

Project Canterbury

The New American Prayer Book: Its History and Contents

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Chapter VII. The New Prayer Book: Revision

The Prayer Book of 1892 lasted thirty-six years. It was never satisfactory. The Convention which adopted it was not only conservative, but timid. It hesitated to embark on a liturgical adventure. Revision was reduced to a minimum. Archaic expressions were retained and much of its theology savored of the middle ages. For the most part the painstaking labor of twelve long years was embalmed in the "Book Annexed" which remains a melancholy movement of what might have been done to make a living Liturgy. The consequence was the Church outgrew her own Prayer Book. More and more the clergy turned to outside sources for the enrichment of the devotional life of their people. Less and less respect was paid to the rubrics. Parts of the Psalter were never read in the public services; the table of Lessons was largely ignored. The Baptism office was mutilated, parts of it being an affront to ordinary intelligence, and other Offices like that of the Visitation of the Sick fell into complete disuse.

Obviously something had to be done to repair the integrity of the Book of Common Prayer. Hence the General Convention of 1913, spurred by memorials from two important dioceses, determined on the appointment of a Joint Commission, consisting of seven bishops and an equal number of presbyters and laymen, "to consider and report such revision and enrichment of the Prayer Book as will adapt it to present conditions, if, in their judgment, such revision be necessary." The resolution appointing the Commission, however, expressly stipulated "that no proposition involving the Faith and Doctrine of the Church shall be considered or reported." It also expressly excluded "any proposal to change the title-page of the Prayer Book" and the suggestion of any change in the "Name of the Church." The former instruction proved to be impracticable; the latter was scrupulously observed.

The Right Reverend Cortlandt Whitehead, Bishop of Pittsburgh, was chairman of the Commission until his death, when he was succeeded by the Right Reverend Charles Lewis Slattery, Bishop of Massachusetts. In the later stages of the work the Reverend Doctor John W. Suter of Boston served as secretary. The revision which began in 1913 is embodied in five triennial reports. It was completed and adopted at the General Convention of 1928 held at Washington, D. C., and was then formally authorized for use in the churches. The intervening time was spent in the careful editing and preparation of the Book for the printers and, by general consent, it will come into use on Advent Sunday, 1929.

For a complete analysis of both revision and enrichment the reader must be referred to the Book

itself. Here they can be only outlined. As compared with the two previous American Prayer Books the new Book has two outstanding characteristics--it is much more flexible in its use and there is a marked tendency to shorten the regular services; especially those of Morning and Evening Prayer. It is no longer compulsory every Sunday to recite the Exhortation beginning, "Dearly beloved brethren" which was in danger of losing its force by constant repetition. For it may be substituted the shorter invitation, "Let us humbly confess our sins to Almighty God." A much shorter chant, The "*Benedictus es*" may be used instead of the longer "*Te Deum*." The revision of the Lectionary has provided shorter and more profitable Scripture Lessons and large liberty is allowed in the selection of the Psalms. A new short Absolution is inserted in Evening Prayer and permission given to read one lesson instead of the traditional two. When the Litany is said Morning Prayer ends with the Collect for Grace. The Prayer Book of 1892 required the recital of the Ten Commandments in full once on each Sunday; the new Book limits this requirement to "at least one Sunday in each month." Not only are the services shortened, but rigid uniformity in the services is no longer insisted upon. After the third Collect in Morning and Evening Prayer the minister may either end the service with the "Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," or by the use of a prayer or prayers from any part of the Book, thus giving a much greater variety of liturgical use. The section "Concerning the Service of the Church," which follows the Preface to the Book, is a striking illustration of the unprecedented breadth of the liturgical liberty of the new Prayer Book. It sets forth that the Order for Holy Communion, for Morning and Evening Prayer, and the Litany, are the services regularly authorized for use "in this Church," but with the far-reaching proviso that, subject to the direction of the bishop, in addition there may be used other devotions "set forth by lawful authority." Nor is this all. Under carefully defined conditions, "when the edification of the Congregation so requires," these other devotions may be used instead of the regular Morning and Evening Prayer.

The revision of the 1892 Book is far-reaching, and in some instances radical. It extends not only to language, but also to theological statement. All passages of Holy Scripture are now taken from the Revised Version and in some cases the marginal rendering has been adopted. There is an entirely new translation of the Psalter correcting many obvious errors. In Psalm XIV these verses are deleted:

5 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues have they deceived: the poison of asps is under their lips.

6 Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood.

