

Project Canterbury

The New American Prayer Book: Its History and Contents

By E. Clowes Chorley, D.D.

Historiographer of the Protestant Episcopal Church

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Chapter IV. The Prayer Book of 1789

The General Convention of 1786 adjourned without the official adoption of a Book of Common Prayer. It had acceded to the suggestions of the English bench of bishops by reinstating the Nicene Creed and restoring the clause, "He descended into Hell," in the Apostles' Creed, and that was all. The Book of 1785 was still the "Proposed Book." The clergy were free to use it or not. A few here and there did so, but for the most part the English Book, with alterations in the State prayers, was in common use.

The delay in issuing an authorized Prayer Book for the American Church led to two interesting developments; the one in Boston, the other in Connecticut. The wave of Unitarianism which was sweeping over New England profoundly affected the congregation of King's Chapel, Boston, the oldest Episcopal church in that city. When in 1782 Mr. James Freeman was called to be minister of the Chapel, he was content to use the English Book with the changes in use in Trinity Church, Boston. Owing, however, to a marked change in his theological views, Mr. Freeman proposed an amended Form of Prayer for public use at the Chapel. On June 19, 1785, the Prayer Book as amended was adopted for use by the congregation. It was published under the title page of:

A
LITURGY
Collected Principally From The
BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER,
For The Use Of The
FIRST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
In
BOSTON;
Together With The
PSALTER Or PSALMS
Of
DAVID.
Continually Pray To God The Father, By The
Mediation Of Our Only Saviour Jesus Christ,
For The Heavenly Assistance of the Holy Ghost.
Off. for Ord. of Priests.

BOSTON,
PRINTED BY PETER EDES, IN STATE STREET.
MDCCLXXXV.

The Preface states that "great assistance hath been derived from the Judicious corrections of the Reverend Mr. Lindsey, who hath reformed the Book of Common Prayer according to the plan of the truly pious and justly celebrated Doctor Samuel Clarke." It is noted in the *History of King's Chapel* that the alterations "for the most part were such as involved the omission of the doctrine of the Trinity." The ascription, "Glory be to the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost" was left out as were also the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. The Preface adds,

The Liturgy, contained in this volume, is such, that no Christian, it is supposed, can take offence at, or find his conscience wounded in repeating. The Trinitarian, the Unitarian, the Calvinist, the Arminian will read nothing in it which can give him any reasonable umbrage. GOD is the sole object of worship in these prayers; and as no man can come to GOD, but by the one Mediator, JESUS CHRIST, every petition is here offered in his name, and in obedience to his positive command.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Freeman applied for episcopal ordination. Failing to obtain this he was ordained in King's Chapel by the senior warden who laid hands upon him and then "blessed him in the name of the Lord, and the whole assembly, as one man, spontaneously and emphatically pronounced, *Amen!*" This ended the association of King's Chapel with the Episcopal Church, but the Prayer Book with sundry amendments remains in use to this day.

Under date of August 12, 1785, Bishop Seabury issued an injunction to his clergy prefaced thus:

SAMUEL, by divine permission, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the State of Connecticut, ... Greeting.

Stating that "It having pleased Almighty GOD, that the late *British* Colony of Connecticut should become a free, sovereign and independent State," he directed alterations in the State Prayers; the discontinuance of the "observation" of the fifth of November, the thirtieth of January, the twenty-ninth of May, and the twenty-fifth of October, and added a new prayer to be used "during every session of the Great and General Court, or Assembly."

The following year he compiled [an office for the Holy Communion](#) which was issued under the title:

THE COMMUNION OFFICE
Or Order
For The Administration
Of The
HOLY EUCHARIST
Or
SUPPER Of The LORD
With
PRIVATE DEVOTIONS
Recommended to the Episcopal Congregations

In *Connecticut*
By the Right Reverend
BISHOP SEABURY.
NEW-LONDON:
PRINTED BY T. GREEN, M,DCC,LXXXVI.

The prayer of consecration in this issue followed that of the Scotch Prayer Book. On his consecration in Scotland Seabury undertook to endeavor to introduce it to the American Church "without the compulsion of authority on the one side, or the prejudice of former custom on the other." The use of this service was not made compulsory in Connecticut, but it was generally adopted in the diocese and later incorporated in the American Prayer Book. At the same convention Seabury introduced a new petition in the Litany reading:

That it may please Thee to bless and protect the United States of America in Congress assembled; and to direct and prosper all their consultations to the advancement of the public welfare and the promotion of thy true religion and virtue.

