

**Enriching our Worship:  
A Reading of Its Trinitarian Theology**  
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*[This lengthy essay was published first at Covenant: Part 1 (Introduction), Part 2, and Part 3]*

**Part I – Introduction**

A conversation about Prayer Book revision is now on the table in the Episcopal Church. General Convention 2015 passed [Resolution A169](#) directing “the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) to prepare a plan for the comprehensive revision of the current Book of Common Prayer and present that plan to the 79th General Convention.” [Jordan Hylden and Keith Voets](#) voiced their profound concerns about Prayer Book revision on this blog in the final post of their three-part series “A Way Forward Together” (I strongly encourage readers to read that short article first). And then on October 8, 2015 [Dr. Ruth Meyers](#) of Church Divinity School of the Pacific and outgoing chair of the [Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music](#) for the Episcopal Church offered a web forum with her personal thoughts on Prayer Book revision in light of the resolution (see *The Living Church*’s story [here](#) and watch the entire presentation [here](#)).

Episcopalians need to consider this development very carefully, and our ecumenical partners should watch it closely. As a contribution to this discussion, my purpose here is to present two related items:

- (a) the basic contours of the revised Holy Eucharist liturgy in the first volume of *Enriching our Worship* (henceforth, EOW1; see the entire document [here](#) and all the volumes in the series [here](#))
- (b) a consideration the Trinitarian theology contained therein.

Why look at EOW1? Every indication suggests that the work of EOW1, along with the new collects in *Holy Women, Holy Men*, signals the trajectory of further liturgical reform in the Episcopal Church. Dr. Meyers seemed suggested as much in her recent presentation. At the installation of the new Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev’d Michael Curry, on November 1, 2015, the eucharistic prayer came not from the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) but from EOW1 (see pages 19-20 of the bulletin [here](#)). Thus, it is essential that all Episcopalians — particularly the bishops who are charged with the task of guarding “the faith, unity and discipline of the Church” (BCP 517) and are the chief liturgical officers for their dioceses (BCP 13) — read these rites and examine them carefully and with prayer.

The character of EOW1 is that of a resource. The texts within EOW1, its introduction explains, “may be used in two very different ways.” Probably the most common use of EOW1 is as a resource “in conjunction with the Rite Two liturgies of the 1979 BCP.” As much or as little of EOW1 could be incorporated into a Rite II liturgy, from just one element to four or five, including one of the three eucharistic prayers. There is also a second option: “to develop an entire liturgy using the supplemental texts. The

entire eucharistic liturgy can be designed with only the collect of the day from the BCP being added” (EOW1, p. 14). These two different uses of EOW1 bring a real degree of complexity to a theological reading of its content. EOW1 is both a set of supplemental options and, conversely, a complete rite (either option, we should remember, is subject to the explicit permission of the diocesan bishop).

I have decided to approach this examination by analyzing the EOW1 as a whole eucharistic rite, all the while acknowledging that it could be used in a more *ad hoc* fashion. The careful reader will need to alter my analysis depending on how much or how little of EOW1 is used in a specific instance. The principle reason for my decision to analyze EOW1 as a complete rite is twofold. First, only the eucharistic prayers lend themselves to a theological reading on their own, and this is something that I will do later in this series of posts. Many of EOW1’s changes are small; trying to tease out an interpretation of each would be less than fair. Second, most of the publications related to the composition of EOW1’s materials argue that the principles that undergird its *must be brought to fruition*.<sup>1</sup> Until these principles have been fully implemented, the purpose of EOW1’s texts has not yet been realized, and the Episcopal Church remains constrained by (putatively) restrictive and biased language. Thus, at least from the perspective of the essay’s authors, and from my reading of Dr. Ruth Meyers’s recent address, the complete implementation of these principles is the ultimate goal in some set of future rites. From what a few members of the SCLM have said to me, this is not, however, the perspective of the whole of the SCLM. Some members have reservations about the language in EOW1 and some have strong reservations about revising the 1979 BCP. Thus, I want to take care not to paint with too broad a brush.