7 Destruction and unhappiness is in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes.

In the judgment of the best Hebrew scholars these verses are a late interpolation and are foreign to the thought of the Psalm. The relaxation of the requirement to read the Psalter for the day obviates the necessity of reciting in the public services those Psalms or parts of Psalms which call down the curses of heaven upon enemies--the "imprecatory" Psalms. No longer will a congregation of Christian people be compelled to say of a fellow man:--

Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread....

Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion upon his fatherless children.

Let his posterity be destroyed; and in the next generation let his name be clean put out.

The opening sentences of the Litany have been revised as indicated:

1892 Book

O God the Father Heaven; have mercy upon miserable sinners.

O God the Father Heaven; have mercy upon miserable sinners.

O God, the Son, Redeemer of the world; have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

O God the Son, Redeemer of the world: have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son have mercy upon us Miserable sinners.

O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son; have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God; have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God; have mercy upon us miserable sinners.

The New Book

O God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth;
Have mercy upon us.

O God the Son, Redeemer of the world;
Have mercy on us.

O God the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful;
Have mercy upon us.

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, one God;
Have mercy upon us.

The omission of the fourfold repetition of "miserable sinners" goes back to the earlier Latin forms of the Litany.

The revision of the Penitential Office illustrates one marked feature of the new Prayer Book--the elimination of exaggerated and therefore, to that extent, unreal expressions of penitence for sin. The medieval idea of the utter worthlessness of man was far from the conception that "thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." In the older Liturgies and in the later English and American Prayer Books man is represented as utterly depraved, cringing in his approach to God; hoping to gain his favor by a confession of abject unworthiness. This note was dominant in the Penitential Office in the Book of 1892 and its predecessor of 1789. These words were put

into the mouth of the penitent: "Enter not into judgement with thy servants, who are vile earth, and miserable sinners but so turn thine anger from us, who meekly acknowledge our vileness, and truly repent us of our faults &c." In the revision the pagan idea of the "anger" of God is entirely eliminated. The words, "vile earth and miserable sinners" are deleted, and instead of "who meekly acknowledge our vileness," the prayer reads, "who meekly acknowledge our transgressions." In the appointed fifty-first Psalm the last two verses, which are a priestly addition to the original, are left out so that it ends on the note of Christian hope.

In the new Prayer Book the *Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or the Holy Communion* is placed before the Collects, Epistles and Gospels. An entirely new rubric permits a deacon, in the absence of a priest, to say that part of the service ending with the Gospel. The proposal to require members of the Church to communicate at least three times a year, Easter being one, was not approved by the Convention.

The growing conviction that the Ten Commandments have no proper place in the service of Holy Communion finds expressions in a significant permission to modify their recital by the omission of the reasons for their observance; reasons which have lost their point and force in modern times. The part of Decalogue affected is now thus printed:

Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them;

for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and show mercy unto thousands in them that love me and keep my commandments.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Thou shalt not take the Name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his Name in vain.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work; thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Honour thy father and thy mother;

that thy days may be long in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Thou shalt not covet

thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee.

The parts inset may be omitted. The proposal of the Commission to follow the summary of the Law by the words, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" did not meet with approval.

New Offertory sentences are added. The word "Militant" has been deleted from the invitation, "Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church," thus reverting to its original form in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI in 1549. In this same prayer there has been inserted a clause definitely praying for the dead:

And we also bless thy holy name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear: *beseeking thee to grant them continual growth in thy love and service.*

This also goes back to the English Book of 1549, but it is the first time in the history of the American Prayer Books that prayers for the departed have been recognized. Others appear in the new Burial Office where their use is permissive. In this prayer it is mandatory and as such was vigorously opposed in the General Convention by a group of Low Churchmen. Some of the Proper Prefaces have been revised, notably the one for Whitsuntide which now leaves out the description of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as "a sudden great sound, as it had been a mighty wind, in the likeness of fiery tongues." The abstruse opening of the Preface for Trinity Sunday has been changed by the omission of the words, "Who art one God, one Lord; not only Person, but three Persons in one Substance," and substituting this clause: "Who, with thine only-begotten Son, and the Holy Ghost, art one God, one Lord, in Trinity of Persons and in Unity of Substance." For the benefit of those to whom the foregoing is inexplicable--and they are many in number--a simpler alternative Preface has been provided for the Day. New Prefaces are added for the Epiphany, All Saints' Day and one to be used at the Feasts of the Purification; the Annunciation of the Transfiguration. The Prayer of Humble Access now stands after the consecration of the Elements, and before the Lord's Prayer is now said, "And now, as our Saviour Christ hath taught us, we are bold to say 'Our Father which art in heaven.'" The Joint Commission sought to amend the rubric directing that any remaining portion of the consecrated bread and wine should be reverently consumed and not carried out of church, by a provision that, when allowed by the bishop, there might be reserved so much as might be required that day for the communion of the sick. The recommendation was not adopted.

