation to the “aspirational,” “wanting,” “ascending,” “receiving,” “seeking,” and “sensuous,” and very narrow definitions of those words. It is contrasted with *agape*, which is “condescending,” “bestowing,” “giving,” “sacrificial.” The strict dichotomy placed between these two terms Coakley, and many others, have denounced as a part of this retrieval. Coakley looks to Gregory of Nyssa’s definition of *eros* as *agape* “stretched out in longing toward the divine goal (Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 47).

⁴ Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 143. Demanding, in part, because desire evidently “lies crucially at the intersection of human sin and salvation.”

This paper will be partly descriptive as well as constructive and prescriptive. My engagement with the subjects of desire, the contemplative, and Anglican/Episcopal liturgy, particularly in the form it has taken in the US, are preliminary. My intention, however, is to demonstrate how the lens of desire, as applied to “common prayer,” is hopeful, transformative, and thoroughly Anglican.

PART ONE: AN ANGLICAN-EPISCOPAL THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

“All Holy Desires”

What is desire? When we think about desire, we have to think about two different kinds: human desire and divine desire. Human desire is that which has been given to us by God, and it is reflective; it images divine desire. Divine desire “connotes that plenitude of longing love that God has for God's own creation and for its full and ecstatic participation in the divine, Trinitarian life.”⁵ So, our desires are, at their most fundamental, made in God's image. When we say that human desire reflects divine desire, we recognize that God in God's Trinitarian nature is “both the source and the goal of our desire” and that this is how God has created us. We are ‘desiring selves’, and God is a desiring God.

Coakley's theological retrieval of desire largely relies upon the insights of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, who wrote about the *intensification* of desire, that the soul must “boil in love [ἐρωτικῶς, *erotikos*, erotic desire], but only in the Spirit.”⁶ In prayer, desire is “aroused,” and one is given permission to be lost in desire, but again, “in the Spirit,” so that it is reordered or reoriented. The work of the Holy Spirit transforming our desires occurs over a lifetime.

⁵ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 10.

⁶ Richard A. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs, translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2012), 29. This is in contrast with a vision of *eros* as becoming sublimated or controlled.

This line or trajectory of transformation has lived in the Prayer Book from the beginning. In the Rite I (traditional language) liturgy for Evening prayer, at the reading of the *Collects*, one prays *A Collect for Peace*. This collect goes back to the original 1549 Book of Common Prayer.⁷ It begins, “O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed...” This prayer acknowledges that there is a dichotomy of desire: there are holy desires and unholy desires. What does it mean for these desires to be holy? For these desires to be “holy” is to say that they are *pure*, without sin, ‘set apart.’ At Morning Prayer, in the Rite I form of the *Venite*, “O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”⁸ The *beauty* of holiness is that it is God's. Marion Hatchett, the great commentator on the 1979 Prayer Book, expressed that this “preamble” to the collect recognizes theologically that “It is God who kindles holy desires, transforms them into purposeful resolutions, and finally brings them to fruition and works of justice.”⁹ Holy desires, good counsels (purposeful resolutions), and just works—these are ultimately gifts and are the end of “common prayer.”

The Primacy of Contemplative Prayer?

It is now pertinent to turn to the practice of prayer. Prayer, in its various forms, is undoubtedly integral to both the subjective experience of the Christian and the communal life of the Church. Anglican Christians express this distinctly in acknowledging as fundamental the maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi*, (“*the law of prayer, the law of belief*”). In other words, what we pray, how we pray, and when we pray all inform what we believe about God, ourselves, and everything else. You may even add *lex vivendi* (“*The law of living*”)—because what we pray

⁷ OWC, 16. See Brian Cummings notes on the origins of this prayer, 694-695.

⁸ See Ps. 96:9.

⁹ Marion Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 142.

affects our beliefs and affects how we live.¹⁰ In Coakley's writing, *Lex Orandi* seemingly becomes restricted to individual contemplative prayer.¹¹ In this, Coakley's ascetic theology unintentionally tends towards individualization and interiorization.¹² She has written that "liturgy is... not an 'affective' complement to intellectual reflection but rather the means of a full integration of all aspects of embodied selfhood in the life of Christ."¹³ Therefore, we need the liturgical to buttress the contemplative and move beyond mere individualization and interiorization; we need the Book of Common Prayer.

The Book of Common Prayer, being the locus for Anglican prayer, informs profoundly, how Anglican Christians understand themselves and directly influences their theological reflection. Of various forms of prayer, *liturgical prayer* is primary.¹⁴ Specifically, for Anglicans/Episcopalians, the *liturgies* of the Prayer Book are primary. In acknowledging their primacy, one would hope that we have a self-awareness of how these liturgies are shaping and forming us.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the relationship between *Lex Orandi* and *Lex Credendi* may not be as straightforwardly consequential as it is *co-constitutive*. See Ashley Cocksworth, "Theorizing the (Anglican) *Lex Orandi*: A Theological Account" in *Modern Theology*, Vol. 36:2 (2020), 298-316, 307.

¹¹ Coakley view of 'contemplation' is greatly informed by her reading of Romans 8, wherein Paul describes how the Spirit "intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (v. 27). Her take is that 'contemplation' is a yielding to the Spirit's act of prayer, prayer "at its deepest is God's" (*God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 115). This is informed by her reading of early patristic writings and of the Carmelite mystics St. John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila, who, by her summarization, saw contemplation as "the divine infusion of prayer into a passive recipient" (*Powers and Submissions*, 47). The silence of contemplation, she writes, is "the voluntary silence of attention, transformation, mysterious interconnection" (*God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 84).

¹² She expressly states that the problem she is combating is how the West has "so much individualized and physicalized" desire (Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 6). She writes that "the (seemingly) private or individual act of contemplation is, in fact, the most intensely corporate Christian activity of all, and thus too, the lifeblood of liturgical life" (Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 25), but, again, she does not prescribe *how*.

¹³ Sarah Coakley, "Beyond 'Belief': Liturgy and the Cognitive Apprehension of God," in *The Vocation of Theology for Today: A Festschrift for David Ford* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 144.

¹⁴ W. Taylor Stevenson, "Lex Orandi—Lex Credendi" in *The Study of Anglicanism*, rev. ed., eds. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Johnathan Knight (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 196-197.

This brings us then to the concept of “common prayer.”¹⁵ What is “common prayer”? “Common prayer” is a pattern of Christian prayer—of confession, repentance, adoration, supplication, intercession, etc.—that can be done communally or individually, yet always *in common*—that is, together. “Common prayer” for Anglicans is mediated through the liturgies of the Prayer Book. Prayer together has formed the Anglican life. The Anglican life is made up of liturgies of the Prayer Book which address our desire, direct it, and entrust it to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

The “End” of Common Prayer

The end of “common prayer” can be summarized by the *Collect for Peace* examined above—holy desires, good counsels, just works. Of these three, however, “good counsels” and “just works” are penultimate. What is ultimate are holy desires. One manner of conceiving holy desire is as ‘purity of heart.’ As Christ proclaims in the beatitudes, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8). Purity of heart is a means toward the end of the vision of God: God in Godself. Not only are the pure in heart blessed in seeing God but they are also blessed because they can then *give* pure love. Pure love, helpfully articulated by Rowan Williams, is this: “The desire that merges finally into purity of heart...a desire not to stop desiring.”¹⁶ It does not stop desiring because it “desires the desire of the other” and does so towards “eucharistic interrelation,”¹⁷ or relations defined by thanksgiving. Defined thusly, one sees the other—divine

¹⁵ Not to be confused with the Prayer Book as a *book* or, as will later be discussed, the Prayer Book as an “ascetical system.”

¹⁶ Rowan Williams, *Passions of the Soul* (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2024), 61.

¹⁷ Rowan Williams, *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2021), 54. This conceptual language is appropriated from psychoanalyst Jaques Lucan and “redeemed” through a “Maximian” lens, as in Saint Maximos the Confessor. Williams’ reflections play off Christoph Schneider’s “The Transformation of Eros: Reflections on Desire in Jacques Lacan” in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the*

other and created other—more and more as *thankworthy*. This is why it is important that we consider the Rites of Holy Eucharist and the Office. These liturgies, the work of human beings, are hopefully training this desire and enlarging it within us, in doing so accomplishing the work of God—the glorification of God and the sanctification of humankind.¹⁸

In return, *koinonia*, or “communion”—the fellowship of the people of God—is given to us as a grace, as a part of the “work,” of “having our minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Rom. 8:5). The process of “having our minds set on what the Spirit desires” requires vulnerability, an openness to being so transformed. This is paired with *kenosis*, or self-emptying, dispossession, or effacement.¹⁹ Our model for this is Jesus himself, and what he did, “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). Coakley asserts that in the incarnation, Christ “made space” for humanity to be itself in his reconciling and redemptive work for the whole of creation while also “making space” for God to be God in his life.²⁰ The Christ hymn of Phil. 2, Coakley writes, is “an invitation to enter into Christ’s extended life in the church.”²¹ This understanding opens up possibilities of connecting *eros* with *kenosis*. *Eros*, in being rightly aligned or “redeemed,” may work alongside the *kenotic*, the Christian life being

World Through the Word, eds. Adrian Pabst & Christoph Schneider (London: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 271-89. In his famous piece “The Body’s Grace,” Williams expressed a similar idea in reference to sexual partnership, that “to desire my joy is to desire the joy of that one I desire,” and that partners are “pleased because they are pleasing.” See Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers Jr. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), pp. 309-321.

¹⁸ Or perfection. See the Collect for Purity: “...that we may *perfectly* love thee...”

¹⁹ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 23. She emphasizes “effacement” against “direct human imitation,” which she labels “idolatrous.” She writes: “it is vitally important not to confuse this quest for the right alignment of sexual desire and divine desire with the false attempt to directly to imitate the life of the Trinity...because we are embodied created beings we may indeed through the graced aid of the Spirit ‘imitate’ Christ the God/*man*; but we cannot without Christ’s mediation directly imitate the Trinity itself,” 309.

