

Project Canterbury

The New American Prayer Book: Its History and Contents

By E. Clowes Chorley, D.D.

Historiographer of the Protestant Episcopal Church

New York: Macmillan Company, 1929.

Transcribed by Irene C. Teas, 2005.

Chapter VI. The Prayer Book of 1892

The Book of Common Prayer as set forth in 1789, with sundry amendments and additions, remained in use in the American Church for the long period of one hundred and three years. With the passage of time there came a deepening sense of its inadequacy as an expression of the devotional life of the church. It had been adopted at a time when the church was small in numbers and largely lacking in religious fervor. She was then content to be "respectable," ministering to privileged people and with little or no care for them that were without. Her years from 1785 to 1811 were aptly described as a period of "suspended animation." The Prayer Book of 1789 represented the thought and life of the church at her lowest ebb.

Great movements followed in rapid succession. The blazing of the westward trail gave birth to missionary expansion and in 1820 the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society was formed. The consecration of Bishop Alexander Veits Griswold and Bishop John Henry Hobart in 1811 was as the sound of the wind in the tops of the mulberry trees. The dry bones stirred into a new life. The American Church was born again. Griswold was the leader of the Evangelical Movement which swept the country like a flame of fire. Hobart was the ardent and aggressive apostle of "Evangelical truth and Apostolic order" and by his burning zeal created a new ideal for the Episcopate in America. Then came the Oxford or Tractarian Movement with its quickening sense of the value of Christian tradition and its recovery of the inspiring vision of the glories of the Catholic Church. Out of that sprang the large enrichment of the ritual of worship which once again made beauty the handmaid of religion. Then followed the inevitable reaction against Evangelicalism on the one hand and Tractarianism on the other. This found eloquent expression in the literature of the middle of the nineteenth century--in Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*; in George Eliot's works and in Matthew Arnold's poems of fine despair. The publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 ushered in the long conflict between science and revealed religion which was accentuated by Huxley's unrivaled powers of popular exposition. All this created what John Morley described as "a vague disquiet." The Broad Church Movement was an effort to restate the Christian faith in the light of modern knowledge. Its leaders in the American Church were John Cotton Smith, Phillips Brooks, and Edward A. Washburn.

In a world seething with the new learning and new ideals, the Liturgy remained static. Its language was antiquated; much of its theology was medieval; its services were as long and wearisome as the corrupted Breviaries of the thirteenth century. A Prayer Book of the

eighteenth century was woefully inadequate to express the thought and devotion of the nineteenth century.

Hence, at a comparatively early date efforts were made for its revision and enrichment. They were originated by Bishop John Henry Hobart, who was almost a fanatical devotee of the Liturgy, in 1826. "Chiefly for the purpose of removing the objections so generally made to the length of our morning service" Hobart introduced into the House of Bishops proposals to shorten the same in respect to the Psalter and the Lessons. A rubric provided for the reading of a psalm or psalms instead of the psalter for the day and also instead of the appointed lessons, to read a portion thereof consisting of not less than fifteen verses. The rubric at the end of the Communion Office was to be so changed as to make clear the obligation of the clergy to read the Ante-Communion service down to the end of the Gospel and in all cases to conclude the service with the Blessing. In the Confirmation Office an alternate Preface was suggested, and, "in order to correct the injurious misapprehension, as to the meaning of certain terms," a new collect was set forth in that service to be used at the discretion of the bishop.

Simple as were these changes, they appear to have excited the alarm of the Low Churchmen. They were approved by the House of Deputies by a vote of 39 to 19 and went down to the dioceses for their consideration. Agitation resulted. The Low Churchmen objected to the lack of uniformity in the services of the church which would result from the liberty in the choice of psalms and lessons. They were in favor of a revision of the Prayer Book, but, like Bishop Griswold, contended that it should be done thoroughly or not at all. The opposition proved so formidable that in 1829 on the motion of Hobart himself the proposals were "dismissed from the consideration of the Convention."