Nonetheless, my analysis will address the eucharistic rite as a coherent whole, both because EOW1’s introduction mentions such a potential use and also because a completely revised rite like that in EOW1 is the stated goal of the SCLM. Furthermore, I do not doubt that some congregations use EOW1’s rite in place of the BCP rite. However, as I noted above, the reader should remember that the materials in EOW1 could be used simply as supplemental resources.

The principle concern that motivated EOW1 was about how we speak about God in our particular context. The initiative first appeared, its introduction explains, when “ears attuned to contemporary language and culture grew uncomfortable with liturgical metaphors and forms of address, inherited largely from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which God is primarily envisioned as a kind of *Paterfamilias*” (“Introduction,” EOW1, p. 8). More specifically, “one of the considerations in choosing or developing texts included in this collection has been the prayer experience of woman” (“Preface,” EOW1, p. 6). “Then as now,” their solution has never been to adopt the strategy of the modalist-sounding “Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier/Sustainer” but rather to excavate language and metaphors from the tradition that have been underutilized: “in particular the writings of

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<sup>1</sup> These essays can be found in [How Shall We Pray?](#) (1994), [A Prayer Book for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#) (1996), and [Gleanings](#) (1999), all edited by Ruth Meyers, and Lionel Mitchell’s essay “Background” published in both [Commentary on Prayer Book Studies 30](#) (1989) and [Supplemental Liturgical Materials](#) (1991).

the Early Church, along with the ecstatic evocations of the Medieval mystics,” as well as “the riches of scripture and the Christian tradition, which include an abundance of images of God” (“Introduction,” EOW1, p. 8). One way to express the SCLM’s main theological concern with the range of language used thus far in Anglican liturgies is that the (over-)emphasis on certain attributes or aspects of God (e.g. God as a “law-giving sovereign” or God’s fatherliness) runs the risk of becoming an “idolatry” of particular aspects of God.

Whether or not one agrees with how the SCLM attempts to solve these concerns, I think it is important to acknowledge at the beginning of this piece that Christians must take seriously the concerns raised by feminist theologians (along with many theologians who wouldn’t use the moniker “feminist”). We cannot dispute that women have not been treated as equals to men for much of history, whether inside or outside of the church. But even more, the practical experience of some women with regard to men and the masculine is often negative, often as the oppressor and the subjugator. And for some women (along with men who have experienced abuse at the hands of other men), the predominantly masculine language of most Christian theology and liturgy is experienced as painful, disorienting, and alienating.

Related to this more experiential concern is the basic Christian theological claim that God is neither a man nor a woman, neither male nor female. God is God. God’s eternal Word and Son became incarnate as a human being, specifically as the man Jesus of Nazareth; but God is not a man (or a woman). And since God is not a man, masculine pronouns for God the Holy Trinity raise real concerns for some theologians because they might lead to the inaccurate conclusion that God is a man. There are not the only concerns and critiques raised by feminists, nor are these the only suggestions that might be made about how to change the church’s public liturgy in light of them.

But, I would note, that truly taking these concerns seriously does not necessarily entail a theological revision that jettisons traditional Christological and Trinitarian language. It may, but this is not necessarily the case. There are a variety of ways to respond (pastorally, spiritually, theologically) and retain the language of Scripture and tradition: namely, that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is the one God of Israel who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all of whom equally share in and partake of the divine substance and nature and are rightly called the Holy Trinity. The Cambridge theologian Sarah Coakley provides an excellent example of a feminist author striving to respond creatively to feminist concerns, while retaining the conciliar language:

Neither the straightforward obliteration of ‘Father’ language, nor the feminization of the ‘Spirit’ (or indeed of the Son), constitute in themselves satisfactory strategies in the face of the profound feminist critique of classical Christian thought forms and patterns of behavior. These problems can only be met satisfactorily by an *ascetic* which attacks idolatry at its root (Coakley, [\*God, Sexuality, and the Self\*](#), p. 7).

The scope of feminist concerns is an enormous and thorny topic that is impossible to deal with satisfactorily in this context. Nonetheless, I think it is necessary to acknowledge this at the beginning of an examination of one such liturgical response to this set of concerns.

