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Book of Common Prayer

General Information

The Book of Common Prayer (in full, the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church) is the official prayer book of the Church of England and of Anglican churches in other countries, including the Episcopal church in the United States. The first complete version of the Book of Common Prayer appeared in 1549 at the time of the Reformation, during the reign of Edward VI; its use was made compulsory by Parliament. It followed other church reforms and was the result of the work begun during the reign of Edward's father, Henry VIII, under the direction of Thomas Cranmer and Nicholas Ridley. Their aim was to produce a book in the vernacular that would be a unified and simplified equivalent of the Roman Catholic liturgical books. Used with the Bible and an authorized hymnal, it provided all of the formularies for Anglican worship, from morning and evening prayers and the liturgy of Holy Communion to the rites for the sacraments and visitation of the sick. An Ordinal (ordination service) was added in 1550.

A revised version of the Book of Common Prayer, sometimes called the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI, appeared in 1552, and its use, too, was made compulsory by Parliament. **This version differed radically from the earlier one.** The structure of the Holy Communion service was changed, many ceremonies were eliminated, and the vestments worn by the clergy were simplified. Eight months after its appearance, it was suppressed by Queen Mary I, who reintroduced Latin as the language to be used in services in the Church of England.

After Queen Elizabeth I ascended the throne in 1558, the Book of Common Prayer was amended, and the prayer book, which in the new version tended toward Roman Catholicism, was restored to use; further amendments in a Roman Catholic direction were made in 1604, during the reign of James I. During the Commonwealth the Book of Common Prayer was suppressed, but in 1662, following the restoration of the monarchy, its use was again made compulsory. Because the amendments made in the 1662 version were also in a Roman Catholic direction, many Puritans defected from the established church. Only minor amendments were made in the Book of Common Prayer after 1662 in England. The formation of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S. in 1783 necessitated a revised prayer book for American use. It was ratified in 1789; further revisions were made in 1892, 1928, and 1979. It is basically the same book used by other members of the Anglican communion.

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Book of Common Prayer

Advanced Information

Historically there have been three books which have borne this title in the Church of England, though the title has also been applied to books in other provinces of the Anglican Communion that have been largely derived from these three.

In 1594 the English Parliament passed an Act of Uniformity requiring the clergy to use from the Feast of Pentecost in that year "the Booke of the Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church after the Use of the Church of England." This revised and reformed handbook of worship was largely the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, and in his Preface, Cranmer explained that it was to provide common

prayer in two senses of the word. From that time the worship of the Church of England, hitherto almost entirely in Latin, was to be in the common tongue ("suche language... as they mighte understande and have profite by hearyng the same"), and a common usage in every diocese (previously there had been several different uses).

In conducting worship the clergy had previously needed the missal (for the Mass), breviary (for daily offices), manual (for the occasional offices), and pontifical (for episcopal services). The new book contained all of these except the ordinal (for daily services), which was published separately in 1550 and revised and bound up in the editions of 1552 and 1662. In addition it included a calendar and lectionary and the litany, together with Coverdale's translation of the Psalter.

The first prayer book met with little favor. Protestants felt that it did not go far enough in its reforms, and in 1551 Martin Bucer published a *Censura*, or critique, in which he set out in detail the areas where the book obscured clear biblical teaching. Further, those who leaned toward Roman Catholicism (notably Bishop Gardiner of Winchester) claimed that the book still taught the old doctrines of the Mass. In consequence Cranmer produced a second prayer book in 1552 in which the Protestant position was much more clearly adopted. These books are known as the First and Second Prayer Books of King Edward the Sixth.

When Mary Tudor ascended the English throne in 1553, this second prayer book was proscribed as she reestablished the teaching and practices of the Church of Rome and leading Protestants were martyred. In 1559 Elizabeth I restored the second book with minor alterations. During the next century with the accession of James I in 1603 and the restoration of Charles II in 1660 the ongoing struggle between extreme Puritans and Episcopalians smoldered continuously, and the Hampton Court (1604) and Savoy (1661) conferences were held in an attempt to resolve the matters at issue. In the end relatively few changes were made, and the 1662 Act of Uniformity introduced a third Book of Common Prayer which was basically that of 1552 in its theological emphasis.