Where the Litany was not said this Collect was to be used:

Almighty God, the fountain of all goodness, we humbly beseech Thee to bless the United States of America in Congress assembled, together with the Governor and Rulers of this State; endue them with thy Holy Spirit; enrich them with thy heavenly grace; prosper them with all happiness; and grant that under their wise and just government, we may lead godly and quiet lives in this world, and by thy mercy obtain everlasting happiness in the world to come, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The General Convention of 1789 met at Philadelphia on July 8, with the States of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina represented by clerical and lay deputies. For the first time in the history of the American Church a bishop--William White of Pennsylvania--was present at a General Convention. Bishop Seabury, smarting under some question as to the validity of his consecration by Scotch bishops, was absent, as was also Provoost, Bishop of New York "detained by indisposition." There was no representation from the dioceses of New England. By this time the need for the unity of the church was pressing and the convention was adjourned till September "for the purpose of settling articles of union, discipline, uniformity of worship, and general government among all the churches in the United States."

When the adjourned Convention met, Bishop Seabury was present together with deputies from Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, this being the first time the New England churches were represented in General Convention. Certain modifications were made in the Constitution to meet the views of New England, and on October 2 it was finally adopted. The Convention then separated into two houses--the House of Bishops and the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies.

The way was now open to proceed to the adoption of a Book of Common Prayer for the American Church. Immediately a difference of opinion manifested itself. The Bishops held that

the English Prayer Book was still the Liturgy of the American Church and that "it should be taken as the book in which some alterations were contemplated." On the other hand, the Deputies took the position "that there were no forms of prayer, no offices and no rubrics until they should be formed by the Convention now assembled." Hence they appointed committees to "prepare" the various offices.

The revision covered a period of thirteen days. On some matters, notably the Creeds, the two Houses disagreed. Out of deference to the wishes of Connecticut where it was said that the omission of the Athanasian Creed "would hazard the reception of the new Book," the Bishops adopted an amendment to retain that Creed for use where it was so desired. The Deputies would have none of it. When the matter came to a conference between the two Houses the Deputies "would now [*sic*] allow of the Creed in any shape; which was thought intolerant by the gentlemen from New England, who with Bishop Seabury, gave it up with great reluctance."

Changed political conditions were recognized by the omission of all references to the king, royal family and the High Court of Parliament wherever found in the English Book. In their place two new prayers were inserted--one for the President of the United States; the other for Congress.

A Prayer for the President of the United States, and all in civil authority

O Lord, our heavenly Father, the high and mighty Ruler of the universe, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth; most heartily we beseech thee, with thy favour, to behold and bless thy servant, the President of the United States, and all others in authority; and so replenish them with the grace of thy holy Spirit, that they may always incline to thy will, and walk in thy way: Endue them plenteously with heavenly gifts; grant them in health and prosperity long to live; and finally, after this life to attain everlasting joy and felicity, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A Prayer for Congress to be used during their session

Most gracious God, we humbly beseech thee, as for the People of these United States in general, so especially for their Senate and Representatives in Congress assembled; that thou wouldest be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations, to the advancement of thy Glory, the good of thy Church, the safety, honour, and welfare of thy people; that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavours, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations. These, and all other necessities for them, for us, and thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the Name and mediation of Jesus Christ, our most blessed Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

The following special offices in the English Book were omitted:

A FORM OF PRAYER WITH THANKSGIVING, to be used yearly upon the Fifth Day of November, for the happy Deliverance of King JAMES I, and the Three estates of *England*, from the most traiterous and bloody-intended Massacre by

Gunpowder: And also for the happy Arrival of His Majesty King *William* on this Day, for the Deliverance of our Church and Nation.

A FORM OF PRAYER WITH FASTING, to be used yearly on the Thirtieth of *January*, being the day of the Martyrdom of the Blessed King CHARLES the First; to implore the mercy of God, that neither the Guilt of that sacred and innocent Blood, nor those other sins, by which God was provoked to deliver up both us and our King into the hands of cruel and unreasonable men, may at any time hereafter be visited upon us or our posterity.

A FORM OF PRAYER WITH THANKSGIVING to Almighty God, for having put an end to the Great Rebellion, by the Restitution of the King and Royal Family, and the Restoration of the Government after many Years interruption; which unspeakable Mercies were wonderfully completed upon the Twenty-ninth of *May*, in the Year 1660. And in memory thereof that Day in every Year is by Act of Parliament appointed to be for ever kept holy.