Though Hobart's modest proposals were withdrawn the question of revision would not down and in 1853 it became acute. Moved by the isolation of the Episcopal Church and her evident failure to meet the needs of the time a group of men under the leadership of the Reverend Doctor William A. Muhlenberg of New York prepared and presented to the House of Bishops the now famous "Memorial." Moved by the "divided and distracted state of American Protestant Christianity; new and subtle forms of unbelief," the memorialists questioned the ability of the Episcopal Church, bound by "fixed and invariable modes of public worship, and her traditional customs and usages" to adequately meet the situation, and pleaded for a broader and more comprehensive ecclesiastical system. As an essential part of that broader system they put in the front larger liberty in the use of the Book of Common Prayer and urged that the edification of the people was more important than uniformity of modes of public worship. The Memorial was referred to a committee of bishops who reported at the General Convention of 1856. They recommended the discretionary use of Morning Prayer, the Litany and the Ante-Communion as separate services; also the Holy Communion with a sermon. That, at other than the stated morning and evening prayer, ministers might use such parts of the Prayer Book and lessons as would "tend most to edification." The report further provided that diocesan bishops might set forth "such special services as, in their judgment, shall be required by the peculiar spiritual necessities of any class or portion of the population within said dioceses." In response to a request of the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies made in 1853 for a form of prayer for the Increase of the Ministry, the committee recommended the adoption of the following new prayers:

A Prayer for Unity

A Prayer for the Increase of the Ministry
 A Prayer for Missions and Missionaries
 A Prayer for the Young
 A Prayer for a Person about to be exposed to special danger
 A Prayer in time of public calamities, dangers, or difficulties
 A Thanksgiving for deliverance of a person from any peril
 A Prayer for deliverance from public calamities and dangers
 A Thanksgiving for the recovery of a sick child

Outside these proposed additions the Prayer Book was left untouched so far as actual legislation was concerned, though the committee concurred in the view "that in adjusting the length of our public services, more regard should be had to the physical ability of both minister and people." To this end the House of Bishops expressed the opinion that the three Offices of Morning Prayer, Litany and Holy Communion might be used separately; that on special occasions the clergy might have discretion in the use of the Prayer Book and the choice of lessons and that the bishops might put forth special services to meet peculiar necessities, with the proviso that such should not supersede the Prayer Book "in congregations capable of its use."

The Church at large was not satisfied with the treatment of the Memorial and especially with the failure to embrace the opportunity to revise the Prayer Book. In 1859 the House of Deputies declared that the action of the bishops "had disturbed the minds of many in our Church," and asked them "to reconsider their resolutions and to throw the subject matter into such shape as will admit of the joint action of both Houses of Convention." This the bishops refused to do and defeated a motion in their own House to refer the whole matter of the Memorial and Prayer Book revision to a Joint Commission.

At the Convention of 1862 the House of Deputies resolved that the Litany be amended to include the new suffrage: "That it may please thee to send forth labourers into thy harvest." Strange as it may seem, the House of Bishops declared that such an addition was "inexpedient."

About this time there arose a demand for drastic Prayer Book revision emanating from a small but active group of radical low churchmen. Their views found expression in a pamphlet first published in 1858 entitled, *Are There Romanizing Germs in the Prayer Book?* Although anonymous, the writer of the pamphlet was the Reverend Franklin S. Rising, then secretary of the American Church Missionary Society. He defined "romanizing germs" as "certain seminal doctrines, which, being implanted and taking root, in due time spring up and bear Romanism as their fruit." Such germs he found in the Book of Common Prayer in its teaching on the rule of faith, its doctrine of the ministry and in the two Sacraments, especially that of Baptism. The Catechism he found also to be a "fruitful source of Romanizing doctrines." Later sundry presbyters presented to the General Convention a memorial setting forth their objections to some of the language of the Prayer Book and asking for latitude in its use, especially that they should not be compelled to say in Baptism, "It hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit." The issue was joined on the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. In 1869 nine bishops joined in the plea for authority to use an alternative phrase. The controversy came to a head with the deposition from the ministry of the Reverend Dr. Cheney of Chicago who had refused to read that sentence in administering baptism. To allay the feeling this action aroused, the bishops, acting as individuals and not as a House, issued a statement expressing their opinion that the word "regeneration is not there so used as to determine that a moral change in

the subject of Baptism is wrought in the sacrament." The concession came too late. The malcontents went out and formed the Reformed Episcopal Church. One of its first acts was to issue its own Prayer Book which, in the main, was based upon the "Proposed Book" of 1785.

Throughout this agitation the demand for shorter Prayer Book services was insistent. All sorts of expedients were proposed--the amendment of canons and the constitution and the creation of new rubrics, all without success. The utmost that could be gained was an agreement on the appointment of a "Joint Committee on the matter of providing shortened Services."