In 1637 the High Church Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, had attempted to impose on the Scottish church a book which was much more akin to that of 1549 in its doctrinal outlook. Although he was unsuccessful, his book formed the basis of the Book of Common Prayer adopted by the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1764. By a strange quirk of history the Protestant Episcopal Church in America drew on this book in compiling its liturgy, and thus today the Anglican Communion embraces provinces of more Catholic or Protestant theological outlook depending on whether their liturgy is ultimately derived from the 1549 or 1552 archetype.

In 1872 the Act of Uniformity Amendment Act allowed certain modifications in the way the services of the prayer book were used in the Church of England, permitting certain omissions, mainly on weekdays; hence the act became known as the Shortened Services Act. However, no amendment of the text was made at this stage.

A revision of the Book of Common Prayer was proposed in the Church of England in 1927, and although it was approved by the church's Convocations and House of Laity of Church Assembly, the book was rejected by Parliament largely because it reintroduced controversial pre-Reformation ideas, particularly in the Communion service. Since then the Worship and Doctrine Measure of 1974 has given the Church of England greater freedom to control its liturgy, and in consequence the Alternative Service Book was published in 1980 to supplement with modern services, but not to supersede, the Book of Common Prayer. Authorization of the latter can still be withdrawn only by Parliament.

D H Wheaton
(Elwell Evangelical Dictionary)

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Book of Common Prayer

Catholic Information

I. HISTORY

On 21 January, 1549, the first Act of Uniformity was passed imposing upon the whole realm of England "The Book of the Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church after the Use of the Church of England". Before this date (with some recent exceptions) the services had always been conducted in Latin; and though there were various "uses", e.g. Salisbury, Hereford, Bagor, York, and Lincoln, these were all derived from, and for the most part identical with, the Roman liturgy. "Altogether some eighteen English uses are known . . . Without exemption these English Missals are Roman -- they have the Roman Canon to begin with; they have the Roman variables; in short, their structure is identical with that of the Roman Missal" (J. Wickham Legg, 27 February, from a correspondence in "The Guardian", February and March, 1907). Though the motive for the introduction of the new liturgy is stated to be the desire for uniformity, simplicity, and the edification of the people, it is clear that this was merely a pretext. The real motive was the removal from the service books of the doctrines rejected by the Protestant Reformers. *Lex orandi, Lex credendi*. The old books clearly contained the Real Presence, the Sacrifice of the Mass, Invocation of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, Prayer for the Dead, the Seven Sacraments, with Auricular Confession, and a Sacrificing Priesthood. The Act of Uniformity states that the king by the advice of Somerset and the rest of the Council, "appointed the Archbishop of Canterbury and certain of the most learned and discreet bishops and other learned men of this realm" to draw up the new book. Who these were, besides Cranmer, cannot now be determined. No list is known earlier than that given in Fullers "Church History", published 1657. However, "the history of the Prayerbook down to the end of Edward's reign is the biography of Cranmer, for there can be no doubt that almost every line of it is his composition" (Mason, Thomas Cranmer, 139). With regard to the authority by which it was composed and issued, Abbot Gasquet and Mr. Bishop have carefully gone over the evidence (Edward VI and the Boo of Common Prayer, ch. x), and they have come to the same conclusion as the Anglican Canon Dixon, who affirms that "the Convocation Of the clergy had nothing to do with the first Act of Uniformity of religion. Laymen made the first English Boo of Common Prayer into a schedule of a penal statute. As little in the work itself which was then imposed upon the realm, had the clergy originally any share" (Hist. of the Ch. of England, III, 5). The instruction given by royal authority was that the framers of the book should "have as well eye and respect to the most sincere and pure Christian religion taught by scripture as to the usages in the primitive Church." How this was carried out will appear when we come to examine the contents of the book. Meantime we may observe that the Communion Service cannot be classed with any of the old liturgies, but rather resembles the form drawn up by Luther in 1523 and 1526. Both agree in the elimination of anything denoting offertory or sacrifice in the true sense of the words, "Even if it were not an ascertained fact that during the year when it was in preparation, Cranmer was under the influence of his Lutheran friends, the testimony of the book itself would be sufficient to prove beyond doubt that it was conceived and drawn up after the Lutheran pattern" (Gasquet and Bishop, op. cit., 228; cf. ch. xiii). Though there were of course some who welcomed the new service, the imposition of it gave rise to strenuous opposition in most parts of the country. By the time, however, that the Book of 1549 appeared, Cranmer had already adopted views more advanced than those contained in it, and was preparing for further revision. Early in 1550 an act was passed approving of the new ordinal (see ANGLICAN ORDERS) and the altars were removed and tables substituted for them in many places. In the same year Gardiner, while still a prisoner in the Tower, made use of the words of the Prayer Book to refute Cramner's own work on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Savior. About the same time Bucer completed his elaborate "Censura" of the Prayer Book. Accordingly in 1552 a second Boo of Common Prayer was published, in which everything in the First Book which had been fixed upon by Gardiner is evidence that the new liturgy did not reject the old beliefs and everything which Bucer had objected to was in the revision carefully swept away and altered. Before this book could come into general use the old Catholic services were restored by Mary. After her death the Second Book was imposed by Elizabeth in 1559 with some few, though important, changes.