A FORM OF PRAYER WITH THANKSGIVING to Almighty God; to be used in all Churches and Chapels within this Realm, every year, upon the Twenty-fifth day of *October*, being the day on which his Majesty began his happy Reign.

So far as the regular offices of the church were concerned there was a general desire to depart from the Prayer Book of the Church of England as little as was possible. Three new opening sentences to Morning and Evening Prayers were added, and minor changes were made in the chants. In the "*Te Deum*" the words "thou didst humble thyself to be born of a Virgin" were substituted for "thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb." The rubric governing the use of the Apostles' Creed gave permission to omit the words, "He descended into Hell," or to substitute for them, "He went into the place of departed Spirits," which, the rubric explains, "are to be considered as words of the same meaning as in the Creed." In morning and evening service the Nicene Creed might be used instead of the Apostles' Creed. Where persons present so desired the sign of the cross in Baptism might be omitted. In the marriage service the causes for which matrimony was ordained and set forth with unblushing plainness in the English Book, were left out; also at the giving of the ring the words "with my body I thee worship." The lengthy exhortation was also eliminated. The personal absolution in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick was left out and three new prayers added thereto. The English Communion Service, with its attendant series of curses, found no place in the new book, but a brief service for Ash Wednesday took its place. The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion were omitted entirely.

Some notable additions were made. In the service of Holy Communion, after the recital of the Ten Commandments, permission was given to add:

Hear also what our Lord Jesus Christ Saith.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

This was added, as Bishop White wrote, "to give to the weight of Moses, the greater authority of our Saviour." An even more notable addition was made to the Prayer of Consecration in the shape of the invocation of the Holy Spirit. This was taken from the Scotch Book of Common Prayer which went back to the form contained in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. The rubric in the English Book requiring the consumption of any consecrated bread and wine left over from the service and forbidding it being carried out of church was retained. But those requiring parishioners to communicate at least three times in the year and also the one forbidding a celebration of the Lord's Supper "except there be a convenient number to communicate with the Priest," were left out. Other additions were the "*Gloria in Excelsis*" as an alternative to the "*Gloria Patria*" in morning prayer; prayers for Sick Persons; Those in Affliction; Persons going to Sea and for Malefactors after Condemnation, all of which were taken from Bishop Jeremy Taylor; also some new Thanksgivings from the same source. A selection of Psalms to be said instead of the Psalter was assented to very reluctantly by the bishops.

Three entirely new Offices were added. The first, "A Form of Prayer for the Visitation of Prisoners." This had appeared in the "Proposed Book" and had its origin at a Synod held at Dublin in 1711, and is commonly found in the Prayer Books printed in Ireland. The second was a "Form of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God, for the Fruits of the Earth, and all the other Blessings of his merciful Providence." This also was in the "Proposed Book" and is believed to have been compiled by the Reverend Doctor William Smith of Maryland. The last addition was an Office entitled "Forms of Prayer to be used in Families." In the main these were taken from a compilation by Gibson, Bishop of London, who in turn was indebted to Archbishop Tillotson.

On Friday, October 16, the long work of revision and enrichment was completed. For the first time in her history the American Church had an authorized Book of Common Prayer which, with a few additions, was destined to be her book of worship for more than a century. The Preface states that it is the general aim of the Church "in these different *reviews* and *alterations* ... to do that which, according to her best understanding, might most tend to the preservation of *peace* and *unity* in the church; the procuring of reverence, and the exciting of piety and devotion in the worship of God; and the cutting off occasion, from them that seek occasion, of cavil or quarrel against her liturgy." Preceding the Preface is:

The
RATIFICATION
Of The
BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER,

By the Bishops, the Clergy, and the Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America in Convention, this Sixteenth Day of October, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-nine:

This Convention, having in their present Session set forth "A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS, AND OTHER RITES AND CEREMONIES OF THE CHURCH," do hereby establish the said Book: and require, that it be received as such by all the Members of the same: And this Book shall be in use from and after the First Day of October,

in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety.

It was accordingly published with the title-page:

The BOOK of
COMMON PRAYER
And Administration of the
SACRAMENTS
And Other
RITES and CEREMONIES of the CHURCH,
According To The Use Of
The Protestant Episcopal Church
In The
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:
Together With The
PSALTER
Or
PSALMS of DAVID.

Project Canterbury