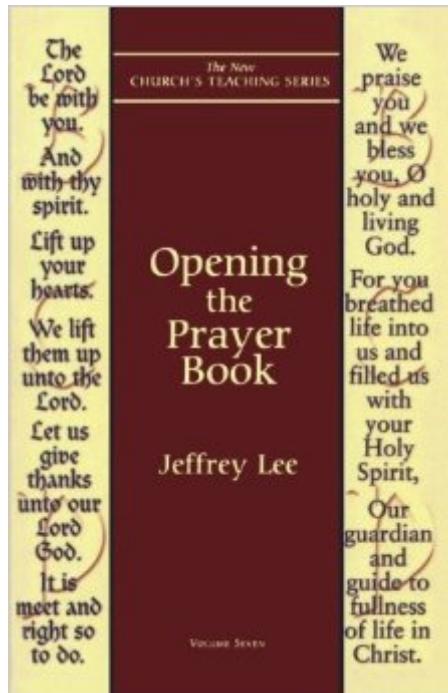


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Opening The Prayer Book (New Church's Teaching Series)



Synopsis

What Roger Ferlo did for the Bible in *Opening the Bible*, volume 2 of The New Church's Teaching Series, Jeffrey Lee now does for the prayer book in volume 7 of the series. *Opening the Prayer Book* introduces us to the history and liturgies of The Book of Common Prayer, and helps us understand why the prayer book is such an important aspect of Anglican self-understanding. Lee begins with the fundamental question, "What is common prayer?" He explores some of the ways in which our worship according to The Book of Common Prayer affects who we are as a church, and the way it shapes our lives of faith. In chapter 2 Lee turns to the development of patterns of liturgy from the time of Jesus to the Reformation, tracing changes in the primary liturgies of baptism, eucharist, and daily prayer. The American prayer book is the focus of chapter 3, from the earliest revisions in the new nation through the liturgical scholarship that led to the substantial theological and liturgical changes in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Chapter 4 begins a survey of the pages of the prayer book itself. Lee examines in particular the liturgies of Holy Week and Easter, baptism and eucharist, and the daily office, with a view to understanding the way the parts of the services are rooted in the historical prayers of the church and at the same time reflect the living tradition of Christians today. This theme is further developed in chapter 5, which focuses on the prayer book and our common life. Here Lee discusses questions of how a common prayer book can be responsive to a growing variety of pastoral situations and diverse cultures in a fast-changing world. The final chapter addresses the future of the prayer book within the Anglican Communion, in light of demands for further revision and for greater freedom to adapt the prayer book to local needs and beliefs. As with each book in The New Church's Teaching Series, recommended resources for further reading and questions for discussion are included.

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Customer Reviews

This is a very reader friendly book concerning one of the most essential parts of the Episcopal Church, and that is the Book of Common Prayer. As an Episcopalian, this book has refreshed my knowledge on the prayer book and has taught me things I either forgot or didn't know. Common prayer is something we cherish as Episcopalians. It is something that unites us all and at the same time, it shows our commitment as followers of Christ by actively participating in prayer and the liturgies. We have studied this book in our adult Sunday school class and I have enjoyed every minute of it. A must read for any Episcopalian or anyone interested in the prayer book and the Episcopal Church.

Much of this book seems to be a set-up for the last chapter in which Lee predicts that the 1979 Book of Common Prayer will most likely be the LAST revision of this classic of the Anglican worship tradition. He assures us that the influence of the BCP will continue to mold that tradition, but that the tradition will continue to expand, embracing multicultural influences, new views on sexuality, and the evolving dominance of nonprint media. Lee refutes charges that Episcopalians' reliance on their Book limits their expression of faith and spends several chapters helpfully explicating its various liturgies. Along the way, he provides a brief (too brief, by my accounting) history of how the BCP/1979 came to be, including discussion of the influence of the Scottish prayer books of 1637 and 1764, early efforts to reintroduce ancient forms of worship based on scholarly research on the liturgy. In the end, Lee eloquently affirms, "We ask the liturgy to bear an enormous weight of meaning. Good ritual that is capable of bearing such weight depends on a certain familiarity so that the forms, actions, and texts can become vehicles for the meaning they embody. If members of the assembly have to wonder what is going to happen THIS Sunday morning, it can lessen their ability to worship. If they have to worry about getting the words right...they may be less free to encounter the Mystery of Christ in those words" (p. 164). This book is just one of thirteen titles in The New Church's Teaching Series, a series that sets out to explain key Episcopalian positions on the practices, beliefs, and role of the church. Intended primarily for Episcopalians, I think Lutherans and

Catholics will relate to many of the opinions expressed in these books. I strongly recommend the ones on the Bible: *Opening the Bible* by Roger Ferlo and *Engaging the Word* by Michael Johnston.