²⁰ See Jn. 5:19, 30; 6:38. Coakley refers to Christ’s commitment, and that which we, by grace, take on as “ceding and responding” (see Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2002), 34-35). Rowan Williams describes this wonderfully: “*Kenosis* is defined as the common form of Jesus’ earthly life (as service, acceptance, authority in and through dependence) and the life of God (as gift or commitment to an other and the simultaneous imaging and returning of that act)” (Rowan Williams, “Trinity and Ontology” in *On Christian Theology*, 161).

²¹ Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 34.

one of a love of paradoxical “empty-fullness,” an experience of grace. Through the dispossession of self, we experience the intensification of desire—the boiling of desire in the Spirit described by Gregory of Nyssa—In which we become more self-giving, in the process imbuing our communities with stability and joy.²² This is “Love [as] strong as death” (Song of Songs 8:6). Those who commit themselves to this love in “common prayer” through the Prayer Book are what I will refer to as “Prayer Book Liturgical Ascetics.”

Commitments

a. The Book of Common Prayer in its various forms is ascetic

The Prayer Book, in being ascetic, shows that asceticism is not something that is limited to those who commit themselves to a life of *excessive* suffering and solitude—as may be, for many, the image conjured by the word “ascetic.” Ascetic is “common,” available to all people. The basic meaning of asceticism is training, self-discipline, self-denial. It is something embodied, practiced, and, indeed, in this context of “common prayer,” *communal*. The soul²³ is trained in an integrative way—involving our whole selves—to be attuned to the voice of God. Coakley provides a helpful definition of the ascetic life. She writes that it is “a demanding integration of intellectual, spiritual and bodily practice over a lifetime sustained by a complete vision of the Christian life and its ‘ends.’”²⁴ While asceticism may be “demanding,” it does not need to be *severe*. In fact, the liturgical ascetic may be viewed as someone who is “stunningly normal.”²⁵

Recognizing the normality of the ascetic, one also recognizes the “abnormality of human

²² Seeing others as the “occasion of joy.” See Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 312.

²³ By “soul” I mean the holistic self—“heart, mind, soul and strength [body].”

²⁴ Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 18. Voluntary “Suffering” is still very much a part of the ascetic vision. That is a part of the call of Christ to his disciples to “take up their cross” (also see Phil. 3:10, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death”). The voluntary exists alongside the *involuntary* suffering of the world (See Rom. 5:3-4; Jas. 1:2-4).

²⁵ Aiden Kavanaugh, *On Liturgical Theology: The Hale Memorial Lectures on Seabury-Western Theological Seminary 1981* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984), 161.

choice,” the contorting effect of sin. What may be construed as “normal” is the life from *A Collect for Peace*, the fruit of the Spirit. The liturgical ascetic is enabled to say, along with the psalmist, “My delight shall be in thy statutes” (Ps. 119:16, Coverdale).²⁶

- b. Ascetic: my understanding of ascetic follows Coakley’s own conviction that there is a “necessary connection [between] *desire* and asceticism.”

Human desire and longing are good gifts of the grace of God, initiating the upward impulse of human beings toward what is real—the true, the good, and the beautiful. We must extricate ourselves of a framework of human desire as *innately* selfish, lustful, distorted, or perverse. To see human desire as such is to diminish or fail to see the fullness (or as much as we are able to perceive) of the image of God in the other and in ourselves. This is not to deny the reality of sin and the disordering of our desires. It is rightly assumed at the beginning of both Morning and Evening Prayer, at the confession of sin, that “we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts”; we begin the Office by recognizing this fact that we so easily waver “in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and left undone.”²⁷ In wavering so, we have failed to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves, “offend[ing] against [God’s] holy laws.”²⁸ Asceticism helps us to direct our desires in the right direction.

- c. Liturgy:²⁹ *liturgical prayer* involves the praying of prayers written through a process of “chastening” or “alignment.” Having gone through that process, they are, in turn, able to contribute to our own ascetical shaping.

²⁶ Think also John 14: “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me”; 1 John: “this is love for God that we obey his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome”; 2 John 1:6: “And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments. This is the very commandment you have heard from the beginning, that you must walk in love.”

²⁷ In the Great Litany, traditionally prayed on Wednesdays and Fridays before the liturgy of the word, we pray against “all inordinate and sinful affections,” “blindness of heart,” “hardness of heart” and we ask for “singleness of heart,” for our hearts to be “turned.”

²⁸ BCP, 41, 63, 321.

²⁹ The word liturgy comes from the Gk. word *leitourgia*, which means “the work of the people.” Within the context of Christian worship, liturgy is corporate, done *together*; a communal offering to God.

The chastening of liturgical prayers has occurred by the church's enactment of its liturgies and by its proceeding theological reflection.³⁰ Largely inspired by the attestation of scripture and used alongside scripture, our use of particular liturgical prayers intimates the church's belief that our God is rightly attested to or proved by them.³¹ In using them, we are entrusting our prayer, in part, to the discipling of the saints—of those who have gone before us who, in their discernment, composed them. Ultimately, formal liturgy rightly and humbly composed and conducted “attempts to be a ‘giving over’ of our words to God.”³² This is as opposed to speech that seeks to retain a distance between or control over what is being spoken of, namely, God. The words of liturgical prayers become deeply ingrained in the creative, social, and religious/spiritual imagination of those who pray them. Those living by the Prayer Book have entrusted their prayer and the shaping of their imaginations in part to Thomas Cranmer and the other composer/compiler³³ and their successors.

- d. Those who live by the Prayer Book (Anglicans/Episcopalians, and others) are then “Prayer Book Liturgical Ascetics,” committed to keeping the “monastic pattern” of Eucharist and Office.

³⁰ Paul Avis in his work *God and the Creative Imagination* describes the *apophatic* dimension of liturgy well: “liturgy exerts a profound effect on the worshipper by expressing Christian religious affections in a restrained and disciplined form that protects the worshipper from being overwhelmed by an experience of the numinous,” or the invasive presence of God among the ecclesial gathered. He goes on: “...this controlled expression of religious emotion is particularly evident [in the 1662 Prayer Book] in the *obliqueness* with which God is invoked...thoughts that defy expression, emotions that are too strong for human nature to bear, are constrained, contained, and made manageable by this obliqueness of address in traditional liturgical forms (Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 78, emphasis added).

³¹ Liturgist Louis Weil, one of the members of the committee that drafted and proposed the ‘79 Prayer Book, wrote the following: “at the center of Christian liturgical prayer we find *the doctrine of God*, not as a series of creedal statements but in the lifting up of images which are expressive of how God is understood through Christian faith” (Louis Weil, “The Gospel in Anglicanism” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, 63, emphasis added).

³² Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 7.

³³ The title “compiler” recognizes that there are prayers of the Prayer Book that are English translations of prayers (most likely from Latin) some of which that go back to the early centuries of the Church and that these make up a majority of the prayers in the Prayer Book. These prayers, then, belong to the church *catholic* (universal). Many were *composed*, many of them by Cranmer.

The term “liturgical asceticism”³⁴ refers to a life of “ritual” coherence or continuity. Life lived according to the Prayer Book essentially *is* liturgical asceticism. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's genius in compiling the first Prayer Book was in presenting to the English-speaking church (at least those who could read) a compendium of all the services they would ever need in their Christian lives. This paper will focus on those services that make up the heart of the Prayer Book, the “monastic pattern,” which includes Eucharist and Office.³⁵ In the United States, before the introduction of the '79 Prayer Book, the principal service in the typical Episcopal Church on a Sunday would have been Morning Prayer. This was not the intended ‘Cranmerian’ pattern. The intended Sunday pattern of Cranmer’s Prayer Book was Morning Prayer, the Great Litany, the Eucharist, and then Evening Prayer later in the day.³⁶ The Episcopal churches in the United States are better primed for living into this pattern, given the trend after the introduction of the '79 Prayer Book to make Holy Eucharist the principal Sunday service.

PART TWO: PRAYER BOOK LITURGICAL ASCETICISM

The Prayer Book as Ascetical System

While the Prayer Book contains other “Rites and ceremonies,” including the Rites for “Holy Baptism” and the “pastoral offices”—Including “Confirmation,” “Marriage,” and “Burial”—making up all the services the ordinary Christian will need throughout their life, the basis of the Prayer Book is what Martin Thornton called the “three-fold rule of the Catholic

³⁴ Term borrowed from Roman Catholic Liturgist David W. Fagerberg. See *On Liturgical Asceticism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of American Press, 2013).

³⁵ The '79 Prayer Book describes “The Holy Eucharist, the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts, and Daily Morning and Evening Prayer, as set forth in this Book” as “the regular services appointed for public worship in this Church” (BCP, 13).

³⁶ John Gibaut, “The Daily Office,” in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, ed. Charles C. Hefling and Cynthia L. Shattuck (New York: Oxford University Press), 454. Also see the section “Concerning the Service of the Church” in the *1928 Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford University Press), vii.

Church: Office—Eucharist—and Personal Devotion.”³⁷ “Personal Devotion,” in my mind, includes Coakley’s emphasis on the contemplative. “The contemplative” fundamentally is one who turns their mind intently toward God with the aim of habitual union with God. As Thornton noted, “Eucharist and Office are [not] inconsonant with contemplative experience;” however, they are different; it is simply a fact that those two Rites are approached in a more “thoughtful, discursive way.”³⁸ The Eucharist and the Office do have different roles in the ascetical system of the Prayer Book. The goal of this part of the paper is to show how desire is threaded between the two.

The Daily Office

The liturgies of the Office—those of Morning and Evening Prayer—are the liturgies that the Prayer Book Liturgical Ascetic encounters most frequently. As suggested by the title “Daily Office,” this encounter occurs every day of the week. These services are predicated on “habitual recollection” or “recapitulation.” In the daily readings from the Psalter and of Holy Scripture, the “Lessons,” which make up a substantive part of the Office, salvation history is remembered. Within the liturgical context, the psalms and other texts from Christian scripture act as the primary aid in recollecting this history, though some of the collects and other prayers have this function as well. I will follow the movement of the liturgy, discussing its constituent parts and where and how they address desire.