Also at the outset, I think it is also fruitful to note the range of options available to those who wish to revise Christian liturgies in light of the concerns articulated by feminist theologians. Here are three possibilities:

- One option is to replace masculine names and pronouns with feminine ones: e.g. “*Mother* Almighty, creator of heaven and earth” or “It is right to give *her* thanks and praise.” This approach has the advantage of retaining both the personal aspect of God “for us” (albeit analogously) and the relations between the Persons (**Note:** While there are some legitimate concerns about the use of “Person” for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [see how Aquinas addresses this in [ST I.29](#)], I will use the term as a brief shorthand, acknowledging that we use this term about God in way that is different from how we use it for human beings). While a mother is not identical with a father, both have an equally unique and singular relationship to a child and these names speak to this relationship. Father, Mother, Son, and Daughter all convey in their respective names a fact about who each is *in relation to a particular other*.
- Another is to try and balance masculine and feminine words, moving in some sort logical way between masculine names and pronouns and feminine ones. This has both the advantage of the first approach (because it communicates “being-in-relation”) while at the same time including the Scriptural language of *Father* and *Son*. While Scripture uses feminine/maternal *analogies* for God (e.g. Isa. 49:15; 66:13; Ps. 131:2; Ezek. 16:44-45; Sir. 4:10; Matt. 23:37), it does not use a *name* or mode of divine address that is definitely feminine. (**Note:** unlike English, the word for *spirit* is feminine in Hebrew and neuter in Greek, but it seems imprudent to try and draw too many conclusions from this). In this approach, both scriptural language and the attendant relationality of that language are preserved.
- Still another tack is to avoid gendered language altogether. And this is the approach of EOW1 and the new prayers in [Holy Women, Holy Men](#). There are a number of ways to avoid gendered language. One approach (though I’ve never seen this in a liturgical rite) would be utilize the non-gendered procession language that was so central to the pre- and post-Nicene debates, such as Unbegotten (α γ ε ν ε τ ο ς) and Only-begotten (μονογενής). Thus, Prayer 1 in EOW1 could read, “Blessed are you, gracious Unbegotten One [replacing *Gracious God*]...” and then later, “Then, in the fullness of time, you sent your eternal *and Only-begotten* [NB: this phrase is added] Word, made mortal flesh in Jesus” (is *made* what we want to say?). EOW1, however, takes the non-gendered route and also avoids any language of begetting, procession, or relation.

One way to evaluate the Trinitarian theology of EOW1’s eucharistic materials is simply to ask about the basic shape of the theology presented therein, which is what I shall do in later posts. The claim that the Prayer Book holds a special place in Anglicanism as an expression of doctrine is part and parcel of its self-identity. Without an authoritative magisterium that speaks with any binding authority, and without an official

confession or catechism like what is found in many of the magisterial Protestant traditions and in the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the Prayer Book and our canon law (to a much lesser extent) express our doctrine, albeit in the mode of liturgical language. Nonetheless, given the weight it carries for us vis-à-vis other families of Christian, a doctrinal evaluation of a new and proposed rite is one of the first and basic steps when considering liturgical revision.

## Part 2 – The Revised Holy Eucharist Liturgy of EOW1

The way I have decided to provide a picture of the revised eucharistic rite as a whole in the first volume of *Enriching Our Worship* (henceforth, EOW1) is to outline a summary of the ways in which it changes and edits the Rite II communion service in the current 1979 BCP. One of the things that makes an evaluation like this difficult is that one's response is colored by the context. Were the texts to have appeared out of the blue, they would likely be read in a different way. But they are consciously meant to be alternatives to the 1979 BCP and thus they must be read as and within a conversation with this authority for worship in the Episcopal Church.