Further changes were made in 1604 and again in 1662, but the Prayer Book as a whole practically remains what it was in 1552. "The position which was deliberately abandoned in 1549 and still further departed from in 1552 has never been recovered. The measure of the distance traversed in these new liturgies by those who controlled the English reformation

can only be duly estimated on an historical survey of the period in which the ground was lost" (Gasquet find Bishop, op. cit., 307).

II. CONTENTS

The Boo of Common Prayer is really a combination of four of our liturgical books: the Breviary, Missal, Pontifical, and Ritual.

(1) The New Calendar

The old Sarum and other calendars in use before the Reformation contained the fast days and the feasts for most of the days in the year. Among these were the Purification, Annunciation, Visitation, Assumption, Nativity, and Conception of "the Blessed Mary", a large number of purely Roman saints; and All Souls' Day. Corpus Christi was kept on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. The Calendar of the First Prayer Book omitted the fast days altogether and gave only twenty-two saints' days, all being New Testament saints; the only feasts of the Blessed Virgin retained are the Purification and the Annunciation; All Souls' Day is omitted, and there is no office for Corpus Christi. Hardly any change was made in this part in the Second Prayer Book, though the "dog Daies" are characteristically noted. The Calendar of the Third Prayer Book (1559-61) reintroduced the mention of the fast days and a goodly number of feasts; among the latter, the Visitation of the "Blessed Virgin Mary", the Conception and the Nativity of "the Virgin Mary"; but no special offices were appointed for any of these feasts. "The reason why the names of these Saints-days and Holy-days were resumed into the calendar are various", says Wheatly in "A Rational Illustration of the Book of Comm. Prayer" (Pt. II. Introd.), "some of them being retained upon account of our Courts of Justice. . . . Others are probably kept for the sake of such tradesmen as are wont to celebrate in the memory of their tutelar Saints And again, it has been the custom to have Wakes or Fairs kept upon these days; so that the people should be left out For these reasons our second reformers under Queen Elizabeth though convenient to restore the names of them to the Calendar, though not with any regard of being kept holy by the Church".