Much of the language of both the Office and Holy Eucharist centers on *the heart*. While the heart may be more emphasized in the Rite I liturgies, Rite II still retains much of the language of the heart—for example, “to you all hearts are open” and “the thoughts of our

³⁷ Thornton, *English Spirituality*, 258.

³⁸ Thornton, *English Spirituality*, 20.

hearts”; in the Confession, the Officiant and the people say, “We have not loved you with our whole heart.”³⁹

The Confession of Sin

After an opening sentence, the officiant speaks to the people a verse from scripture provided according to the liturgical season the service is offered in, what is traditionally referred to as the General Confession.

- At Morning Prayer (Rite I): “...and so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him.”⁴⁰ Here are presented with the notion the liturgy of the office *prepares us* for worship whilst also being an act of worship.
- “with penitent and obedient hearts.”⁴¹

As noted above, the congregation, in reciting the confession together, marks how they, both individually *and collectively*, have “followed too much the devices and desires of [their] own hearts”⁴² or in Rite II, “We have not loved you with our whole heart.”⁴³

The Psalter⁴⁴

The Daily recitation of the Psalms makes up *the heart* of the Prayer Book Office of Morning. The Psalms are the bulk of the services. The Invitatory has two options from the Psalms for opening Morning Prayer, either the Venite (Psalm 95) or the Jubilate (Psalm 100). In the Suffrages, from Psalm 51, we read, “Create in us clean hearts, O God.”⁴⁵ Cranmer had the Psalter in the Prayer Book, containing all 150 Psalms in numerical order, divided into thirty days

³⁹ In the *Collects for the Church Year*, note the language of God “enkindling” (BCP, 161, 196, 213), “planting,” (BCP, 162, 213), “pouring” (BCP, 165, 174, 188, 216, 225, 240), “fixing” (BCP, 219) and “graft[ing]” (BCP, 181; 233) desires in our hearts. See also The Collect for Ash Wednesday, “create and make in us new and contrite hearts” (BCP, 166; 217), the second collect on Ascension Day, our hearts “ascending” to “continually dwell” with Christ (BCP, 174; 226), and the second collect on Pentecost/Whitsunday God, “taught” the hearts of his people by sending the Holy Spirit (BCP, 175; 227).

⁴⁰ BCP, 41.

⁴¹ BCP, 41, 62, 79, 116.

⁴² BCP, 41, 62.

⁴³ BCP, 79, 116.

⁴⁴ BCP, 581-808.

⁴⁵ BCP, 55, 68; 98, 122. In the 1662 Prayer Book, it appears, “O God, make clean our hearts within us,” see OWC, 248, 255).

(sixty segments) for morning and evening each month.⁴⁶ The Psalter in the '79 Prayer Book lectionary contains a repeated seven-week pattern.⁴⁷ Although the lectionary of the '79 Prayer Book does not require the use of the entire Psalter, and as a part of the lectionary readings has Psalm readings carefully selected in accordance with the time of day, the day of the week, and the season of the church year, I share Cranmer's concern of certain Psalms being displaced or abandoned through the interference of alternative readings provided in the Lectionary. As a part of the process of our desires being transformed in the Spirit, my conviction is that the entirety of the Psalter is beneficial to this end.⁴⁸

The sensitive language of the psalmist(s) encapsulates the full extent of human emotion, but, mysteriously, "in the Spirit." This dynamic is described clearly by Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

In [Christ's] mouth the word of man becomes the Word of God, and if we pray his prayer with him, the Word of God becomes once again the word of man. All Prayers of the Bible are such prayers which we pray together with Jesus Christ, in which he accompanies us and through which he accompanies us and through which he brings us into the presence of God.⁴⁹

If the Daily Office (and the Eucharist) are services of "habitual recollection" or recapitulation, the Psalter, as a whole, viewed as a recapitulation of the narrative of Holy Scripture, is especially effective for the ascetical project. Below are some textual examples of

⁴⁶ Lionel Mitchell in his *Praying Shapes Believing*, called this division 'rigid' (Lionell L. Mitchell and Ruth M. Meyers, *Praying Shapes Believing* (New York: Seabury Books, 2016), 39). In terms of 'rigidity,' Cranmer's division seems far more "doable" than the Benedictine pattern of repeating the entirety of the Psalter in a week (See OWC, 784) or especially complete daily recitation as practiced by some Eastern monks (see Hatchett, *Commentary*, 106). Perhaps this is easier to do when, as a monastic in the truest sense, you have seven dedicated times of prayer and certain Psalms were prescribed for certain offices.

⁴⁷ BCP, 934. The cycle begins on the first week of Advent, the first week after Epiphany, the eighth week after Epiphany (if there should be one), the second week of Easter, with Trinity Sunday and Proper 2, Proper 9, Proper 16, and Proper 23. There are more interruptions to a complete reading of the Psalter with this cycle than Cranmer's thirty day cycle.

⁴⁸ Even those Psalms (especially the "imprecatory Psalms" whose language may be found offensive or problematic.

⁴⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, trans. James H. Burtness (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 14.

“desire” working in the Psalter. Much of the language is not so direct.⁵⁰ We may take the many references in the Psalms to “longing,” “seeking,” “thirsting,” “desire,” and “satisfaction,” and the heart as encompassed in our understanding of desire (human and divine):

- Ps. 10:18 – “The LORD will hear the desire of the humble; you will strengthen their heart...”⁵¹
- Ps. 17:16b – “When I awake, I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness”⁵²
- Ps. 20:4 – “[May the LORD] Grant you your heart’s desire”⁵³
- Ps. 21:2 – “You [O LORD] have given [the king] his heart’s desire”⁵⁴
- Ps. 27:11 – “You speak in my heart and say ‘seek my face.’ Your face, LORD, I will seek.”⁵⁵
- Ps. 35:27 – “...‘great is the LORD, who desires the prosperity of his servant.’”⁵⁶
- Ps. 37:4 – “Take delight in the LORD, and he shall give you your heart’s desire”⁵⁷
- Ps. 38:9 – “O Lord, you know all my desires, and my sighing is not hidden from you”⁵⁸
- Ps. 42:1-2a – “As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul is athirst for God; athirst for the living God.”⁵⁹
- Ps. 63:1, 5 – “O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; *my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you*, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water”; My soul is content, as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,⁶⁰
- Ps. 73:25-26 – “Whom have I in heaven but you? And having you I desire nothing upon earth. Though my flesh and my heart should waste away, God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”⁶¹
- Ps. 84:1 – “My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.”⁶²
- Ps. 90:14 – “Satisfy us by your loving-kindness in the morning so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life.”⁶³
- Ps. 107:9 – “For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things”⁶⁴

⁵⁰ There are no explicit references to *eros* in the New Testament, and the word is found only twice in the Septuagint. See LXX: Prov 7:18, “Come and let us enjoy love until the early morning; come here, let us embrace in *love*”; 30:16, “Hades and *love* of a woman and Tartarus and earth not filled with water...” (NETS, italics signifying the word *eros*).

⁵¹ BCP, 596.

⁵² BCP 602.

⁵³ BCP, 608.

⁵⁴ BCP, 608.

⁵⁵ BCP, 618.

⁵⁶ BCP, 631.

⁵⁷ BCP 633.

⁵⁸ BCP 637.

⁵⁹ BCP, 643.

⁶⁰ BCP, 670 (emphasis added).

⁶¹ BCP, 688-689.

⁶² BCP, 707.

⁶³ BCP, 719.

⁶⁴ BCP, 746.

- Ps. 112:8 – “Their heart is established and will not shrink, until they see their desire upon their enemies”⁶⁵
- Ps. 119 has several references to longing for God’s salvation (vv. 81, 174), for God’s commandments (vv. 40, 131), and most frequently for God’s judgments (for example, v. 20: “My soul is *consumed* at all times with *longing for your judgments*”).⁶⁶
- Ps. 132:14 – “For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired her for his habitation.”⁶⁷
- 143:6 – “I spread out my hands to you; my soul gasps to you like a thirsty land”⁶⁸
- Ps. 145:17, 20 – “You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature”; “[The LORD] fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he hears their cry and helps them.”⁶⁹

As this list shows, desire is a multivalent concept in the Psalter.⁷⁰ This is by no means an exhaustive list of all the dynamics of desire present within. Themes of desire appear in every genre of psalm. This list cannot account for what occurs when the person committed to praying the Psalms with Cranmer’s thirty-day cycle encounters dissonance between the language of a psalm and their current emotional, physical, and spiritual being—for example, if one were to enter a time of prayer in a mood of praise but in the Psalms appointed are confronted by psalms of lament.

The Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer

It is after the other readings from scripture, the *Canticles*,⁷¹ and The Apostle’s Creed, that we come to the section titled *The Prayers*. The first of “the prayers” is *The Lord’s Prayer*. This is

⁶⁵ BCP, 755. This translation follows Miles Coverdale and an interesting case of “desire language” in the Psalter as it is interpretive. “Their desire” is not present in the MT.

⁶⁶ BCP, 764 (emphasis added). See also Psalm 119:7: “I will thank you with an *unfeigned heart* when I have learned your righteous judgments,” BCP, 763 (emphasis added); or v. 30b: “I have set your judgments before me”; or v. 35 “Make me go in the path of your commandments for *that is my desire*” (emphasis added); or v. 52 “when I remember your judgments of old, O LORD, I take great comfort,” BCP, 767. Also see Ps. 19: “...the judgements of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold...” (BCP, 607).

⁶⁷ BCP, 786.

⁶⁸ BCP, 799.

⁶⁹ BCP, 802. Of note here, as well as other Psalms previously listed the “fulfillment of desire” set next to the hearing of “cries” or the acknowledgment of “sighing” in Psalm 38:9.

⁷⁰ This begs for a more in-depth exploration of desire in the Psalms.

