

## Book reviews

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Bryan Spinks, *The Rise and Fall of the Incomparable Liturgy: The Book of Common Prayer, 1559–1906* (London: SPCK, 2017), pp. xi + 198. £19.99/\$24.00.

As he remarks in his short introduction, most studies of the English Prayer Books focus on the work of Thomas Cranmer, but in this present study Bryan Spinks sets out fresh trajectories and takes as its starting point the Elizabethan Settlement and the Prayer Book of 1559. There are cogent and compelling reasons to place a historical marker here as the effective beginning of Anglicanism. Spinks is a sure-handed historian and the most prolific English liturgist, and in this volume he draws together a wide range of research interests and some of his previously published work on the fate of the Book of Common Prayer between 1559 and 1906, the year when a Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline reported that the Book of Common Prayer was no longer a sufficient vehicle to meet and express the religious needs of the English people in the twentieth century.

The book originated as a series of lectures at Yale Divinity School and is divided into five equal chapters. The opening chapter signals the broader approach that Spinks consistently takes throughout the book. The Elizabethan Prayer Book is set in the context of wider liturgical provision, including Latin translations for use in schools and colleges, and what might be described as ‘semi-official’ devotional material to augment the provision made in the Prayer Book. This broader purview allows for some illuminating comparisons to be made, and for some generally accepted views to be questioned, not least concerning Elizabeth I’s own religious sensibilities as well as her pragmatic political manoeuvrings. The assertion that ‘in matters of religion Elizabeth was a Protestant’ cannot be made without some judicious nuancing. The second chapter on the Jacobean settlement, an epoch often elided in historical surveys, again provides a wider purview, and the third chapter draws on material not generally treated in textual reviews of the history of Anglican worship and polity.

This widening of horizons leads to a fuller review in this study of the Prayer Book in Scotland, Ireland and America, and a fulsome account is given of the circumstances that led to the episcopal ordination of the Connecticut presbyter, Samuel Seabury, by Nonjuring bishops in Scotland in 1784 to be

the first Anglican bishop in the loose federation of 'English' congregations in the United States, who even at that stage were divided as to whether they should be an episcopally ordered and led church. Equal attention is also given to the story of the fluctuating influences of Puritan, Evangelicals, Rationalists and non-Jurors in the developments of the prayer books from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, and this account of the diverse currents of political loyalties, convictions and theological nuances effectively demonstrates the impossibility of positing a single evolutionary line in the development of the English Prayer Books from the seventeenth to the eve of the twentieth century.

For a book of some 160 pages, this widening of horizons is a real achievement, and mention should be made of the breadth of sources that Spinks deploys to produce this insightful and engaging study. As well as textual studies, there are also extracts from contemporaneous journals, letters and other sources that shed light on how these worship texts were both received and performed. There are, for instance, references to Christmas folk customs (p. 96), and extensive coverage of music, especially in cathedrals and royal chapels (pp. 88–9, 135 and 147ff.). Again, the architectural frame in which these rites were performed is also fully treated, but more could have been made of Kenneth Fincham's work on altars and church furnishings during the seventeenth century. Wren's extraordinary and extensive architectural achievements are duly noted, but my main disappointment is the lack of attention to the use of visual art in this period. In relation to eucharistic theology, for example, there were instances where painting and sculpture said more than what was articulated in the authorised texts for worship. Famously we might cite the work of Grinling Gibbons (1648–1721) in St Mary Abchurch and St James's Piccadilly, with the emblems of the pelican and the dove conveying a sense of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the commemoration of Christ's death and Passion.

The extensive bibliography is a gift to both scholars and students alike, but the book really deserves a fuller conclusion. Nevertheless, within the comparative short compass of this erudite book, Spinks demonstrates how the English Prayer Books were not only religious, social and political texts, but also texts that were performed, and performed in startlingly different ways.

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