### The summary:

- Acclamation: the Trinitarian acclamation for Ordinary Time (“Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”), which was borrowed from the Byzantine Rite, is changed in such a way as to remove any references to the Persons or to the Trinity: “Blessed be the one, holy, and living God” or simply “Blessed be God.”
- [The Collect for Purity](#) and the “Kyrie eleison/Lord, have mercy” have been removed. Thus, any sense of a posture other than praise (such as humility or penitence) is removed from the Preparation Rites.
- The rubrics helpfully clarify what the compilers of the 1979 BCP clearly intended: the “Song of Praise” that can be sung in place of the [Gloria in excelsis](#) is ideally a biblical canticle or an ancient construction like the [Te Deum](#).
- The *Salutation* is changed from “The Lord be with you” to “God be with you.” This is the first of many places where the term *Lord* is excised completely.
- An option is provided during Ordinary Time (the seasons after Epiphany and Pentecost) to replace the Prayer Book collects with those from a list of new collects. I will not attempt a summary of the alternative collects; but as it concerns Trinitarian issues, I note the following characteristics, which are similar to the approach of the entire rite:
  - *Father* is never used;
  - Jesus is never referred to as *Son*, neither as a proper name nor in terms of his relation to God the Father;
  - The relationship between the Persons is unclear: how the Father relates to Jesus, how the Spirit relates to Father and Son, and many similar questions, remain opaque.
- The *Response* after the lessons is changed from “The Word of the Lord” to “Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s people/the churches” (cf. [Rev 2:29](#)).
- The *Gospel proclamation* changes in three ways:
  - The acclamation preceding the Gospel changes *Lord* to *Savior* (e.g. “The Holy Gospel of our *Savior* Jesus Christ according to \_\_\_\_\_”)

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- The response to the acclamation (“Glory to you, Lord Christ”) is removed
- The acclamation following the Gospel (“The Gospel of the Lord / Praise to you, Lord Christ”) disappears altogether.
- The translation of the Nicene Creed is altered in a number of ways from the “We believe” translation in both Rite I and Rite II of the 1979 BCP:
  - Language regarding the Incarnation now more accurately reflects the conciliar language so that the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary are both the object of the preposition ἐκ (“of”): σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου is translated as “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary”
  - “and was *made man*” has become “and *became truly human*” (the purpose for this, Ruth Meyers explains, is to emphasize “that it is not the maleness but the humanity of Jesus that is significant in the redemption of humanity”)
  - The masculine pronouns for the Holy Spirit in the third section of the Creed are able to be removed by the judicious use of relative pronouns (which makes it more like the Rite I form of the Nicene Creed)
- The Confession is rewritten with a number of changes: the clarification about sin “in thought, word, and deed” is removed; the parallel of not loving God and our neighbor (cf. [Luke 10:27](#)) also disappears; we repent “of the evil that enslaves us,” the meaning of which continues to elude me; and “Son” is changed to “Savior”
- In the *Absolution*, “through our *Lord Jesus Christ*” becomes “through the *grace* of Jesus Christ”
- “The Peace of the *Lord* be always with you” becomes the “The Peace of *Christ*”
- *N.B.* The eucharistic prayers will be addressed in Part 3 of this article
- The Lord’s Prayer simply disappears from its place between the Eucharistic Prayer and the Breaking of the Bread/Fraction (note that the Lord’s Prayer is also removed from its normal place after the salutation in Morning and Evening Prayer)
- The two Postcommunion prayers of thanksgiving are written in the vein already noted about language changes (no *Father* or *Lord*, nor Jesus as *Son*)
- All the blessing options are possibly Trinitarian in their implication but are nonetheless rather vague:
  - In one, the Father is the “Eternal *Majesty*” and the Son the “incarnate *Word*”
  - In another, the Father (presumably) is “the God of Abraham and Sarah,” the Son is “Jesus Christ born of our sister Mary,” and the Spirit is the one who “broods over the world as a mother over her children”
  - Still another speaks of “God’s blessing,” “Christ’s peace,” and “the Spirit’s outpouring”
  - And still another of “the Wisdom of God,” “the Love of God,” and “the Grace of God,” a construction that also does not appear to make a direct correspondence to particular Persons

How might we categorize these changes?