⁷¹ It should be said that the *Canticles* do aid in shaping desire, especially as they—as scripture or prayers of the Christian tradition—help place the scripture lessons in the context of worship. A notable example would be the *Magnificat* at Evening Prayer: “My soul doth magnify the Lord” (BCP, 65; 119).

appropriate given Christ's word to "Pray then like this" (Matt. 6:9). The Lord's Prayer acts not only as a model by which all the other prayers following might be compared but as that from which all other Christian prayer flows. To quote Coakley, the Lord's Prayer, or the "Our Father,"⁷² "is, at base, a modulator of desire...put[ting] God, his Kingdom, and his Holy Name first in the order of implications and then arranges everything else that is really important and desirable under that."⁷³

We pray the Lord's Prayer that our desires might be formed into his own. To pray this prayer is a *self-emptying* act—we loosen our grasp, we relinquish control, we *surrender*. In regularly praying "thy kingdom come, thy will be done," we are learning what it means to have our "heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27) aligned with God's and asking for God's abiding presence and direct rule of our selves. When we ask for "daily bread," we recognize our creaturely dependence on God; we recognize the dependence of human desire on divine desire—that inexhaustible desire that longs for our *participation*.⁷⁴ Asking forgiveness for our trespasses, we ask for it "as we forgive those who trespass against us." It is not inherent to us to forgive; it may be impossible. It is acknowledged here that forgiveness is also God's work.

⁷² Coakley makes a penetrating comment about the language of "Father" in the tradition that I believe is worthy to note here: she writes that with 'Father language,' "The potential for cultural and patriarchal distortion is endless, and the mere 'complementary' addition of some new, well-intentioned, focus on the Spirit or 'feminine' language for God is not in itself going to shift this problem. A deeper sense of our own capacity for self-deceiving idolatry (yes, even potentially a feminist idolatry) has to come into play, precisely in and through the 'purgations' of prayer: only the primacy of divine desire can attend to this deeper problem... 'Can a feminist call God Father', then? One might more truly insist that she, above all, must; for it lies with her alone to do the kneeling work that ultimately slays patriarchy at its root" (Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 326-27). The concern of some 'modern' liturgy (for example in the ECUSA's *Enriching our Worship* series of alternative liturgical texts) to opt for "inclusive" or "expansive" language for God that, though well-intentioned, can muddy the clarity of the Church's Trinitarian formulations and present unnecessary modifications. I find Coakley's careful approach a refreshing medium rooted in her ascetical project.

⁷³ Sarah Coakley, 'Worship and Desire in the Anglican Tradition: Why this Matters in Contemporary Church and Culture' Thursday 20, October 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJtKMaQfOk8>, 12:06-12:23.

⁷⁴ See Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 92. There she describes divine desire as "unchanging, but vibrant."

When we ask “lead us not into temptation,” we are recognizing those “unholy desires,” those desires that tempt us away from the true, the good, and the beautiful—or what is *real*.

If you are only following the Morning and Evening Prayer, the Lord’s Prayer is prayed twice daily.⁷⁵ It is also present in the Liturgies of the Holy Eucharist.⁷⁶ It is liturgically poignant that, in the Daily Office, the Lord’s Prayer comes after the reading of the Psalms. Bonhoeffer wrote, “It would not be difficult to arrange [the psalms] according to the Lord’s Prayer and to show how the Psalter is totally absorbed in the prayer of Jesus.”⁷⁷

The Collects

The Collects presented below all have explicit references to desire or *affection*:

The Collect of the Day/Collects for the Church Year

- Fifth Sunday in Lent: “Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that...our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found.”⁷⁸
- Sixth Sunday of Easter: “Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, *which exceed all that we can desire*...”⁷⁹
- Proper 9: “Grant us the grace of thy Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to thee with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection...”⁸⁰

Collects

- *A Collect for the Renewal of Life* (at Morning Prayer): “drive far from us all *wrong desires*. Incline our hearts to keep thy law, and guide our feet in the way of peace...”⁸¹
- *A Collect for Peace* (at Evening Prayer): One of the original “fixed collects”—“O God, from whom *all holy desires*, all good counsels, and all just works do proceeds”⁸²

⁷⁵ BCP, 97, 121; 54, 67. The Lord’s Prayer is also present in “An Order of Service for Noonday” (pp.103-107) and “An Order for Compline” (pp. 127-135) on pp. 106 and 132, respectively. This paper sees these two parts of the Office, though beneficial, as optional.

⁷⁶ BCP, 364; 336.

⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 27.

⁷⁸ BCP, 219; 167.

⁷⁹ BCP, 255 (emphasis added); 174.

⁸⁰ BCP, 231; 179.

⁸¹ BCP, 56 (emphasis added); 99.

⁸² BCP, 69 (emphasis added); the Rite II version of this collect reads, “the source of all good desires,” 123. In my opinion, in changing “holy” desires to “good” desires misses the aim of the affective language.

- “that our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments”
- *A Collect for the Presence of Christ* (at Evening Prayer): Based on the account in Luke’s gospel of the disciples’ encounter with the risen Jesus on the Road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35)—“...kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread”⁸³

It is after the reading of the Collects and one of the “prayers for mission” that the rubrics for Morning and Evening Prayer state, “here...authorized intercessions and thanksgivings may follow.”⁸⁴ This is an invitation for silence, for the contemplative to become an explicit part of the liturgy.⁸⁵

The General Thanksgiving

- “We give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to [all whom you have made]”⁸⁶
- “That our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful.”⁸⁷

A Prayer of Saint Chrysostom

- “Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them.”⁸⁸

Holy Eucharist

Though addressed in this paper after the Office, it could have also been addressed before. As “eighth-day” people,⁸⁹ we can say that the week begins *and ends* with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, called “The liturgy for the Proclamation of the Word of God and the Celebration

⁸³ BCP, 124; 70.

⁸⁴ BCP, 58, 71, 101, 125.

⁸⁵ This may contradict Thornton’s belief that “private devotion,” which I have included Coakley’s contemplative prayer as a part of, is necessarily something “the soul pursues in private, and, in the purely physical sense, alone” (Martin Thornton, *Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation* (London: SPCK, 1958), 226).

⁸⁶ BCP, 99.

⁸⁷ BCP, 59.

⁸⁸ BCP, 72; Rite II version on 102. As noted by Marion Hatchett, by “expedient” is meant “profitable,” as is made clearer in the modern rendering “as may be best for us,” (see Hatchett, *Commentary*, 131).

⁸⁹ Sunday, also being the first day. The “eighth day” denotes redemption, resurrection, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and new creation whilst recognizing that we are in the time between the advents of Christ, the eschatological “already and the not yet” bidding faithful endurance.

of Holy Communion”⁹⁰ For Prayer Book liturgical ascetics, this is the simultaneous beginning and end of the weekly “monastic pattern.” It is good that the week begins *and* ends with this, as we are faced expressly with the desires *of Christ*. Jesus says to the disciples at the Last Supper in Luke’s gospel, “*With desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*” (Luke 22:15 AV, emphasis added).⁹¹ The Eucharist is “the climax of longing in worship.”⁹² It is a truly *vulnerable* act wherein, receiving or communicating, we express our desire to know him and be known by him. We are communally united *to Christ by Christ*. We do this also made vulnerable in the liminality of sacred time (the “eighth day”). It is not only a vulnerable act on the part of the communicants but on Christ’s also. In the words of institution or consecration, the words of Jesus at the Last Supper remind us that “it is at the moment before death that Christ longed most to give his body to his disciples,” and we are continually made witnesses of the “intensification of his desire as he faces his own mortality.”⁹³

Dom Gregory Dix, whose liturgical scholarship had an enormous impact on Prayer Book revision across the Anglican Communion since his *The Shape of the Liturgy* was published in 1945, specifically pointed out Anglicanism’s long-held emphasis on the Eucharist as “Holy Communion” in an “individualistic sense.”⁹⁴ In the twentieth century, the emphasis shifted from

⁹⁰ BCP, 315.

⁹¹ Gk. “πιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα τοῦτο τὸ πάσχα φαγεῖν μεθ’ ὑμῶν πρὸ τοῦ με παθεῖν.” In particular the words “πιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα” (*epithymia epethymēsa*). Or NKJV: “With *ferve*nt desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (emphasis original, indicating word not present in the Gk. text); NEB/REB: “How I have *longed* to eat this Passover with you before my death!” (emphasis added).

⁹² Sarah Coakley, “Christian Worship and Desire in the Anglican Tradition: Why this Matters in Contemporary Church and Culture” (7th Annual Lecture of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, 20 October, 2022).

⁹³ Sarah Coakley, “A Theology of Desire” (Lecture at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, 1 November, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxkHBKM4hMQ>, 40:04-40:44).

⁹⁴ William R. Crockett, “Holy Communion” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, 318. A result, Crockett writes, of the penitential character of Cranmer’s rites. A more “conservative” approach to the Prayer Book, represented by Ephraim Radner claims that though the revised rites “articulate other scripturally-based assertions” or “doctrinal foci,” the “dilution of the penitential character” in the ’79 Prayer Book has rendered the newer liturgies “dispassionate” (Ephraim Radner, “Apprehending the Truth: Anglican Conservatism and Common Discernment” in *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 84-85). This may be a matter of “aesthetics” more so than *ascetics*.

the Eucharist being not only an act of personal communion to a “corporate community celebration in which all the participants are built up into communion with Christ and with one another in the body of Christ.”⁹⁵ This is the emphasis of the Eucharistic liturgies of the ’79 BCP.