There are many important changes in the Collects, Epistles and Gospels used in the service of

Holy Communion. Most of the titles of the Saints' Days are amended on the descriptive side: "St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr"; "St. John, Apostle and Evangelist"; "Septuagesima, or the Third Sunday before Lent"; "The Sunday next before Easter, commonly called Palm Sunday," and the fixed dates of the feasts and festivals are added. The old well-nigh unintelligible Epistle for the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ gives place to a noble passage from the Epistle to the Philippians. An alternative Gospel is provided for Maundy Thursday; new Epistles for St. Thomas' Day and for S.S. Simon and Jude and a new Collect for St. Luke's Day. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is now the appointed Gospel for the ninth Sunday after Trinity, and the unedifying repetition of the sealing of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Epistle for All Saints' Day is omitted. There is an important change in the third Collect for Good Friday, a clause of which reads:

Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics; and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd," etc.

This unwarranted slur on the Hebrew race comes down from the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. It is now changed to read: "Have mercy upon all who know thee not as thou art revealed in the Gospel of thy Son." The plea that "they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites" is omitted, and the new vision of Christian unity, not as embraced in one *fold*, but as members of one *flock* finds expression in this revised prayer.

The opening sentence of the exhortation in the Office of Baptism, reading, "forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin," has long been deeply resented, so much so that many of the clergy refused to read it. It has happily been deleted in the new Book as having no warrant in Holy Scripture; the old prayer quoting the saving of Noah and the passage of Israel through the Red Sea as figuring Baptism is now omitted, as also the phrase that the infant may "be delivered from thy wrath." The unhappy prayer, "grant that the old Adam in this child may be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in him," is changed to read, "grant that like as Christ died and rose again, so this child may die to sin and rise to newness of life." In the Prayer Book of 1892 the making of the sign of the cross in Baptism was permissive; in the new Book it is mandatory as in the Prayer Book of 1549. In the service of Baptism for adults two new questions are added:

Minister. Dost thou believe in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God?

Answer. I do.

Minister. Dost thou accept him, and desire to follow him as thy Saviour and Lord?

Answer. I do.

An entirely new *Office of Instruction* takes the place of the old Catechism which is now relegated to the end of the Prayer Book with the Articles of Religion. The new Office takes the form of a service with suitable prayers, versicles and responses. The catechizing is governed by sound pedagogical principles. The old Catechism, where retained, is modernized, and in addition instruction is given in the nature of the Church as "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic"; the duties of membership therein; Confirmation; the Sacraments; and the three Orders in the Ministry. In the service of Confirmation the old preface is omitted, and this new

question is asked by the bishop:

Do ye promise to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

And every one shall answer,

I do.

The changes in what the Prayer Book quaintly calls "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" have been widely heralded. The provision for the publication of the Bans of marriage are retained, though more honored in the breach than the observance. In the Exhortation the words "in the time of man's innocency" are deleted. The most significant change is that the vows and promises of the man and the woman are made exactly alike by the omission of the word "obey." They both undertake precisely the same obligation. In the giving of the ring the bridegroom is no longer called upon to say, "with all my worldly goods I thee endow." Provision is made for the blessing of the Ring in the words: "Bless, O Lord, this Ring, that he who gives it and she who wears it may abide in thy peace, and continue in thy favour, unto their life's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord: Amen." Isaac and Rebecca are no longer held up as shining examples of matrimonial felicity. Two new prayers are added to the service. One for the gift of children, reading:

O Almighty God, Creator of mankind, who only art the well-spring of life; Bestow upon these thy servants, if it be thy will, the gift and heritage of children; and grant that they may see their children brought up in thy faith and fear, to the honour and glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The other is for the Home:

O God, who hast so consecrated the state of Matrimony that in it is represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church; Look mercifully upon these thy servants, that they may love, honour, and cherish each other, and so live together in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and of peace; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

