

## Project Canterbury

## The New American Prayer Book: Its History and Contents

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## Chapter VIII. The New Prayer Book: Enrichment

Important as is the revision in the New Prayer Book, its large enrichment is even more so. The comparatively short life of the 1892 Book was mainly due to the reluctance of the General Convention to enrich the public service of the Church. The older devotions failed to express changed and changing ideas and conditions. Large spheres of modern life were, as far as the Prayer Book was concerned, excluded. A living Liturgy must express in its forms of devotion the thoughts of the time. New occasions not only "teach new duties," but they call for new devotions.

The careful user of the new Book will move in a larger world of prayer. Every phase of life finds recognition. The individual; the family; children; education; the administration of justice; legislators; the naval and military services; the ministry to the sick; international relations; labor, and poverty as represented by all poor, homeless and neglected folk. Nor is fidelity in the stewardship of wealth forgotten. Nothing human is alien to the new Prayer Book.

First comes a larger recognition of the life of the Nation. The Form of Prayer "for the inestimable Blessings of Religious and Civil Liberty, to be used yearly on the Fourth of July," which was printed in the "Proposed Book" of 1785, was never incorporated in the official Prayer Book of the American Church. In the new Book there is provided a Collect, Epistle and Gospel for "Independence Day," the Collect reading:

O Eternal God, through whose mighty power our fathers won their liberties of old;  
Grant, we beseech thee, that we and all the people of this land may have grace to  
maintain these liberties in righteousness and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

In the Litany there is the following new suffrage: "That it may please thee so to rule the heart of thy servant, the President of the United States, that he may above all things seek thy honour and glory." There has also been added, as an alternative, in the service of Morning Prayer a second supplication for "the President of the United States, and all in Civil Authority." It puts the nation first and emphasizes the responsibility of elective office: "Grant ... to them wisdom and strength to know and to do thy will. Fill them with the love of truth and righteousness; and make them ever mindful of their calling to serve this people in thy fear." Among the new occasional prayers place has been given to a finely comprehensive petition *For Our Country*,

reading:

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage; We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favour and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honourable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

It would be difficult to find, in so small a compass, a more accurate conception of the complex problems of modern American life; a keener sense of its perils and a saner sense of its needs than is set forth in this prayer. The later new *Prayer for the Family of Nations* is a significant recognition of the new Internationalism.

The inescapable responsibility of the Christian Church for the welfare of the people at large and for the reign of social justice is reflected in the pages of the new Prayer Book. There is now a prayer "For Every Man in his Work"; "For Prisoners"; "For Faithfulness in the Use of this World's Goods"; "For all Poor, Homeless and Neglected Folk"; "For Those in Mental Darkness"; "For the *Families of the Land*," and this prayer "For Social Justice":

*For Social Justice*

Almighty God, who hast created man in thine own image; Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil, and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice among men and nations, to the glory of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For the first time in the American Prayer Book there is inserted a prayer "For The Army" and one "For The Navy." The blessed and enduring memory of those who have made the supreme sacrifice for love of country is enshrined in this thanksgiving and supplication to be used on "Memorial Days":

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, in whose hands are the living and the dead; We give thee thanks for all those thy servants who have laid down their lives in the service of our country. Grant to them thy mercy and the light of thy presence, that the good work which thou hast begun in them may be perfected; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. *Amen.*

And, lest any need should have been forgotten, there is provided this beautiful and all-embracing General Intercession:

O God, at whose word man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening; Be

merciful to all whose duties are difficult or burdensome, and comfort them concerning their toil. Shield from bodily accident and harm the workmen at their work. Protect the efforts of sober and honest industry, and suffer not the hire of the labourers to be kept back by fraud. Incline the heart of employers and of those whom they employ to mutual forbearance, fairness, and goodwill. Give the spirit of governance and of a sound mind to all in places of authority. Bless all those who labour in works of mercy or in schools of good learning. Care for all aged persons, and all little children, the sick and the afflicted, and those who travel by land or by sea. Remember all who by reason of weakness are overtaken, or because of poverty are forgotten. Let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before thee; and according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die. Give ear unto our prayer, O merciful and gracious Father, for the love of thy dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

On the more intimate side of the life of the Church as a family there is definite enrichment in the shape of new Prayers for

The Increase of the Ministry  
 Religious Education  
 Children  
 Those about to be Confirmed  
 Christian Service  
 A Sick Child.

The Church herself is remembered in a new prayer for "that peace and unity which is according to thy will," and a place has been found for the noble prayer written by Archbishop Laud:

O Gracious Father, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church; that thou wouldest be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, establish it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of him who died and rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

For the first time a form of the ancient "Bidding Prayer" appears in the American Liturgy. It goes back to pre-Reformation days when it was known as the "Bidding of the Bedes." The people were bidden to pray as the preacher named the subjects of their devotion. Its use was continued after the Reformation with the omission of the name of the Pope and the substitution therefor of the King as the "Supreme Head of the Church of England." The fifty-fifth section of the "Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical," adopted in 1603 and printed in the old English Prayer Books, is headed, "The Form of a Prayer to be used by all Preachers before their Sermons." The first part of it reads:

Before all Sermons, Lectures, and Homilies, the Preachers and Ministers shall move the people to join with them in Prayer in this Form, or to this Effect, as briefly as conveniently they may: Ye shall pray for Christ's holy Catholick Church, that is, for the whole Congregation of Christian People dispersed throughout the whole World, etc.