The Celebrant begins the Eucharistic liturgy with what is traditionally called *the Collect for Purity*:

- “Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name...”⁹⁶

In Rite I, when including the *Decalogue*, after the Celebrant reads a commandment, the people respond, “Lord, have mercy upon us, *and incline our hearts to keep this law.*”⁹⁷ The Celebrant may follow the *Decalogue* with the *Summary of the Law*. In Rite II this is taken expressly from Mark’s gospel which includes the command to love⁹⁸ God “all your

⁹⁵ Crockett, “Holy Communion,” 18. David Cunningham writes, “Especially in those traditions that speak of a ‘real presence’ of Christ in the elements, we are presented with the image of a body inhabiting the body of the other; we take Christ’s body into ours and in this act become the Body of Christ. The Eucharist has thus been important for a wide variety of mystical theologians who have used the language of ‘inhabitation’ to describe both God’s presence in us and ours in God. God is our dwelling place (Ps. 90) but we also speak of ‘inviting God into’ our hearts and souls, and of our bodies as ‘a temple of the Holy Spirit.’ Many Eucharistic rites make use of this language of mutual participation; here, we pray that through our participation in the body and the blood, God may evermore dwell in us and we in God.” (David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, 183). This fits into Coakley’s vision of or emphasis on *incorporation* and that incorporation as *pneumatological* (See Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 87; 129n33).

⁹⁶ BCP, 355; 323.

⁹⁷ BCP, 317-318. This language of the heart is absent in the Rite II version (See p. 350). In the Prayer Book, the rubrics for the *Penitential Order* (pp. 319-321; 351-353), when they are used to begin the service, exclude of *the Collect for Purity* and thus the explicit reference to our desires. In my mind this is better in the Rite I liturgy if the *Exhortation* is used (BCP, 316-317) at the opening of the *Penitential Order*—with references to the people’s “beloved[ness] in the Lord,” God’s “great love” for all people, and this great phrase of *incorporation* that we are “made one body in [Christ]” and *also* “members one of another” and made “children of God by the power of the Holy Spirit” (316)—though not ideal. In the Rubric for Rite I, this may also be used at the *Confession of Sin*, which may be beneficial to emphasize certain themes, for example the “dignifying” aspect of receiving the sacrament and also self-examination and preparation.

⁹⁸ It should be noted that in the Gk. text, this love is *agape*, though we may expand that love to include *eros*.

heart...soul...mind...*strength*” (Mk. 12:29-31) whereas in Rite I it is taken from Matthew’s Gospel which excludes “strength.”⁹⁹

Prayers of the People

- Rite I: “with meek heart and due reverence they may hear and receive thy holy word”¹⁰⁰

Confession of Sin

- Rite I: the invitation “ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and do intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in His holy ways, draw near with faith.”¹⁰¹
- Rite I: “We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us”¹⁰²
- Rite I: “those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him”¹⁰³

Then follows *The Peace*, in which, being refreshed by the forgiveness of God in Christ we offer the peace of Christ to the other, claiming *as our heart’s desire* reconciliation with our neighbor—our siblings in Christ.

The Sursum Corda

- “lift up your hearts,” and the response, “we lift them to the Lord”¹⁰⁴

In Eucharistic Prayer D, at *the Recitation of Salvation History*

- “In your mercy you came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you.”¹⁰⁵ This speaks to the aspiring element, the seeking

The Offering or Oblation

Notice the theme of the *anticipation* of consummation:

⁹⁹ BCP 351; 319. The inclusion of “strength” in Marks gospel emphasizes how we love God with our whole embodied selves. If referencing Deut. 6:5, in Heb. the commandment has מְאֹד (*me’od*), has been rendered “strength”; in LXX this is translated δυνάμις (*dunamis*), denoting *physical* action. The Gk. texts of Mark and Luke use forms of the word ἰσχύς (*ischus*) as a synonym denoting *ability*.

¹⁰⁰ BCP, 329.

¹⁰¹ BCP, 330. See Sarah Coakley, “Living Prayer and Leadership,” By Jason Byassee. *Faith and Leadership*, August 17, 2009, <https://faithandleadership.com/sarah-coakley-living-prayer-and-leadership>.

¹⁰² BCP, 331.

¹⁰³ BCP, 332.

¹⁰⁴ BCP, 333, 340, 361, 367, 370, 372, 402, 404.

¹⁰⁵ BCP 373.

- Rite I: “We earnestly desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”¹⁰⁶
- Rite I: “we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies.”¹⁰⁷
- Rite I: “made one body with him, that he may dwell in us and we in him”¹⁰⁸
- Rite II: Eucharistic Prayer A - “And at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom”¹⁰⁹

The Lord’s Prayer

Everything that was said about the Lord’s Prayer above persists within the context of the Holy Eucharist but is now placed within the framing sentence: “And now, as our savior Christ has taught us, *we are bold* to say...”¹¹⁰

The Prayer of Humble Access

Notice the themes of incorporation and consummation:

- “...That we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us”¹¹¹

The Invitation

- “and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving”¹¹² the climax of our thanksgiving, binding us together

Postcommunion Prayer

Consummation:

- Rite I: “We most heartily thank thee for that thou dost feed us...”¹¹³
- Rite I: “...that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son”; Rite II: “You have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ”; “...assuring us in these holy mysteries that we are living members of the Body of your Son, and heirs of your eternal kingdom.”¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ BCP, 335. Also present in Eucharistic Prayer II, 342. The form in the 1662 Prayer Book, “we your servants *entirely desire* your fatherly goodness mercifully to accept...” (OWC, 403). This echoes the language of Jesus in Lk. 22 mentioned above, as many English translations render Jesus’ word in v. 15 “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.” It is worthy of note that in the current liturgy it is placed before the people “communicate” while it was traditionally spoken after. Considering the affective trajectory, I am more inclined to see this placed before.

¹⁰⁷ BCP, 336, 342.

¹⁰⁸ BCP, 336.

¹⁰⁹ BCP, 363

¹¹⁰ BCP, 343.

¹¹¹ BCP, 337.

¹¹² BCP, 365.

¹¹³ BCP, 339.

¹¹⁴ BCP, 339; 365-366.

- Rite I: “so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, *and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in*”; Rite II: “send us now into the world in peace, and *grant us strength and courage* to love and serve you with *gladness and singleness of heart* through Christ our Lord.”¹¹⁵

The Blessing

- Rite I: “keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God”¹¹⁶

As is made evident by this exploration of the Office and Holy Eucharist, when communities commit themselves to the practice of liturgical asceticism via the Prayer Book, they become immersed in an integrated daily order and practice aimed at transforming their hearts and, in turn, their desire. In this monastic pattern of confession, the recitation of the *prayers*, the reading of the *collects*, and the moment of Holy Eucharist, one sees that praying the Prayer Book—a life of “common prayer”—moves us in a common trajectory of the heart. The Prayer Book liturgical ascetic is placed within a context where the exploration or discernment of divine desire through contemplative prayer, an act of “private devotion,” is not stifled or suppressed but is supported.¹¹⁷

PART THREE: MATTERS OF COMMUNION

“What is Anglican?”

Having described how desire is expressed in the liturgies of the monastic pattern, it is necessary to turn to the matters of *communion*. The end of “common prayer” is that “desire of the desire of the other” toward “eucharistic interrelation.” Eucharistic interrelation, those relations defined by thanksgiving and seeing the other more and more as “thankworthy,” is

¹¹⁵ BCP, 339 (emphasis added); 365 (emphasis added). Also, note the reality of grace present: God is the one who enables. The alternative prayer does not emphasize this as much, more so the “sending,” 336.

¹¹⁶ BCP, 339.

¹¹⁷ The denouncement of the contemplative act entirely would be, in my mind, “quenching of the Spirit” (1 Thes. 5:19-22).

communion. If Anglicans claim to be in communion with one another, then that communion must be recognized as a grace of God, a gift that oughtn't to be taken for granted.

As a first matter of communion, I feel it vital to again consider what is *Anglican*. Coakley herself makes a distinction between “Episcopalian” as American Anglicanism and “Anglicanism” as English. As an established church, the Church of England, by its very nature, exists in contrast to American religion or Protestant Christianity in America, which persists in a more competitive religious economy.¹¹⁸ This is a fair distinction. However, I hold that it is more important now than ever that Episcopalians *do* claim their identity as Anglicans. For a church to be Anglican, in part, is for them, to use Pierre Whalon’s phrase, to be a “people of two books,”¹¹⁹ namely Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer.

It should be stated that while what has been presented is an Anglican/Episcopal theology—and from someone who has chosen the Episcopal Church in the United States (ECUSA) as a “spiritual” and “denominational home”—my intention for this paper is that it may *also* excavate insights for the churches broadly. Indeed, Coakley views “the absolute centrality granted to the practice of prayer” in her own theologizing as something “Anglican,”¹²⁰ and if that is the case, then it seems to me this “Anglican” core or tenet ought to be widely applied.

The Obligation of Daily Recitation

In our secular age, it is, perhaps, even more imperative that Episcopal congregations share the act of daily “common prayer” together. Daily recitation is not something left to “clerics” but is *especially* the exercise of the laity. For Anglicans/Episcopalians, to pray

¹¹⁸ “Science, Pastoral Ministry, and Systematic Vision: An Interview with Sarah Coakley, Part Two,” *Interface*, August 25, 2021, <https://www.regentinterface.com/resource/science-pastoral-ministry-and-systematic-vision-an-interview-with-sarah-coakley-part-two/>.

¹¹⁹ Pierre W. Whalon, “The Future of Common Prayer,” in *The Oxford Guide*, 551.

¹²⁰ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, xiii.

“monastically,” in a manner similar to Paul’s call on the Church in Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) is a duty or habit existing for *all*, “cleric and lay.” Coakley, writing about the situation in England, writes: “The loss of disciplined clerical prayer in a busy age is fatal; for the priest, for the priest’s people, for ecumenical relations, and even for national life.”¹²¹ Coakley makes this solemn pronouncement, of course, within the context of being in an “established” or the national church in England. Being embedded within the religious economy of the United States, it perhaps does not seem so fatal an absence for the Episcopal Church. However, as much as it is “our bounden duty and service” that we should “at all times and in all places” render thanks to God in all things,¹²² the concerns Coakley raises for the Church of England are to be shared. The Church in the United States needs as much ecclesial imagination for thriving communal life—at the parish level, the denominational level, in ecumenism, and for the uplift of the nation—as does the Church in England.