So matters stood until the General Convention of 1880. The Reverend Doctor William Reed Huntington, then a clerical deputy from the diocese of Massachusetts, had long cherished the hope of "a careful, loving, fair-minded" revision of the Liturgy in order that "the Church may cease to wear the dimensions of a sect, and become the chosen home of a great people." He saw that the moment had come, and in 1880 offered the following resolution in the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That a Joint Committee, to consist of seven Bishops, seven Presbyters and seven Laymen, be appointed to consider, and report to the next General Convention, whether, in view of the fact that this Church is soon to enter upon the second century of its organized existence in this country, the changed conditions of national life do not demand certain alterations in the Book of Common Prayer in the direction of liturgical enrichment and increased flexibility of use.

The resolution was adopted by a divided vote in the House of Deputies and concurred in by the House of Bishops.

John Williams, Bishop of Connecticut, was elected chairman of the Joint Committee, and Dr. Huntington, secretary. It is not too much to say that Dr. Huntington was the leading spirit in the preparation of the new Prayer Book. The spirit which governed his work is set forth in a letter to Bishop Williams in which he wrote:

I cannot tell how it looks to you, but it does seem to me that never since the days of White and Seabury has such an opportunity been vouchsafed to the Church. We certainly do not want to Americanize the Prayer Book in any vulgar sense, but at the same time we cannot forget that it is in America we live, and to Americans that we minister. To bring the worship of the Church closer home to the hearts of "this great and understanding people" by making it more attractive to their imaginations and more adaptable to their needs is a work to which we may well thank God for having called us.

At the outset the committee agreed on two fundamental principles. First, that it would report no alterations affecting the doctrine of the Book; second, that the revision should be guided by the accepted principles of liturgical construction and ritual, "which have guided the compilation and amendments of the Book of Common Prayer, and have made it what it is." The revision covered a period of twelve years.

The first report was presented to the General Convention of 1883 and embraced one hundred

and ninety-six changes. They were embodied in what was called "The Book Annexed" the amendments being inserted in their proper place in the Prayer Book. The committee drew upon the rich heritage of the devotions of the Catholic Church and in later times from Bright's *Ancient Collects*; Hutton's *The Daily Service*, and Huntington's *Materia Ritualis*. It is quite impossible, within the compass of this book, to recite in detail the history of the reception of the report in the Conventions of 1883, 1886, 1889 and 1892. Its fortunes varied. The Convention of 1883 was enthusiastic in its acceptance of many of the recommendations. But it had to run the gauntlet in 1886 when they came up for final confirmation. There was an inevitable reaction and in many influential quarters there was severe, if not unjust, criticism. Some of the bishops were markedly hostile, one remarking that "a fly-leaf would contain the desirable portions of the whole attempted revision; another asserted that it was "unsatisfactory, liturgically, historically, doctrinally and in diction and phraseology." It is not therefore surprising that the whole matter was remitted to a new committee for review and report. The successive story of the rejections makes melancholy reading, tempered only by the fact that so many of the items then rejected have found their way into the new Standard Prayer Book of 1928--an act of tardy justice.

Among the more important recommendations which were set aside were:

An alternative Confession and Absolution in Evening Prayer.

The Office of the Beatitudes.

An enlarged Service for Thanksgiving Day, otherwise "named Harvest Home" and containing new prayers for "*A Blessing on the Families of the Land*," "*For the Country*" and "*For all Poor, Homeless and Neglected Folk*."

A Short Office of Prayer for sundry Occasions.

A Rubric requiring "Every Communicant to receive the Communion at the least, three times a year, of which Easter is to be one."

The saying of "Thanks be to thee, O Lord" after the Gospel.

A Service for the Burial of Infants or young Children.

A proposal to add to Family Prayers on Sundays when the Holy Communion was to be celebrated, these words:

And grant that those of us who, this day, are to receive the blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, may come to those holy mysteries with faith, charity and true repentance, and being filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, may to their great and endless comfort receive remission of their sins and all other benefits of his Passion

were disapproved.

Those Conventions manifested a marked unwillingness to the enrichment of the Liturgy. Among

the twenty new prayers rejected were those:

For all who are dependent on the Public Care
 Young Persons preparing for Confirmation
 For the Spirit of Prayer
 For Grace to Speak the Truth in Love
 For the Light of God's Truth

and a like fate was meted out to

An Intercession for those who err from the Faith
 An Intercession for these who live in Sin
 A general Intercession

and new prayers for morning and evening.