(2) The Breviary

The Sarum Breviary contained the canonical Hours, the Psalms distributed through the week, antiphons, versicles, and responses, and Little Chapters much the same as the modern breviary -- of course without the modifications since introduced by St. Pius V and later pontiffs. But in 1535 there appeared a new breviary drawn up by Cardinal Quignonez, in which a complete break had been made with the old order of the Office. The canonical Hours had indeed been retained but the antiphons, versicles, responses, and Little Chapters had been omitted, the Psalms were distributed in such that three were said at each hour, and the same Psalms said every day of the week in the same order. A striking feature of this breviary was the great length of the Scriptures lessons which enabled the priest to read through in the course of the year almost the whole of the Old Testament and the whole of the New Testament with Epistles of St. Paul twice over. It was this book which Cranmer had before him when framing the office portion of the First Prayer Book. Indeed he copied word for word in his preface a considerable portion of Quignonez's preface. (See Gasquet and Bishop, op. cit., App. III.) He reduced, however, the hours to two -- Matins and Evensong (called Morning and Evening Prayer in the Second Book) -- and arranged the Psalms for recital once a month instead of once a week. He also introduced two Scripture lessons, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament at both hours of prayer, and entirely omitted the lessons of the saints. In the Second Book he introduced "When the wicked man", "dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us", the general confession ("Almighty and most merciful Father"), and the Absolution ("Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"), which have remained to the present day. When we remember that more than a hundred editions of Quignonez's breviary were printed during the short space of twenty years, and that it was on the point of being adopted universally, we can see that this portion of the Boo of Common Prayer has some justification. No doctrinal questions were at stake -- unless it might be the omission of the intercession of the saints.

(3) The Missal

The Canon of the Mass in the Sarum Missal is taken almost word for word from the Roman Missal. In the First Prayer Book the Communion service is styled "The Supper of the Lord and the Holy Communion, commonly called the Mass"; in the Second, and also in the present book, "The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or the Holy Communion". It is not possible within the limits of the present article to compare in detail the first Book with the Sarum on the one hand, and with the subsequent books on the other. (See Gasquet and Bishop, ch. xii and xvi). The word altar is used in the First Book, though with the alternative of "God's board"; in the Second Book and subsequent Books "table" and "board" alone occur. As regards vestments the First Book directs that the priest shall wear "a white alb plain, with a vestment (chasuble?) or cope", find the assisting clergy "albs with tunacles"; the Second Book "the minister at the time of the Communion find all other times in his ministration, shall use neither alb, vestment nor cope; but being archbishop or bishop, he shall have and wear a rochet, and being a priest or deacon, he shall have and wear a surplice only". In the Third Book (1559) "it is to be noted that such ornaments of the church and of the ministers thereof, at all times of their ministration, shall be retained, and be in use, as were in the Church of England by the authority of Parliament in the second year of the reign of King Edward the Sixth". As is well known, the meaning of this rubric has long been a matter of dispute. The First book directs the priest to stand "humbly before the midst of the altar"; the Second, to stand "at the north side of the table", as is still the rule. No mention is made of incense, or lights, or holy water in any of the books. As to the service itself, the changes may be briefly summed up as follows: The First Book omitted all mention of any true sacrifice, but retained expressions capable of referring to the Real Presence; the Second Book excluded these; the Third and subsequent books re-admitted and combined expressions which might be taken in either sense. "On comparing and the first with the second Communion office what is obvious at first sight is, that whilst the former, in spite of the substantial change made in the ancient mass, manifested a general order and disposition of parts similar to the mass itself, the latter was changed beyond recognition" (Gasquet and Bishop, 288). It will be sufficient to note here that while the First retained something like the prepatory prayer of Consecration ("Vouchsafe to bl+ess and sanc+tify these thy gifts, and creatures of bread and wine that they may be unto us the body and blood of thy most dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ"), the Second and subsequent Books omitted this altogether; in the Second Book no directions were given as to the acts of the minister -- he might recite the words of Consecration as a mere lesson; but in the later Books he was directed to take the paten and cup into his hands. Most significant, too, are the changes made in the form of administering the Holy Communion. In 1549:

When he deliverith the Sacrament of the Body of Christ, he shall say unto every one these words: "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life". And the Minister delivering the Sacrament of the Blood shall say "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life."

In 1552:

And when he deliverith the bread, he shall say: "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee. and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving." And the Minister that deliverith the cup shall say: "Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee, and be thankful".

In 1559 and the present Book:

And when he delivereth the Bread to any one he shall say, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this In remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving." And the Minister that delivereth the cup shall say: "The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for thee, and be thankful."