This is a very user friendly book. Mr. Lee's writing is very clear for the average lay person. As a cradled Episcopalian (born and raised in the Episcopal Church) I learned so much about the book I use every week. It is a wonderful resource and great teaching tool. Thanks for clarifying and expanding upon our church's prayer book!

The Episcopal church in the twentieth century took advantage of the general availability of publishing to good advantage, compiling through several auspices different collections and teaching series, the latest of which was only completed a few years ago. There have been 'unofficial' collections of teaching texts, such as the Anglican Studies Series by Morehouse press, put out in the 1980s, as well as an earlier teaching series. However, each generation approaches things anew; the New Church Teaching Series, published by Cowley Publications (a company operated as part of the ministry of the Society of St. John the Evangelist - SSJE - one of the religious/monastic communities in the Episcopal church, based in the Boston area) is the most recent series, and in its thirteen volumes, explores in depth and breadth the theology, history, liturgy, ethics, mission and more of the modern Anglican vision in America. This seventh volume, 'Opening the Prayer Book' by Jeffrey Lee, looks at the Book of Common Prayer, perhaps the central defining thing in Anglicanism. Lee's primary focus here is the 1979 American Book of Common Prayer (which makes sense, given that this is a church teaching series for a church that uses this as the primary text); however, no edition or variation of the Book of Common Prayer exists in a vacuum, either historically or geographically/culturally. Lee explores general issues of liturgy and common worship/prayer life in the context of the Anglican usage of the BCP. Particularly with the 1979 American version (and some other recent variations, such as the New Zealand and Australian Prayer Books), there is a great deal of flexibility built into the document that at the same time strives toward consistency and identity. Lee looks briefly at the history of the development of the Book of Common Prayer, from its English origins in the sixteenth century to the more recent versions in America, acknowledging the issues that led to a Scottish influence in the construction of the American Prayer Book. After this historical survey, Lee looks at particular pieces of the liturgy in the BCP, including the primary services around the sacrament of baptism and Easter celebrations, the highest of holy days, and the various other liturgies present for both regular and occasional use. Putting this liturgy into action for the entire congregation (worship shouldn't be something that a clergy caste 'does' for the people

as they sit in pews and watch) is a primary concern for Lee. Lee's final chapter gives some speculations into the future of liturgical development and prayer book reform. Each generation or two makes the prayer book anew for its worship; this always creates tension between those who want to remain with the established ways, those who want radical change, and those who aren't satisfied with the eventual settlement. Even as he argues for continuity with much of Anglican tradition, Lee looks forward to a time when there will be no standard, pew-edition of the BCP in every church as the tie that binds; speculating on the suggestion of his professor Louis Weil (who wrote another volume of this teaching series), the current Books of Common Prayer may well be the last in the line of Cranmer's tradition. Jeffrey Lee is a priest who has served parishes using the Book of Common Prayer throughout the Midwestern United States. He is a speaker and writer in issues of worship and liturgy, and participates in national and international conferences and associations regarding diaconal renewal. Each of the texts is relatively short (only two of the volumes exceed 200 pages), the print and text of each easy to read, designed not for scholars but for the regular church-goer, but not condescending either - the authors operate on the assumption that the readers are genuinely interested in deepening their faith and practice. Each volume concludes with questions for use in discussion group settings, and with annotated lists of further readings recommended.

A good overview of the Book of Common Prayer - both history and usage. The BCP is the base prayer book for the Episcopal Church, and the Anglican tradition generally. First written in the 1500's, it has evolved over time as the Church has evolved. However, the book itself forms the format and basis for worship for the Anglican churchgoer. Where the Anglican tradition appears to be relatively flexible on dogmatic theology, the Church seems very firm on the form and format of worship as contained in the BCP. Jeffery Lee discusses the controversies and issues that have arisen over the 450 years that the BCP has been in use, and discusses the historical, ancient, elements and traditions contained in the BCP. If you are new to the Episcopal Church or want to understand the Anglican tradition better, this book is critical to understanding the what and why of the BCP and the form of worship.

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