So strong and widespread was the objection to continuing this work of revision that a minority report was presented to the General Convention of 1889 characterizing the work as calculated to "excite uneasiness, shake the feeling of confidence and security with which devout people have rested upon the precious formularies of the Prayer Book, and impair the unquestioning loyalty which is the very foundation of the Christian character." The minority therefore proposed "that the revision of the Prayer Book be brought to an end at the present session of the General Convention." In the House of Bishops this resolution was only lost by a vote of twenty-eight to twenty. The vote was even closer in the House of Deputies. In the clerical order twenty-one dioceses voted for it, twenty-four against it; in the lay order nineteen dioceses voted for the resolution, twenty-three against it. The danger point was passed and at the General Convention of 1892 the new Prayer Book was ratified for use in the churches.

For the most part the phraseology was left unchanged and there was no attempt at restatement of doctrine. Here and there it was made possible to shorten the services. The first long step toward enrichment of the Liturgy which culminated in the Book of 1928, was taken in 1892. New sentences were added to morning and evening prayer and the ancient chants, "The Magnificat" and the "*Nunc Dimittis*" were added to evening prayer; also additional versicles and responses. In the same service there was substituted a new prayer for the President of the United States, reading:

Almighty God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite, Have mercy upon this whole land; and so rule the hearts of thy servants THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, THE GOVERNOR OF THIS STATE, and all others in authority, that they, knowing whose ministers they are, may above all things seek thine honour and glory; and that we and all the People, duly considering whose authority they bear, may faithfully and obediently honour them, in thee, and for thee, according to thy blessed word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

The following suffrage was added to the Litany: "That it may please thee to send forth labourers into thy harvest." The occasional prayers were enriched by the addition of three new ones: "For

Unity"; "For Missions"; and two for "Fruitful Seasons" and there was added "A Thanksgiving for the Recovery of a Child." The prayer for Unity read:

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

After the occasional Prayers and Thanksgivings there was inserted "A Penitential Office" for Ash-Wednesday; an adaptation of the old English Communion Service minus its crudities and curses. New Collects, Epistles and Gospels were added for the first Communion at Christmas and Easter Day as in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. One Feast was added to the Calendar: "The Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ," the Collect for which read:

O God, who on the mount didst reveal to chosen witnesses thine only-begotten Son wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening, mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may be permitted to behold the King in his beauty, who with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

It is worthy of note that this example has been followed in the new Prayer Book of the Church of England. New sentences were provided for the Offertory in the Celebration of the Holy Communion; also a significant addition to the rubric: "And sufficient opportunity shall be given to those present to communicate." In the Confirmation Office provision was made for the presentation of the candidates to the bishop; also for a Gospel, and rubric reading, "The Minister shall not omit earnestly to move the Persons confirmed to come to the Lord's Supper," was added. No change was made in the Marriage service save the insertion of one sentence in the Exhortation describing marriage as "an honorable estate, instituted of God," etc. In the Commendatory Prayer used in the Visitation of the Sick the ominous words, "And teach us who survive, in this, and other like daily spectacles of mortality, to see how frail and uncertain our own condition is" were omitted. Three Prayers were added to the Burial Office. A New Rubric was inserted in the *Office For the Visitation of Prisoners* stating that "it is judged best that the criminal should not make any public profession or declaration." The Collect was changed so as to remove the emphasis from the thought of deserved punishment to the divine forgiveness. In the *Communion of the Sick* permission was given to shorten the service in cases of contagious disease or extreme weakness; also to use the service for aged or bed-ridden people with the substitution of the Collect, Gospel and Epistle for the day. These ended the changes and additions in the Prayer Book proper. Some changes were made in the directions for the reading of the Psalter in public services. The old set of the "Selection of Psalms" and the Table of "Proper Psalms" for the great Feasts and Fasts in the Prayer Book of 1789 were omitted and new ones substituted. The Nicene Creed was inserted in the ordination of priests and the consecration of bishops. The words "Assistant Minister" were omitted from the *Office of Institution of Ministers* and, finally, the Articles of Religion were put at the end of the Prayer Book and given a distinct title-page.

With these, and other minor changes, the new Prayer Book was sent forth as the Standard Book of 1892.

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