- 1) All language that carries with it any notion of gender has been excised or replaced — mostly notably, *Father* and *Son*
- 2) The use of the term *Lord* is radically reduced. It is retained only in two places: (a) in the Nicene Creed (“Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord” and “the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life”) and (b) in the Dialogue of the [Sursum corda](#) that begins the Great Thanksgiving (“The *Lord* be with you / We lift them up to the *Lord* / Let us give thanks to the *Lord* our God;” if the *Gloria in excelsis* is used, the term *Lord* also appears).
- 3) If the materials from EOW1 are used as an entire rite (and not just as a supplement for a few parts of the rite as given in the 1979 BCP), the Nicene Creed and the Lord’s Prayer are not required to be said. Since the *Gloria in excelsis* is already optional in the 1979 liturgy, this means that all the places in the liturgy that articulate the received scriptural teaching as explicated by the early councils is entirely absent.
- 4) Outside of the *Gloria* and the Nicene Creed, there is no reference to God as Trinity (the word *Trinity* appears only in an optional collect). The liturgy speaks of *God*; the liturgy speaks of *Jesus*; the liturgy speaks of a (*Holy*) *Spirit*. But how each is related to the other is not clear. And certainly any sense that their relations (or processions) have any bearing on the identity of God is simply unaddressed.

### Part 3 – The Eucharistic Prayers of EOW1

I have already outlined *Enriching Our Worship*’s rite of Holy Eucharist as a whole. In this second part, I turn now to the eucharistic prayers of *Enriching our Worship* (henceforth, EOW1; see the entire document [here](#) and all the volumes in the series [here](#)). As I did with the eucharistic liturgy as a whole, I will also highlight the unique features of the EOW1 rite compared with the rites of the 1979 BCP.

- There are no masculine pronouns for God, and few for Jesus (only when explicitly referring to Jesus in his earthly life)
- The title *Lord* is not used, except in the Sursum Corda (Within the 1979 BCP Rite II, Prayer C had the lowest uses of *Lord* with 4, while Rite I, Prayer II had a total of 14 uses)
- The EOW1 eucharistic prayers are not clear whether they are addressed to a specific Person of the Holy Trinity or if the terms of address used are only meant to indicate a divine addressee generally. Here are the names used when addressing God, (1) before the Sanctus and then (2) after the Sanctus in each prayer:
  - Prayer 1: (1) *You* and (2) *Gracious God, creator of the universe and giver of life*
  - Prayer 2: (1) *Holy and gracious God, source of abundant life* and (2) *Holy and living God*
  - Prayer 3: (1) *our true and loving God/Holy One of Blessing* and (2) *Creator of all*

Compare these divine addresses to those found in the 1979 BCP, all of which explicitly address the Father:

	Rite I-I	Rite I-II	Rite II-A	Rite II-B	Rite II-C	Rite II-D
First title	“O Lord,	“O Lord,	“Father	“Father	“God of all	“Father ...

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<b>before <i>Sanctus</i></b>	holy Father, Almighty everlasting God”	holy Father, Almighty everlasting God”	Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth”	Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth”	power, Ruler of the Universe”	God, living and true”
<b>First title after <i>Sanctus</i></b>	“Almighty God, our heavenly Father”	“O Lord our God”	“Holy and gracious Father”	“O God”	“Father”	“Holy Lord, glorious in power”

A similar point can be made about the terms “Father” and “Son” within the body of the prayers. Within EOW1’s eucharistic prayers:

- There is no use of the name *Father*
- There is no use of the name *Son* to refer to Jesus; note that Prayer 2 names Jesus *son of Mary* and *Jesus, the holy child of God*. For the sake of comparison again, here is the usage in the 1979 BCP of the terms in the eucharistic prayer through the end of the liturgy:

	Rite I-I	Rite I-II	Rite II-A	Rite II-B	Rite II-C	Rite II-D
<b>Uses of Father</b>	8	7	5	3	3	5
<b>Uses of Son</b>	9	7	4	3	2	3

- Additionally, the prayer never speaks of Jesus as God’s *only* Son or child; all the eucharistic prayers in the 1979 BCP use this adjective, except Prayer B
- Recall that the Lord’s Prayer is not listed and thus is not required if the entire EOW1 rite is used

In short, all gendered language for God and all language regarding the inter-Trinitarian relations/procession have been omitted.

