

Select Inclusive language edits to Rite I, BCP 1979
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Introduction

It is not so simple as one might think to amend an existing liturgy with more inclusive language. The Book of Common Prayer 1979, including Rite I, and also other traditional English language liturgies have their own core vocabulary and phrasing that is difficult to modify without doing some damage to the sound of the rite. Introducing contemporary and often prosaic phrasing into what is essentially Elizabethan poetry just doesn't work and comes across as tone-deaf.

Someone unfamiliar with the roots of our liturgy might feel it is easy enough to update words that refer to the humans from "men" to "humans", "people", or "all" or to change "mankind" to "humankind". In some cases that works, but not all the time. Another obvious path that ultimately goes nowhere is to see what other denominations/provinces have done. For example, the Church of England Common Worship resources for traditional liturgies use as their basis the 1662 BCP and tend not to address inclusive language concerns for people. Sometimes dropping a word is the best solution, but that literally can create a hole in the text. Other times the best solution is to borrow from other parts of the BCP or familiar translations of the Bible.

I note that much of the BCP 1979 draws directly from Scripture, and I did not feel at liberty to change or update the original Cranmer translations/texts, the King James Version, or any other translation of Scripture without significant research. There is precedence from the BCP editors themselves modifying an existing translation in a way that maintains the feel of the Cranmer or the KJV but updates the English so that the people can more easily understand what is being said. For example, the Rite 1 editors took liberties with how Scripture was quoted in the Comfortable Words on page 332. The KJV uses "propitiation" in the quotation from 1 John 2:1-2, whereas the Rite 1 editors changed this to "perfect offering"; e.i. RSV "expiation"; NRSV "anointing sacrifice"; NIV "atoning sacrifice"; NEB "Remedy". I was unable to determine if the Rite 1 editors themselves translated ἱλασμός (hilasmos) as "perfect offering" or if they found it in another translation. Be that as it may, it seems a precedent.

All of this is to say that there was no universal "find and replace". I had to go through each text and determine what felt poetic and authentic to the spirit and meaning of the text while also being inclusive to modern English norms. It was an interesting exercise trying to balance my Rite 1 ear – I grew up with Rite 1 and it is used in my currently parish every Sunday – alongside my 21st century ear for gender neutral language.

Guiding Principles

My guiding principles were as follows:

- I was primarily concerned with finding gender neutral words and phrases for humans. In a few cases, the phrasing from older BCPs was more inclusive, and I used those. The word “mankind” shows up in numerous Rite I services and prayers. Changing “mankind” to “humankind” throws off alliterations in some texts and, frankly, doesn’t sound like anything else in the BCP since “humankind” is not a word used in the BCP. “Humanity” is used several times in the BCP, and for that reason I have chosen it as my default word when replacing “mankind”.
- Where possible and when there was precedent in current TEC practice I also edited pronouns for God. I did not edit pronouns for Jesus or the Son and rarely for the Lord. In general, I have not edited the title “The Lord” anywhere in the rite since it is ubiquitous in Scripture, the traditional formulary and transliteration for YHWH, because it is a title used often of Jesus, and because it is a direct translation of Kyrie.
- I edited carefully and intentionally either by dropping words – addition by subtraction so to speak – or by following the precedents and phrasing set by the BCP itself, earlier BCPs, Bible translations used in the BCP (KJV and RSV), or the Bible translation read in most Episcopal churches today (NRSV). In every case, I have explained why I did what I did.
- I tried as far as possible to take into account the effect that syllabic changes have on musical and chant settings.
- I did not want to create anything new. I would have loved to expand on the Comfortable Words or add a version of Prayer D to Rite I, but I felt at this time, it was more practical and useful to the larger church to update cherished liturgies with a gentle and loving touch. I wanted to maintain the feel and language of the BCP without muddying the waters with “new stuff”. Most of all, I wanted something I could use in my own church where we already have worshippers who routinely skip or modify words on their own.
- I am not presenting the entirety of Rite I, but only those portions of services which I have modified in any way.
- I do not recommend changing any previously composed setting of any canticle or liturgical music.

Confession from Morning Prayer (pp. 41-42), Evening Prayer (pp. 62-63), and Penitential Order (pp. 320-321)

Almighty and most merciful father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our
own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to
have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to
have done.

But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults,
restore thou those who are penitent,
according to thy promises declared unto ~~mankind~~us in Christ Jesus our Lord;
and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

Notes: I have changed "mankind" to "us". The word "mankind" shows up in numerous Rite I services and prayers. Changing "mankind" to "humankind" throws off alliterations in some texts and, frankly, doesn't sound like anything else in the BCP since "humankind" is not a word used in the BCP. "Humanity" is used several times in the BCP, but in this case it didn't sound right. After some trial and error I settled on "us".