The Office is meant to be said *together*. This is why the language of liturgical prayer is in the plural.¹²³ The ’79 American Prayer book more readily provides for lay people to lead Morning or Evening Prayer, naming the leader an “officiant” rather than a “minister.” Recognizing the near impossibility of daily communal recitation for most, even back in the mid-twentieth century in England, Fr. Martin Thornton named those people who commit to this daily

¹²¹ Coakley, Introduction to *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley (England: Continuum, 2008), 9. In the Church of England, clergy under Canon C 26, are obligated to say daily Morning and Evening Prayer in “the manner of life of clerks in Holy Orders.” For an exploration of this obligation see Russell Dewhurst, “‘Seven Whole Days’: The Obligation of the Clergy of the Church of England to ‘Say Daily the Morning and Evening Prayer,’” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 24, no. 1 (January 2022): 14–24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0956618x21000673>.

¹²² BCP, 336, 333, 836.

¹²³ Being incorporated into the one body of Christ, we are never isolated in our prayer. This is what makes prayer “common.”

act together “the remnant,”¹²⁴ those *together* regularly interceding for not only their parish church but for the Church *catholic*. They are the center, the beating heart of their congregations. Their vicarious prayer—through Office, Eucharist, and “Private Devotion”—is a creative channel of grace in the world. This is the calling of the Prayer Book Liturgical Ascetic, who recognizes the efficacy of “common prayer.”

Daily Eucharistic celebration has never been the norm in the Anglican Communion, but from the Prayer Book of 1552 on to the 1662 Prayer Book, there was a rubric present that reads, “All Priests and Deacons are to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer either privately or openly, not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause”¹²⁵ However, this rubric was taken out of the first American Prayer Book. One of the results of this is that it is rare to find parishes in the United States that have daily services for Morning and/or Evening Prayer. There is a lack of survey data pertaining to the spiritual practices of Episcopal clergy, so the degree to which daily recitation of the Office is upheld. Though, in the Rites for Ordination Priests, they vow to “be diligent in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures,”¹²⁶ there is no explicit canonical or rubrical obligation to say the Daily Office daily. An argument for it, then, must be made—alongside the rest of the argument of this paper—on precedent, on *tradition*. The lay recitation of the Office, according to Thornton, is a “pastoral principle,”¹²⁷ helping to bring the parish together in prayer.

¹²⁴ This is a concept rooted in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. For a discussion of the “remnant concept” and the Book of Common Prayer see “Ascetical System and the Book of Common Prayer” in *Feed My Lambs: Essays in Pastoral Reconstruction* (Greenwich, CN., Seabury Press, 1961), 48-59.

¹²⁵ OWC, 214. It is interesting to note that the 1552 Prayer Book presented other specific “causes”: “except they be letted [prevented] by *preaching, studying of divinity*, or by some other urgent cause” (Hatchett, *Commentary*, 586 (emphasis added)).

¹²⁶ BCP, 532.

¹²⁷ Thornton, *Feed My Lambs*, 54.

Thornton wrote and Coakley echoes how the Office should be given priority over other parish business, Coakley specifically emphasizing the “public witness” of such prioritization.¹²⁸ The major problem is logistical. Although unideal, the Office can be, and invariably is, recited privately. With this, the Prayer Book liturgical ascetic must by grace maintain the ecclesial imagination and trust that there is never a time when Anglicans/Episcopalians are not at prayer or in worship and that *together* our desires might be becoming increasingly more shaped in the image of God’s own.

The “Liturgical Fidget”

Revision of the ’79 Book of Common Prayer may not occur for a long time.¹²⁹ As it does occur, however, revision ought to be conducted *unhastily*. Revision must be sensitive to the “prejudices” of worshiping communities, concerned for their practice and theological or spiritual understanding without abandoning the end of reform, as reform for the church has never simply been “improvement” but more so *(re)alignment*. Revision itself should be a process undertaken “ascetically.”

The term “liturgical fidget” comes from C.S. Lewis’ first letter to his nephew Malcolm, where he decries the “incessant brightenings, lightnings, lengthenings, abridgments, simplifications, and complications of the service” by Anglican clergy.¹³⁰ While Lewis rather hyperbolically announces that “there is no subject in the world...on which [he had] less to say than liturgiology,” what he did say is significant and worth addressing.¹³¹ For those tasked with

¹²⁸ Thornton, *Pastoral Theology*, 252; Coakley, *Praying for England*, 8.

¹²⁹ The ’79 BCP has been “memorialized” by the General Convention as of 2018 with Resolution 2018-A068. This, as expressed by the Task Force on Liturgical & Prayer Book Revision’s explanation of the proposed resolution A059 to the 80th General Convention, marks an attempt “to shift the Church’s awareness that contemporary and future methods of publication may not be restricted to the form of a book. What General Convention adopts as a prayer book is not a form of publication (a book) but rather *the content*, i.e., the text of the liturgies” (The Episcopal Church, *Reports to the 80th General Convention Otherwise known as The Blue Book*, Vol. 2, 650 (emphasis added)).

¹³⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly on Prayer* (London: Geoffrey Bles LTD, 1964), 12.

¹³¹ Lewis, *Letters to Malcom*, 12.

Prayer Book revision, it is imperative that they are aware of the ways that the Prayer Book as an integrated ascetical system addresses our desire, directs it, and entrusts it to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. If revision inherently denies permanence and uniformity, it, at the very least, ought to recognize the power of habit and aspire to unity in form or pattern—in other words, “*common* prayer.” One should be able to fall into and find rest in the liturgies of “common prayer,” especially, as highlighted here, in the prayers spoken. These prayers, rather than becoming rote in the negative sense (thoughtless, disengaged, disembodied), should become deeply ingrained in one’s being (heart, mind, soul, and strength).

This is where the word “fidget,” in particular, fits well, as it expresses an impatience and unfamiliarity with its subject, a discomfort and nervousness, when what is asked of us is discerning stillness. It is with this that Thornton’s words resonate: “...the only authority behind local liturgical experiment is the local worshipping community...changes and deviations arise with the *progress* of the *active* and *actual* local Church bound together into a fundamental loyalty of service: to put it bluntly, of the Remnant.”¹³² Liturgical revision of the Book of Common Prayer should empower those who *live* by it and are actively *transformed* through it, those I call Prayer Book Liturgical Ascetics, but especially *the laity*. Thornton described this group as “typified by purity in worship and loyalty in faith.”¹³³ These are the pure in heart learning more and more to “desire the desire of the other.”

The preface to the Book of Common Prayer, written in 1789 and printed in all subsequent versions of the American Prayer Book, states, “It is a most invaluable part of that blessed ‘liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,’ that in his worship different forms and usages may without

¹³² Thornton, *Feed My Lambs*, 51.

¹³³ Thornton, *Pastoral Theology*, 22.

offence be allowed *provided the substance of the Faith be kept entire*.”¹³⁴ What is the substance of faith? By my account, that is well summarized by the author of Hebrews: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1 AV).¹³⁵ Clarence Jordan’s rendering of this verse, though interpretive, is helpful here: “faith is the *activation of our aspirations*, the life based on unseen realities. It is conviction translated into deeds. In short, it is the word become flesh.”¹³⁶ “The activation of our aspirations” encapsulates the knowledge of and attending to our basest desire for God amid discerning God’s own desire. Whether it is “assurance,” “evidence,” or “conviction,” it is the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, individually and communally; it is the way of being, of life “enfleshed;” it is “holy desires,” “good counsels,” “just works.” For the Prayer Book Liturgical Ascetic—*loyal* in “common prayer,” being made ever more aware of the dynamics of desire at play—it is life “in Christ,” as it says in *The Collect for Peace* at Morning Prayer, “whose service is perfect freedom.”¹³⁷

The preface goes on to say that the liturgies, “*by common consent and authority*, may be altered, abridged, enlarged, amended *or otherwise disposed of* as may seem most convenient for the edification of the people.”¹³⁸ The ideal, perhaps, is that they might be “disposed of” and that ordinary (or, to use the word in a different manner, “common”) people might become so disciplined, so shaped by the monastic pattern that the liturgies become second nature, the people “entranced in a seamless flow of offering and receiving love and mercy.”¹³⁹ If ever this aim is lost *because of* the liturgical prayers of the Prayer Book and a proposal such as mine attempting

¹³⁴ BCP, 9

¹³⁵ Or NRSV: “the *assurance* of things hoped for, the *conviction* of things not seen.”

¹³⁶ Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith, and Other Cotton Patch Sermons* (New York: Association Press, 1972), 43 (emphasis added).

¹³⁷ BCP, 57; 99.

¹³⁸ BCP, 9.

¹³⁹ Samuel Wells, *God’s Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 11.

to reorient Anglicans/Episcopalians to it remains unmoving, the Prayer Book ought to be abandoned.

CONCLUSION

If the Prayer Book were to be abandoned, would those Christians, previously “people of two books,” then cease to be “Anglican”? It must be re-emphasized that “common prayer” for Anglicans has been *mediated* through the Prayer Book; it is not the Prayer Book itself. “Common prayer” is that pattern of Christian prayer—of confession, repentance, adoration, supplication, intercession, etc.—that can be done communally or individually, yet still *in common* or together. This is the kind of prayer that may more fully account for her ascetical project of desire and opens it up beyond the Prayer Book itself. However, my conviction still is that the liturgical prayers of the Prayer Book are still rich, hopeful, and needed resource for the Anglican Communion.

It is appropriate now to summarize the course of this paper. In part one, having identified Sarah Coakley’s theological retrieval of desire as being especially pertinent to the discussion of Anglican identity, I pushed back her “the primacy of contemplation” in favor of making *liturgical prayer* via the Book of Common Prayer preeminent to come properly alongside the contemplative ascetical exploration of divine desire and ascetical shaping of our own desires. Anchored in the *Collect for Peace*, I named the *gifts* of “common prayer”—the pattern of life lived by the Prayer Book—as penultimately “good counsels” (purposeful resolutions) and “just works” and ultimately “holy desires,” reflective of God’s own.