So what *is* stated in these prayers regarding Trinitarian theology? Here is an outline of the theology that can be surmised from the prayers (quotations are noted parenthetically with the numeral of the eucharistic prayer from which it comes):

- There is a clearly one God. This God is *holy, eternal* (though Prayer 2 makes no mention of this latter quality), *gracious, living, a source of blessing* (3) or *abundance* (second Postcommunion prayer), and *giver of life* (a creedal title for the Holy Spirit that is interestingly used in such a way to not tie it to a particular person).
- There is also Jesus Christ who redeems us (1, 3), is *Savior*, is God’s *eternal Word* (1, 3) who *has never been silent* (3), and is *Wisdom* (3).
  - The work of Jesus was to *triumph over evil, opening the way of freedom and peace* (1), to make *the sacrifice of his life* (2). He is the one who *freed us from sin, brought us into your life, reconciled us to you, and restored us to the glory you intend for us* (3)
  - The relationship of Jesus to God is that Jesus is God’s *eternal Word, made mortal flesh in Jesus* (1), the *holy child of God* (2)



- There is a (Holy) Spirit who replenishes (1), who *moved over the deep and brought all things into being* (2), who acts to make bread and wine the Body and Blood of Jesus and to make us *Christ's Body in the world* (2), *a people of hope, justice, and love* (3), and generally part of the Body of Christ.

More could be said, but this provides a fair overview, I trust.

### Conclusion

Here are some of the implications of the rite and the eucharistic prayers in particular. The most serious is that the relations between the Persons of the Trinity are almost indiscernible. We are left with a substantial set of questions:

- If there are (to use the traditional language) three *hypostases* or Persons who are nonetheless *homoousios* (of the same substance, meaning that they are all “God” and thus completely distinct from creation), how do we distinguish the *hypostases* from each other? How is God related to Jesus and the Holy Spirit? From the prayers, it would seem that their distinction comes about by way of their actions, not by their relations to each other or how they come forth from the First Person. But, of course, this runs the risk of either tritheism or modalism. Traditionally, Christians have taken extreme care to maintain that (in some way) all three Persons act even when we speak of just one Person undertaking an act (e.g. if the Father creates, we cannot say that the Holy Spirit does NOT create). This is a primary point of Gregory of Nyssa’s *On “Not Three Gods”*; unity of operation practically is the definition of common deity.
- More strikingly, it is not clear if there is a “First Person,” the One traditionally called *Father*. Is Jesus God? Is the Holy Spirit God? Are we to infer when *God* is used at the beginning of the eucharistic prayers, that we are referring to the Father? There is also nothing that really precludes a “binitarian” theology in the prayers. Without the language of *Father* or *Unbegotten*, we are left with the more generic term *God* along with *Jesus/Word/Wisdom/Child* and *Holy Spirit*. There is nothing that really clarifies if there is a third Person besides Jesus and the Holy Spirit to whom the prayer is addressed, or whether the prayers asserts that there is *God* who is Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I honestly doubt that this is the intention of the text’s authors. But the problem is the construction doesn’t *rule out* this interpretation.

There is actually nothing in the whole of the rite that precludes a subordinationist Trinitarian theology à la Arius, Eusebius of Caesarea, or Neo-Arians like Eunomius. To be sure, a major piece of the argument that Athanasius put forward was that actions like “saving” and “sanctifying” are actions that can only be undertaken by God and not by a creature. But lots of Christians were willing to attribute salvific actions to a Son and a Holy Spirit who are creatures, though obviously unique and divinely-elevated creatures who by grace are given a distinctive place in creation, salvation, and sanctification. Many third- and fourth-century Christians prayed, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and so the Holy Spirit,” when they did *not* mean that the Son and the Spirit are God or are equal to the Father or are *God* in the same way that the Father is God.

In short, it is simply not clear what kind of Trinitarian theology is embedded in these eucharistic prayers. Even a reference to Christ as “who was and is and is to come” — this does not preclude a Christ created by God before the rest of creation. The lack of language that clarifies each Person’s relationships to the Others (which, in traditional theology, is bound up with who each Person *is*— i.e. Jesus *is* the eternal and Only-begotten Son of the Unbegotten Father, whose union and love is constituted eternally by the Holy Spirit) means that a great deal about the God to whom we are praying is quite unclear. Neither neo-Arian subordinationism, modalism, “binitarianism,” bitheism, or tritheism are necessarily ruled out by the linguistic constructions of EOW1.