Rite I Eucharist – Opening Acclamation (pg. 323)

Celebrant Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

People And blessed be ~~his~~God's kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.

In place of the above, from Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost

Celebrant Alleluia. Christ is risen.

People The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In Lent and on other penitential occasions

Celebrant Bless the Lord who forgiveth all our sins;

People ~~His~~God's mercy endureth for ever.

Notes: I have replaced "God's" for "his" in the standard opening acclamation and also in the Lenten opening acclamation following a practice which is common in Rite 2. I have not edited the title "The Lord" here or anywhere in the Rite since it is ubiquitous in Scripture, the traditional formulary and transliteration for YHWH, because it is a title used often of Jesus, and because it is a direct translation of Kyrie.

Rite I Eucharist – Gloria (pp. 324-325)

Glory be to God on high,
and on earth peace, good will towards ~~men~~all.
We praise thee, we bless thee,
we worship thee,
we glorify thee,
we give thanks to thee for thy great glory,
O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.
O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ;
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Thou that takest away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father,
have mercy upon us.
For thou only art holy;
thou only art the Lord;
thou only, O Christ,
with the Holy Ghost,
art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Notes: "People" is more satisfactory, but would not fit well into any of the sung versions and just doesn't sound right in Rite I. "All" is somewhat unsatisfactory from a translation

standpoint as the text of Luke 2:14 arguable does not refer to all people, but can be read to refer to people of goodwill. That said, "men" meant people, and all of them at that, and so I have used "all". It has the added benefit of working from a musical standpoint.

Rite I Eucharist – Nicene Creed (pp. 326-327)

I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father;
by whom all things were made;
who for us ~~men~~ and for our salvation
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried;
and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
and he shall come again, with glory,
to judge both the quick and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.
And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life,
who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped
and glorified;
who spake by the Prophets.
And I believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins;
and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Notes: The obvious solution here is to use the preferred ICET Creed on pages 325-326, but my parish uses this version, and I happen to like it. I have deleted "men", which now follows the ICET version.

Rite I Eucharist – The Prayers of the People (pp. 328-330)

Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church and the world.

Almighty and everliving God, who in thy holy Word hast taught us to make prayers, and supplications, and to give thanks for all ~~men~~people: Receive these our prayers which we offer unto thy divine Majesty, beseeching thee to inspire continually the Universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord; and grant that all those who do confess thy holy Name may agree in the truth of thy holy Word, and live in unity and godly love.

Give grace, O heavenly Father, to all bishops and other ministers [especially _____], that they may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth thy true and lively Word, and rightly and duly administer thy holy Sacraments. And to all thy people give thy heavenly grace, and especially to this congregation here present; that, with meek heart and due reverence, they may hear and receive thy holy Word, truly serving thee in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life.

We beseech thee also so to rule the hearts of those who bear the authority of government in this and every land [especially _____], that they may be led to wise decisions and right actions for the welfare and peace of the world.

Open, O Lord, the eyes of all people to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works, that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, they may honor thee with their substance, and be faithful stewards of thy bounty.

And we most humbly beseech thee, of thy goodness, O Lord, to comfort and succor [_____ and] all those who in this transitory life, are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity.

Additional petitions and thanksgivings may be included here. And we also bless thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear [especially _____], beseeching thee to grant them continual growth in thy love and service; and to grant us grace so to follow the good examples of [_____ and of] all thy saints, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom.

Grant these our prayers, O Father, for Jesus Christ's sake,
our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

Notes: I have changed "men" to "people". In other parts of Rite I, "people" feels somewhat out of place, but interestingly the Prayers of the People use the word more often than "men". The precedent is in the actual text of the Prayers, and this seems like an obvious and easy change.

Rite I Eucharist – Confession of Sin (pp. 330-331)

Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in ~~his-God's~~ holy ways: Draw near with faith, and make your humble confession to Almighty God, devoutly kneeling.

Almighty God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
maker of all things, judge of all ~~men~~people:
We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins
and wickedness,
which we from time to time most grievously have committed,
by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine Majesty,
provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us.
We do earnestly repent,
and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings;
the remembrance of them is grievous unto us,
the burden of them is intolerable.
Have mercy upon us,
have mercy upon us, most merciful Father;
for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake,
forgive us all that is past;
and grant that we may ever hereafter
serve and please thee in newness of life,
to the honor and glory of thy Name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Notes: I have replaced "God's" for "his" as I have elsewhere following a practice which is common in Rite 2. I have replaced "people" with "men". An obvious alternative would be to drop "men" and replace it with nothing, but that creates a problem with the text, which notes that God is the "maker of all things" and "judge of all ____". Since the first all is adjectival, the second one needs to be as well. Thus, I have settled on people, as I have in the Prayers of the People which immediately precedes the Confession.