In part two, I provided a lexical “tour” of desire in the liturgical prayers of the Daily Office and Holy Eucharist. I marked how the Daily Office in particular through the Psalter is a service of “recollection” or “recapitulation” and as Coakley writes, acts as “a fundamental

anchor...spread[ing] out into further personal prayer and intercession for the parish”¹⁴⁰ and how, as it pertains to desire, the Holy Eucharist, being on the eighth day, in sacred time, acts as a paradoxically anticipatory and consummatory element in the monastic pattern.

In part three, I noted broadly what it means to be Anglican, emphasizing the importance for Episcopalians of claiming their Anglican identity as “people of two books” and highlighted elements from past Anglican practice that may benefit us in the ascetical project of the transformation of our desires—most notably the obligation and prioritization of daily, communal, and/or public recitation of the Office. I also warned against the impulses of Lewis’s “liturgical fidget” in Prayer Book revision, pointing again to the integrated whole of the monastic pattern as experienced by Martin Thornton’s “remnant.” Their experience of truly *living “in Christ” by the Prayer Book* is most credible concerning input into liturgical revision.

The intention of this paper is to reflect on how desire is addressed, directed, and entrusted to transformation by the Holy Spirit in the monastic pattern of Eucharist and Office. What we find is the desire *is* overwhelmingly addressed and ultimately directed to its divine source. When it comes to the act of *entrusting* our desires, this is, ultimately, for those committed to “common prayer” to do themselves, empowered to “make space” for God as Christ did and continues to do in the perichoretic life of the Trinity.

Returning to the theologian’s angle of “beginning in the middle of things,” while this understanding of the Prayer Book may not be so expressly held in my own parish context, from many private conversations, what has been expressed to me is a deep admiration for the prayer book and hints of how “common prayer” has shaped them and their desires. This project is for

¹⁴⁰ Coakley, Introduction to *Praying for England*, 8. And I would add, certainly, intercession for the world.

them and other Episcopalians who sense those deeper dynamics of desire working through the Prayer Book's demanding ascetical vision of life in "common prayer."

APPENDIX I. HONORS RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM PRESENTATION

Panel Title: “Loving the Other: Working Towards Flourishing Community”

This panel explores the complex intersections of sexuality, gender, spirituality/religiosity, identity, and community. We hold in tandem the division that manifests through our language and identity-based biases with the ever-present hope of connection despite such estrangement. Through Psychology, Theology, and Performing Arts, we aim to identify pathways for re-centering and empowering marginalized voices, reconciling diverse communities, and representing narratives toward transformation, wholeness, and the flourishing of all. [Orally presented May 18th, 2024].

Symposium Script

Introduction

The Anglican Communion—the worldwide body of Anglican churches—is currently divided over concerns of gender, sex, and human sexuality, and these are at the forefront of the conversation of Anglican identity. But should they be? "Anglican" has always been a contested term theologically. Its most basic definition would be "English" or "of the Church of England." It also refers to those churches who trace their *origins* to the Church of England and, moreover, are "in communion" with it. As an expression of Anglicanism, the Episcopal Church holds that it is a "big" or "broad tent" church ideally able to honestly hold people of diverse theological viewpoints while committed to worshipping together through the Book of Common Prayer.

For those unfamiliar, the Book of Common Prayer is a compendium of liturgies initially compiled in 1549 for the Church of England, a project led by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, and further edited in 1552. This project primarily focuses on the 1979

American Prayer Book. Where other Christian denominations are united by a particular theology, a catechism, or perhaps a figure of Church history, Anglicans have the Prayer Book and are united by "common prayer." To engage in "common prayer" is to be disciplined in a particular way. When I say that Anglicans are united by "common prayer," I am making a distinction between "common prayer" as a concept and the *Book of Common Prayer* as "the Prayer Book." In my usage, "common prayer" is the life of Christian prayer—of confession, repentance, adoration, supplication, intercession, etc., that is done individually *and* communally yet always in common—that is, *together*. The life of "common prayer" for Anglicans is mediated through the Prayer Book and its liturgies.

Anglicans are a "people of two books,"¹⁴¹ namely Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer. It is more important than ever for Episcopalians to claim their identity as Anglicans in this respect. Church of England priest-theologian Sarah Coakley articulates well that "the task for the Anglican Communion today is, at its deepest level, theological *and spiritual*: not merely to reconsider its subtle and distinctive heritage regarding scripture, tradition, and 'reason,' but to re-enliven its demanding vision of the devout life."¹⁴² I believe the Book of Common Prayer must play an indispensable role in this task and be brought back to the forefront of the conversation of Anglican identity, though in a particular way.

"An Anglican-Episcopal Theology of Desire"

My exploration of this subject began with the work of Sarah Coakley, specifically her book on Trinitarian theology, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*. Coakley's project involves a retrieval and a reiteration of a theology of desire, and by desire, she means *erotic* desire. Hearing the word

¹⁴¹ Pierre W. Whalon, "The Future of Common Prayer," in *The Oxford Guide*, 551.

¹⁴² Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 143.

erotic, we must think first of the Greek word *eros*, one of the several Greek words for *love*, and—though this may be a challenge—we must think of it as something inherently good. *Eros* is fundamentally the "seeking," "longing," "aspiring," "ascending," and "receptive" aspect of love. We must not be tempted to hold a shallow, commodified understanding of erotic desire.

Coakley makes the distinction between human desire and *divine* desire. She emphasizes that God *is a desiring God* and that we, as human beings made in God's image, are desiring selves whose basest desire is for God. This desire for God reflects God's own desire for creation. Her retrieval of desire largely relies upon the insights of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, who wrote about the *intensification* of desire, saying that the soul must "boil in love [in Gk. *erotikos*], but only in the Spirit."¹⁴³ In prayer, desire is "aroused," and one is given permission to be lost in desire, but again, "in the Spirit," so that it is reordered or reoriented toward God. The work of the Holy Spirit transforming our desires occurs over a lifetime.

This must occur for, as Coakley states, desire "lies crucially at the intersection of human sin and salvation." Here I'll turn to the Prayer Book:

O GOD, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed: give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*¹⁴⁴

This is what was traditionally the second Collect—a formal prayer that is used liturgically to gather the intentions of the ecclesial gathered—recited at Evening Prayer. It is "a Collect for Peace." It has been a part of the Daily Office since the original Prayer Book of 1549. This collect used to be "fixed" in the liturgical rubric for Evening Prayer "daily said...without

¹⁴³ Richard A. Norris, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs, translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2012), 29.

¹⁴⁴ BCP, 69.

alteration."¹⁴⁵ This is no longer the case, though it should be. My project is centered in the "preamble" of this Collect: "O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works do proceed..." Implicitly acknowledged is that there is a dichotomy of desire: holy desires and unholy desires. What does it mean for these desires to be holy? It is to say that they are pure, without sin, 'set apart.' At Morning Prayer, the line from Psalm 96 is recited, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." The beauty of holiness is that *it is God's*. Holy desires *are God's desires*. As the great commentator on the '79 Prayer Book Marion Hatchett noted, this collect tells us something about the operating of God's grace. God is the one, he writes, who "kindles holy desires, transforms them into purposeful resolutions and finally brings them to fruition in works of justice."¹⁴⁶

"*Holy Desires*," "*Good Counsels*," "*Just works*"—these are the *ends* of "common prayer", only realized by grace. The ends of "common prayer" are interpersonal. In my understanding of the three ends, I believe "good counsels" and "just works" to be *penultimate* but holy desires to be *ultimate*. Via Rowan Williams, one manner of conceiving holy desire is "purity of heart," which he describes as the "desire not to stop desiring."¹⁴⁷ It does not stop desiring because it "desires the desire of the other" and does so toward "eucharistic interrelation," or relations defined by thanksgiving.¹⁴⁸ In this, one sees the other—divine and created—more and more as *thankworthy*. And this is what we call communion.

Coakley's ascetic vision, in my mind, is the most compelling proposal for how to more transformatively address the concerns of the Anglican Communion and bring the church to a

¹⁴⁵ OWC, 16.

¹⁴⁶ Marion Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 142.

¹⁴⁷ Rowan Williams, *Passions of the Soul* (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2024), 61.

¹⁴⁸ Rowan Williams, *Looking East in Winter: Contemporary Thought and the Eastern Christian Tradition* (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2021), 54.

greater place of unity and a sense of belonging for those within it. However, there is a stumbling block in that her project is centered around contemplative or silent prayer. Now, contemplative prayer is good and is necessarily highlighted by Coakley, but she makes it primary, sidelining the kind that unites all Anglicans: liturgical prayer. In this, Coakley's ascetic theology unintentionally tends towards *individualization* and *interiorization*. But, as she has written, "liturgy is... not an 'affective' complement to intellectual reflection but rather the means of a full integration of all aspects of embodied selfhood in the life of Christ."¹⁴⁹ We need the liturgical to buttress the contemplative and move beyond mere individualization and interiorization; we need the Book of Common Prayer. More so, we need the life that it mediates. This is what I call "Prayer Book liturgical asceticism." Let me break that down:

"Prayer Book Liturgical Asceticism."

First, "asceticism." "Asceticism" most basically means "training" or "discipline." As related to desire, we must all go through the demanding ascetical process of having our desires "trained," "chastened," or "aligned." *Liturgical Asceticism*, then, sees those ends as accomplished through liturgy and liturgical prayer. The Prayer Book is ascetic. In being ascetic, the Prayer Book renders asceticism as something "common"—available to all people and that can be done "together." While demanding, asceticism does not need to be *severe*.

The Prayer Book is what 20th Century Anglican Priest Martin Thornton described as an "integrated ascetical system." When Thornton wrote this, he was writing about the 1662 English Book, the "official" Prayer Book in the Church of England. This applies to the '79 American Book as well. The integral parts of this ascetical system are what I refer to as the "monastic

¹⁴⁹ Sarah Coakley, "Beyond 'Belief': Liturgy and the Cognitive Apprehension of God," in *The Vocation of Theology for Today: A Festschrift for David Ford* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 144.

pattern." This pattern begins with Holy Eucharist, then moves onto The Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer, and includes what Thornton labeled "personal devotion." "Personal devotion," in my mind, includes Coakley's vision of contemplative prayer. "The contemplative" fundamentally is one who turns their mind intently toward God with the aim of habitual union with God.