At this point, it seems prudent to ask: Are these positions ruled out in the current prayers of the 1979 BCP? The answer must be given in two parts.

- 1) I noted already a number of times where parts of the 1979 BCP that spoke clearly of the Trinity and their relations were removed (principally, the opening acclamation in ordinary time and optional final blessing, and the absence of *Father* and *Son* language). None of the 1979 eucharistic prayers say much about the Holy Spirit, particularly in terms of the Spirit’s relation to the Father and the Son. They all use the Father/Son language, Prayers B and C using it the least.
- 2) The second part of the answer concerns the wider context. First, the 1979 communion rites presume the use of the Nicene Creed on every Sunday. Add to this that for most of the year, a Trinitarian opening acclamation and blessing is used, the Lord’s Prayer is prayed, and most places also sing the *Gloria in excelsis* (the *Te Deum* would do just as well). Within this wider context, then, the 1979 rite as a whole *speaks* classical Trinitarian theology, regardless of which of the 6 Eucharistic Prayers are used.

Thus, the answer is, “Yes,” these various positions that could be read into the EOW1 rite are excluded by the 1979 rites as a whole.

What makes those Trinitarian errors (neo-Arian subordinationism, modalism, “binitarianism,” bitheism, or tritheism) quite possible interpretations of the EOW1 rite, especially the eucharistic prayers, is the absence of the wider context of the rite that secures classical Trinitarian theology, as is found in the 1979 BCP rites. Perhaps most significantly, Dr. Meyers indicated in her recent presentation that the use of the Nicene Creed is precisely one of the things likely up for debate in Prayer Book revision process. “The Creed was written in the thought world of the fourth century,” she writes, “and it’s a vital ecumenical statement. But for many in our contemporary context, the language is impenetrable and a stumbling block.” The context of this statement came in the section of her talk that focused on Trinitarian theology, a discussion that she framed with the work of Catherine LaCugna (see her well-known book [God For Us](#)). The concern expressed by Meyers and by LaCugna is summarized quite well by the patristic scholar Lewis Ayres: in the fourth century, it is thought that there was too much focus “on the unity of God and with being reliant on an alien Platonic metaphysics which serves to present a fully Trinitarian theology” ([Nicaea and its Legacy](#), p. 364).

Much of the approach of scholars like LaCugna, however, has been soundly challenged by scholars such as [Lewis Ayres](#), [Michel Rene Barnes](#), [Sarah Coakley](#), and

[Khaled Anatolios](#). They have shown clearly shown on historical grounds that the concern of the Fathers was with a coherent account of the whole of the Scriptural witness. These debates, in short, were not philosophical but scriptural. They were debates about the exegesis of the Bible, and one of the main questions was how to speak in such a way as to preserve what the Scriptures say and then how to make sure that everyone agreed on the definition of the terms employed. The conclusion was that certain non-Scriptural terms (e.g. *homoousios*, *hypostasis*, and *Theotokos*) were *necessary* in order to preserve the clearest account of what Scripture says.

This point about Scripture directs us to a related and just as critical: the place of Scripture as revelation when it comes to our speech about God. Khaled Anatolios suggests the reasoning of the fourth-century Fathers like Athanasius and the Cappadocians works from “the fundamental conviction that the Scriptures are really revelatory of God.” This aspect of the Scriptures’ character is interpreted by someone like Athanasius to mean that this revelation occurs in part “by the mutual interrelatedness of biblical texts.” In Athanasius’s logic, then, “the scriptural naming of God must mirror, in a way accommodated to human understanding, the being of God” ([Retrieving Nicaea](#), p. 111). In my reading, EOW1 rejects such an interpretation, despite protestations to the contrary. Dr. Meyers indicates that the intention in the new rites is to “return to ‘more concrete images of the Bible and the liturgy.’” What we see instead is an erasure of the most used scriptural terms that the tradition has understood as absolutely central. What we also can see is (seemingly) little attention to the arguments throughout the tradition (from the Cappadocians, Augustine, and Aquinas, to name a few) who carefully defended why “Father” and “Son” are proper names that come to us by way of revelation from the Word incarnate. How God acts in history — the Father “sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17) — reveals the nature and identity of God: a Father who has always been giving his Son away, this Son who in turn ever gives himself back to the Father with their mutual loved constituted in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The reason that the Episcopal Church must find a different way to address the feminist concerns I outlined in my first post is that, despite the claim of SCLM’s principle that “the truth of the Gospel which proclaims Jesus as the Son of God the Father and as Lord is essential,” the EOW1 rite as a whole, speaks a fundamentally contrary word. EOW1 speaks a *de facto* different Trinitarian theology. Let me be clear: I do not wish to imply in any way that the SCLM is *trying* to introduce a new Trinitarian theology. Rather, I want to suggest that the Trinitarian implications of their revisions take a back seat to the stated goal of removing gendered language for God. My reading is that they have not considered carefully enough the wide-reaching implications of these revisions in Trinitarian theology, Christology, soteriology, and beyond.