The Office for the Visitation of the Sick has been so changed as to be hardly recognizable in its new form. As it appeared in the old Prayer Book it was so gloomy, so medieval in its theology and so utterly lacking in any understanding of the psychological approach to sick persons, that it had almost ceased to be used in the church. Its basic assumption was that not only is all sickness sent by God, but it is sent as a just punishment for some wrong done. The minister was directed to say to the sick person, "Wherefore, whatsoever your sickness be, know you certainly that it is God's visitation ... it be sent unto you to correct and amend in you whatsoever doth offend the eyes of your heavenly Father." This Exhortation, as unhappy as it is untrue, is omitted in the new Book. Also the words, "Sanctify, we beseech thee, this thy fatherly correction to him. All through the old service ran the suggestion of non-recovery. There was the prayer for recovery "if it shall be thy good pleasure"; then came the ominous "or else." "Or else ... after this painful life ended," etc.

In the new Book the whole tone of the service has been revolutionized. Hope supplants doubt and fear. Jubilant Psalms are added. A new Collect 'reading reads: "Accept, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, the devout praise of thy humble servant, and grant him an abiding sense of thy loving-kindness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*." In addition there is a new prayer for the Despondent:

A Prayer for the Despondent

Comfort, we beseech thee, most gracious God, this thy servant, cast down and faint of heart amidst the sorrows and difficulties of the world; and grant that, by the power of thy Holy Spirit, he may be enabled to go upon his way rejoicing, and give thee continual thanks for thy sustaining providence; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Also a new prayer for Recovery minus the reservations which marred the old.

The unspeakably unfortunate "Prayer for Persons troubled in Mind or Conscience," saying of Almighty God, "Thou writest bitter things against him, and makest him to possess his former iniquities; thy wrath lieth hard upon him," etc., is deservedly banished from the new Book. The old Collect in the *Communion of the Sick* with the note: "who dost correct those whom thou dost love, and chastise every one whom thou dost receive," gives place to one with the note of "loving-kindness," and the Epistle speaking of "the chastening of the Lord" is displaced by one more hopeful in tone. There is also a new and shorter Confession and Absolution.

The harshness of the old first rubric in the *Burial Office* prohibiting its use "for any unbaptized adults, any who die excommunicate, or who have laid violent hands upon themselves" is softened in the new Book by noting that the Office is "appropriate to be used only for the faithful departed in Christ," but giving the minister discretion, in the former cases, to use such devotions from the service or from other parts of the Book "as may be fitting." The words in the sentence from the Book of Job, "and though after my skin worms destroy this body," are left out, there being substituted, "though this body be destroyed"; and instead of the words, "and mine eyes shall behold, and not another," the new translation is, "and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger." New Psalms are added; and two new short lessons, one beginning, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." In the familiar lesson from St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians the section beginning,

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? and why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God I speak this to your shame.

is omitted. Instead of "Man, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery," may be read, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Perhaps the most notable addition to the Burial Office is the provision of two prayers for the dead, one of which reads:

Remember thy servant, O Lord, according to the favour which thou bearest unto thy people, and grant that, increasing in knowledge and love of thee, *he* may go from strength to strength, in the life of perfect service, in thy heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

The changes in the Ordination services for deacons and priests are few, but significant. This is especially so in the change in the form of the question put to the deacon concerning the Bible. The old question was,

The Bishop: Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament?

Answer. I do.

The new question avoids the necessity of asserting a blanket belief. It reads:

The Bishop: Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain all Doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer. I am so persuaded.

A much shorter Litany has been provided for Ordination services. In the *Form of the Consecration of a Church or Chapel* the supplication concerning the baptized has been so changed as to omit the words "delivered from thy wrath and everlasting death" and a new Collect has been substituted for the one in the Book of 1892; also a new Epistle.

Three services found in the previous Prayer Book are omitted entirely from the new--The "Forms of Prayer To Be Used at Sea"; The "Form of Prayer for the Visitation of Prisoners" and "A Form of Prayer and Thanksgiving to Almighty God" used at the service on Thanksgiving Day. While the latter disappears as a separate service its component parts are found elsewhere in the new Prayer Book. The two former are omitted because they have long ago fallen into disuse.

The "Forms of Prayer To Be Used in Families" are not technically part of the Book of Common Prayer and they have now been placed between the Catechism and the Articles of Religion. Some changes occur in the structure of the prayers fitting them more perfectly to modern conditions of life and such phrases as "make us ever mindful of the time when we shall lie down in the dust" have been omitted. A shorter form of Family Prayer both for morning and evening has been provided consisting of the Lord's Prayer, a Collect and the Benediction.