The First Book forbade "any elevation or showing the Sacrament to the people"; the Second Book added the so-called "Black Rubric" denying any "real and essential presence of Christ's natural flesh and blood". This was omitted in 1559, but was reintroduced in 1632, shortened and slightly altered, "corporal presence" being substituted for "real and essential".

(4) The Ritual

The order of the administration of Baptism in the old Sarum Manuale (Ritual) was almost identical in words and ceremonies with that now in use among us. (For the differences see SARUM.) The principal changes in 1549 were the omission of the blessing of the font, of the giving of the blessed salt, and of the first anointing. New prayers were also introduced, but the general character of the old service was preserved, including the exorcisms, the giving of the white garment, and the second anointing. All of these met with Bucer's disapproval, and were accordingly removed in 1552, and have never been restored. The present rite is exactly the same as that of 1552, with few verbal alterations.

As the Reformers did not recognize Confirmation as a sacrament, we are not surprised to find that the rite of administering it has undergone great changes. In 1549 the anointing with chrism was omitted, but the prayer that the Holy Ghost might come down upon those about to be confirmed was retained, and they were signed with the sign of the cross on their forehead. In 1552, owing again to Bucer's influence, the first prayer was altered ("strengthen them with the Holy Ghost"); the signing with the cross was omitted; and a colourless form of words used. This latter rite is still in use; but in 1662 the renewal of baptismal vows was prefixed to it.

The "Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" comes next. As the essential part of the ceremony is the contracting of the parties, considerable latitude has existed in the Church with regard to the rest of the service. The First Book followed the old rite rather closely, but the blessing of the ring and the nuptial Mass were omitted. Of course the Reformers looked upon matrimony merely as a "state of life allowed in the Scriptures", and not as a sacrament. "The Order of the Visitation of the Sick" contains matters of grave importance. In the First Book and in all subsequent Books, the "sick person shall make a special confession, if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter; after which the priest shall absolve him after this form [sort] . . . I absolve thee from thy sins". The First Book alone adds: "and the same form of absolution shall be used in all private confessions." Moreover the First Book alone contains the anointing of the sick: "If the sick person desire to be anointed, then shall the priest anoint him upon the forehead or breast only, making the sign of the cross", and afterwards reciting a long prayer entirely different from the old forms, which were the same as the present Catholic ones. This ceremony was removed at Bucer's suggestion. The First Book also has a rubric about reservation of the Blessed Sacrament: "If there be more sick persons to be visited the same day then shall the curate reserve so much of the sacrament of the body and blood as shall serve the other sick persons, and such as be appointed to communicate with them if there be any; and shall immediately carry it and minister it unto them." Bucer does not seem to have objected to this; nevertheless no mention of reservation is made in any of the later Books. The Sarum Office of the Dead included Vespers (Placebo), Matins (Dirige), Lauds, Mass (Requiem), the Absolution, and the Burial. As might be expected from the views of the Reformers on prayer for the dead, nothing was preserved in the new Books but the "Order for the Burial of the Dead". The First Book, indeed, contains distinct prayers for the soul of the departed, but these were removed in 1552, and have never been restored. For the Thirty-nine Articles see the article under that heading.

In recent years attempts have been made to reform the prayer Book in two opposite directions. The Evangelicals have considered it as still containing too much of the old "propery", while the High Church party have endeavoured to get back the portions omitted or altered since 1549. Various changes have actually been made in the Prayer Book as used by the Protestant churches of Scotland, Ireland and America.

It is only fair, in concluding, to note Cranmers "splendid command of the English language and his instinctive sense of what would suit average English minds. His genius for devotional composition in English is universally recognized, even by those who have least sympathy with his character and career" (Mason, Thomas Cranmer, 140). "I value the Prayer Book, as you cannot do", says one of the Anglican characters in Newman's "Loss and Gain" (ch. viii), "for I have known what it is to one in affliction. May it be long before you know it in a similar way; but if affliction comes on you, depend on it all these new fancies and fashions will vanish from you like the wind, and the good old Prayer Book alone will stand you in any stead."

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