We also must not forget that the wider cultural and theological context in which these liturgies would be celebrated — one that Derek Olsen has just recently outlined with brevity and theological precision (read it [here](#)) — is one that exhibits profound ignorance of basic Christian theology. In fact, most people’s working assumptions about God resemble none of the monotheistic religions. A theologically hazy liturgy for people

who are functionally [Moralistic Therapeutic Deists](#) is a recipe for something other than Christian worship. If we remove the so-called “stumbling blocks” of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer and at the same time replace the Christian grammar and vocabulary entrusted to us, what do we have in its place? The answer to the stumbling blocks of the Creedal language, the difficult teachings of Jesus, the theology in the Epistles, the sacramental theology of the Prayer Book (we could go on) is solid and sustained catechesis, in the context of public worship and outside it.

The very existence of this resource also raises further questions about the very act of making liturgical choices between different options. This matter was raised in earnest by the 1979 BCP, which in providing a host of options gave the parish priest a whole series of liturgical choices to make without providing any criteria by which one is to choose between these options. EOW1 pushes this to a whole new level. What are laudable or suspect reasons for choosing to incorporate some, all, or none of the aspects of this resource into public worship? As I’ve already noted, the way the EOW liturgies are defended in the collections of essays usually assumes that EOW1’s revisions are imperative ones. And yet, every priest and bishop is left to make this decision without any reference to other parishes or bishops, inside or outside the Episcopal Church. Until we address the theological and ecclesiological issues embedded in the practice of individually choosing this or that rite based on our own constructed criteria, we need to carefully consider this approach to liturgical revision.

For “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24). Language like “Wisdom” and “Word” for Jesus, and the maternal imagery in Scripture, need not be cut off from our public liturgy. But it cannot increase at the expense of the terms by which Jesus invites us to join him in calling God “Our Father.” Jesus “issues an invitation which we can of course refuse, but whose terms we cannot define: they are defined by the persons of the Trinity themselves” (B. Marshall, [Trinity and Truth](#), p 15).

### Questions to Consider

- 1) The [Preface to the first American BCP](#) states, “... this Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship; or further than local circumstances require.” Does what we see in EOW1 signal a departure from this doctrine, discipline, and worship. If so, in what respects?
- 2) Bishop Frank Griswold, chair of the SCLM at the time EOW1 was written, writes the following in the Preface: “At all points along the way in the process of selection and development of texts the question has been asked: Is this text consistent with the Trinitarian and Christological formulations which we, as Anglicans, regard as normative and the ground of our common prayer?” Does what we see in EOW1 signal a departure from these conciliar formulations? It is also worth asking whether such changes would render null our agreed statements with other Christian families, most notably with the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the

- [Orthodox Churches](#), and the [Oriental Orthodox Churches](#) (think especially of the [recent statement on Christology](#)). Does this matter to the Episcopal Church?
- 3) Are the theologies in EOW1 and those of the Nicene Creed in tension? If, as is proposed, the Nicene Creed is removed, the Creed will not be able to serve as a hermeneutical lens. In light of what Prof. Meyers said in her lecture about the need to “return to ‘more concrete images of the Bible and the liturgy’ in place of the arcane philosophical language of the fourth-century creeds,” does this place Scripture and the Creed in a relationship of antagonism?