The Eucharist and the Office are *liturgies*, orders for worship, or *forms*. These liturgies, the work of human beings, hopefully train desire and enlarge it within us, and in doing so, accomplish the work of God. In large part, this occurs through liturgical *prayer*. *Liturgical* prayer is speech *disciplined* by the saints and "given over" to God. Those who live by the Prayer Book entrust their prayer and the shaping of their desires in part to Thomas Cranmer, the other compilers of the first Prayer Books, and their successors. Liturgical prayers have gone through a process of "chastening" or "alignment" through the church's enactment of its liturgies and its proceeding theological reflection. Having gone through that process, they can effectively contribute to the ascetical shaping of our desires. These forms, rooted in the witness of Holy Scripture, *disciple* us. The Church disciple others in the way of prayer by how it prays. This is the pastoral principle of *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi*—so we pray, so we believe, so we live.

A "Tour of Desire"

In the paper, I provide a detailed "tour of desire" in the prayers of the Daily Office and Holy Eucharist, showing how the liturgies of the Prayer Book address our desire, direct it, and entrust it to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. I unfortunately do not have enough time to do these liturgies justice here, but I will briefly touch on both.

The liturgies of Morning and Evening Prayer are those that Prayer Book Liturgical Ascetics encounter most frequently. The heart of the Daily Office is the habitual *recollection* and *recapitulation* of salvation history. This is done through the reading of scripture, in the prayers and collects, but especially in the praying of the Psalter. The sensitive language of the psalmists encapsulates the full extent of human emotion “in the Spirit.” When all 150 psalms are read every thirty days, it is especially effective for the ascetical project, even and perhaps especially when the language of the psalms we recite contains dissonances with our current experience. Desire is a multivalent concept in the Psalter evoked in moments of “longing,” “seeking,” “thirsting,” and “satisfaction.” Desire is also addressed in the language of the heart, think Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” or Psalm 73, “Though my flesh and my heart should waste away, God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

At the Eucharist, we are faced expressly with the desires *of Christ*. In St. Luke’s gospel, Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper, “*With desire, I have desired* to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15 AV, emphasis added). The Eucharist is “the climax of longing in worship.” It is a genuinely *vulnerable* act wherein communicating (receiving the elements), we express our desire to know him and be known by him and are communally united *to Christ by Christ*. The Collect for Purity prayed at the beginning of the Eucharistic liturgy expresses well our intention:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ BCP, 323.

We follow this, willingly made vulnerable in the liminality of sacred time (being in what is sometimes called the “eighth day”) and the interplay of *anticipation* and *consummation*, the calling out of the “already and not yet” in the prayers.

Ultimately, what I believe is made evident by my exploration of these liturgies is that when communities commit themselves to liturgical asceticism via the Prayer Book, they become immersed in an integrated daily order and practice aimed at transforming their desires. In the monastic pattern, one sees that praying by these liturgies—a life of “common prayer”—moves them in a common trajectory of the heart. Prayer Book liturgical ascetics are placed within a context where the exploration or discernment of divine desire through contemplative prayer is not stifled or suppressed but is supported.

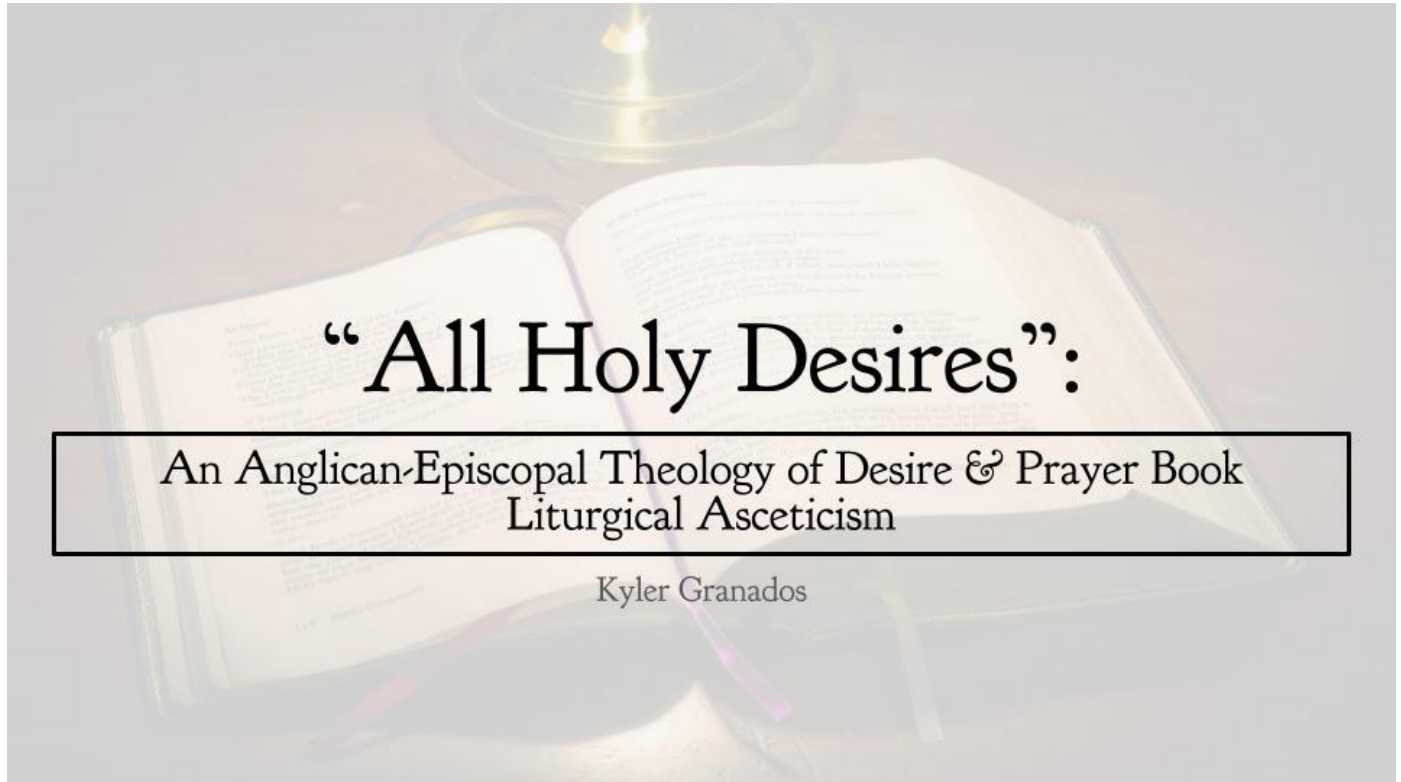
Matters of Communion

You may recognize the Anglican pictured on the right—C. S. Lewis. In the first of his “Letters to Malcolm,” he decried the “liturgical fidgets,” those clergy who are too quick to change the liturgy or adopt new liturgical forms. For those tasked with Prayer Book revision, it must be conducted *unhastily* and done not only with an *awareness* of the ways the Prayer Book is an integrated ascetical system but also with *an intimate familiarity with it*. Thus, I commend the Obligation of Daily Recitation—for both “cleric and laity”—as both voices, though principally that of devoted lay people, should be formative in future revision.

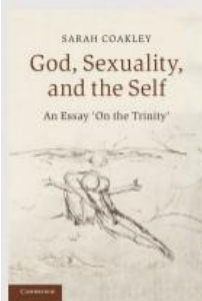
On the left is the flag of the Anglican Communion which has this compass rose signifying its nature as a global movement. At the center is the St. George's Cross and encircling that the New Testament Greek words from St. John's Gospel, “*hē alētheia eleutherōsei hūmās*,” or as rendered in the King James Bible, “The Truth shall make you free” (John 8:32 AV). A truth often neglected is that human desire and longing are good gifts of the grace of God, reflecting

God's image and initiating the upward impulse of human beings toward what is real—the true, the good, and the beautiful. If Anglicans claim to be in communion with one another—again, reasserted as "eucharistic interrelation"—it is because they have been set free or are in the process of becoming freer in Truth to "desire the desire of the other." If this is not the case, it must become our longing and our striving, knowing ultimately that communion is a grace of God given in a life of "common prayer;" to see this realized through the Prayer Book is what makes the communion Anglican.

APPENDIX II. SYMPOSIUM VISUALS



“An Anglican-Episcopal Theology of Desire...”



Anglican: Of the Church of England (CofE) or churches in communion with it (i.e. The Episcopal Church)

“Common prayer”: Life of Christian prayer done *together*

Coakley: Human Desire & *Divine Desire*

BCP: A *Collect for Peace* (at Evening Prayer) · *Holy Desires; Good Counsels; Just Works*

The End of “Common prayer”

- Purity of heart: “A desire not to stop desiring”
- To “Desire the desire of the other”
- Toward “eucharistic interrelation” (*communion*)



“...& Prayer Book Liturgical Asceticism”



Asceticism: from Gk. *askesis* - “Training,” “Discipline”

Prayer Book: The BCP (‘79) · An “Integrated Ascetical System”

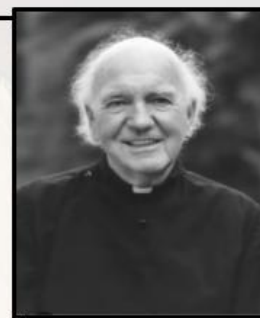
The “Monastic Pattern”

- Holy Eucharist
- The Daily Office
- “Personal Devotion”

Liturgies

Liturgical [Prayer]: Speech disciplined by the Saints & “given over” to God

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi



Matters of Communion



The "Liturgical Fidget"

The Obligation of Daily Recitation

Communion - "Eucharistic interrelation"

- Gk. *hē alētheia eleutherōsei hūmās*: "The Truth shall make you free" (John 8:32 AV)



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