Rite I Morning Prayer – We Praise Thee (pp. 52-53)

We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.

All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting.

To thee all Angels cry aloud,

the Heavens and all the Powers therein.

To thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;

Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory.

The glorious company of the apostles praise thee.

The goodly fellowship of the prophets praise thee.

The noble army of martyrs praise thee.

The holy Church throughout all the world

doth acknowledge thee,

the Father, of an infinite majesty,

thine adorable, true, and only Son,

also the Holy Ghost the Comforter.

Thou art the King of glory, O Christ.

Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

When thou tookest upon thee to deliver ~~man~~ humanity,

thou didst humble thyself to be born of a Virgin.

When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,

thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father.

We believe that thou shalt come to be our judge.

We therefore pray thee, help thy servants,

whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.

Make them to be numbered with thy saints,

in glory everlasting.

Notes: I have changed “man” to “humanity”. “Us” and “People” doesn’t get the universality of the text, whereas “humanity” does. “Humanity” is used several times in the BCP, and for that reason I have chosen it here. I do not recommend changing any previously composed setting of the Te Deum.

Rite I Collect of the Day for the Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

Almighty and everliving God, who, of thy tender love towards ~~mankind~~humanity, hast sent thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all ~~mankind~~humanity should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Notes: I have changed “mankind” to “humanity”. The word “mankind” shows up in numerous Rite I services and prayers. Changing “mankind” to “humankind” throws off alliterations in some texts and, frankly, doesn’t sound like anything else in the BCP since “humankind” is not a word used in the BCP. “Humanity” is used several times in the BCP, and for that reason I have chosen it here.

Rite I Collect of the Day for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

O God, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass ~~man's~~our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, loving thee in all things and above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Notes: I have changed “man” to “our”. This seems to work and links the “our” of the first phrase with the next.

Prayers and Thanksgivings Prayer 2. For All Sorts and Conditions of ~~Men~~People

O God, the creator and preserver of all ~~humanity~~mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of ~~men~~people; that thou wouldest be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, thy saving health unto all nations. More especially we pray for thy holy Church universal; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally, we commend to thy fatherly goodness all those who are in any ways afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; [especially those for whom our prayers are desired]; that it may please thee to comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Notes: I have changed "mankind" to "humanity" and "men" to "people". There is no elegant way to change this prayer without being somewhat heavy-handed.

Burial Rite 1 – Opening Anthems

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord;
~~he those who that~~ believeth in me, even though ~~he they were dead~~die, yet shall ~~he they~~ live;
and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth;
and though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God;
whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold,
and not as a stranger.

For none of us liveth to himself/herself,
and none of us ~~no man~~ dieth to himself/herself.

For if we live, we live unto the Lord.
and if we die, we die unto the Lord.
Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord;
even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labors.

Notes: I have replaced the first part following the phrasing from the NRSV for John 11:25. Instead of “no man” I have repeated “none of us” from the line above, which feels cleaner than trying to come up with something new. I have left “himself” in the section because it “himself” in this context can easily be construed as clean English. The alternate “herself” is offered as an option.

Burial Rite 1 - The Commendation

Give rest, O Christ, to thy servant(s) with thy saints,
where sorrow and pain are no more,
neither sighing, but life everlasting.

Thou only art immortal, ~~the our~~ creator and maker ~~of mankind~~;
and we are mortal, formed of the earth, and unto earth shall
we return. For so thou didst ordain when thou createdst me,
saying, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." All
we go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make
our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Notes: “Humanity” didn’t seem to work here, and “humankind” is not a word used in the BCP. Rewording the sentence a bit seemed to work. Please note, that although I didn’t edit Rite II, the same phrasing “mankind” is used in the Rite II Commendation. I do not recommend changing any previously composed setting of any liturgical music.

Great Litany

(Page 150)

That it may please thee to send forth laborers into thy
harvest, and to draw all ~~mankind~~people into thy kingdom,

(Page 152)

That it may please thee to have mercy upon all ~~mankind~~people,
We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

Notes: “Humanity” didn’t seem to work in either petition, and “humankind” is not a word used in the BCP. “People” works well in both places and has the same syllables for chanting. I do not recommend changing any previously composed setting of any liturgical music.