The form of the Bidding Prayer in the new American Book includes the President, the Governor

and all in authority "that all, and every one of them, may truly serve in their several callings to the glory of God, and the edifying and well-governing of the people, remembering the account they shall be called upon to give at the last great day." It further bids prayers for schools and colleges; the people of these United States; all travelers; prisoners and captives; that thanks be given for "rain and sunshine; for the products of all honest industry; for all temporal and spiritual gifts and for the saints who have been lights of the world in their several generations," and sums up all the petitions in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

A new and shorter alternative Absolution is added to Evening Prayer reading:

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant you Absolution and Remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

The Collects, Epistles and Gospels are not only revised where necessary, but greatly enriched. Entirely new Collects are provided for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Easter--the commemoration of the last week of our Lord's life before the crucifixion; also for Maundy Thursday with its institution of the Blessed Sacrament in the night in which he was betrayed. They shadow forth the pain of the sorrowful way as in Monday's Collect which reads:

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified; Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

There is added a new Collect, Epistle and Gospel for the first Communion on Whitsunday, thus conforming that festival to Christmas and Easter, likewise for Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun week. Provision is made, with the necessary liturgy, for celebrations of the Holy Communion for the Feast of the "*Dedication of a Church*"; the "Ember and Rogation Days," the subjects respectively being the Ministry of Christ's Church and prayers for a blessing on the labors of the husbandman.

A rubric in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI required that the "new married persons (the same day of their marriage) must receive the holy Communion." The intent of that rubric is carried out in the new American Book by the provision of a Collect, Epistle and Gospel for the Solemnization of Matrimony, or what was known before the Reformation as a Nuptial Mass. Another reversion to an ancient Catholic practice is also in the new Book--with its Communion service : at the Burial of the Dead, the Collect for which reads:

O Eternal Lord God, who boldest all souls in life; Vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to thy whole Church in paradise and on earth, thy light and thy peace; and grant that we, following the good examples of those who have served thee here and are now at rest, may at the last enter with them into thine unending joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Prayers for the departed are now enshrined in the Prayer for Christ's Church; the Burial Office and what was known in earlier days as the Requiem Mass. The old objection to these particular services that they were Roman in character has been worn down in later years. The Church is

glad to take devotions of proved value from whatever source they come. The last of the additions to the Collects, Epistles and Gospels is for "A Saint's Day" which can be used for the commemoration of any Saint not named in the Calendar of Saint's Days.

To the suffrage in the Litany for deliverance from "lightning and tempest" has been added "from earthquake, fire and flood," and the words "or by air" have been inserted in the suffrage for those who "travel by land or by water."

There is an entirely new and beautiful service of the "Burial of a Child," one of the opening sentences being the familiar words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God"; also the twenty-third Psalm, beginning, "The Lord is my shepherd." For the brief lesson there is chosen the story of our Lord setting a child in the midst of the ambitious disciples and commanding them to become as little children. The whole office breathes the note of Christian hope, the keynote being found in this Prayer:

O Merciful Father, whose face the angels of thy little ones do always behold in heaven; Grant us stedfastly to believe that this thy child hath been taken into the safe keeping of thine eternal love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The enrichment of the new Book is very marked in the office for the Visitation of the Sick, the whole tone of which has been transformed. It is evident that its compilers have studied with great care the newer psychological method of dealing with sickness. A suggestion of cheer runs through the whole service and the hope of recovery is prominent. There is no suggestion, as in the old service, of imminent death, and the five new Psalms incorporated in the Office are such as to inspire confident hope. This is also embodied in a "Prayer for Recovery" and in a "Thanksgiving for the Beginning of a Recovery." A new "Prayer for Healing" bears witness to the wistful desire to recover the ministry of healing in the Church, and there is added a new "Prayer for the Despondent." Most striking of all is the permission granted for the Unction of the Sick and the Laying on of Hands, both of which find ample authority in the apostolic times, but were engulfed in the wave of the Protestant Reformation, although Unction found a place in the First Prayer Book of 1549. In this new Book the rubric provides that "when any sick person shall in humble faith desire the ministry of healing through Anointing or Laying on of Hands," the minister may proceed so to do, using the following prayer:

O Blessed Redeemer, relieve, we beseech thee, by thy indwelling power, the distress of this thy servant; release *him* from sin, and drive away all pain of soul and body, that being restored to soundness of health, *he* may offer thee praise and thanksgiving; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

In administering Unction he may say:

I anoint thee with oil (*or* I lay my hand upon thee), In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; beseeching the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all thy pain and sickness of body being put to flight, the blessing of health may be restored unto thee. *Amen.*

An integral and entirely new part of this Office is that concerned with the ministration of the

Church to those appointed to die. A simple and short Litany for the Dying is provided, beginning,

O God the Father;  
Have mercy upon the soul of thy servant.

and proceeding

From all evil, from all sin, from all tribulation;  
*Good Lord, deliver him.*

By thy holy Incarnation, by thy Cross and Passion, by thy precious Death and Burial;  
*Good Lord, deliver him.*

By thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and by the coming of the Holy Ghost;  
*Good Lord, deliver him.*

We sinners do beseech thee to hear us, O Lord God; That it may please thee to deliver the soul of thy servant from the power of the evil one, and from eternal death;  
*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

That it may please thee mercifully to pardon all his sins.  
*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

That it may please thee to grant him a place of refreshment and everlasting blessedness;  
*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

That it may please thee to give him joy and gladness in thy kingdom, with thy saints in light;  
*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world;  
*Have mercy upon him.*

O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world;  
*Have mercy upon him.*

O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world;  
*Grant him thy peace.*

Lord, have mercy.  
*Christ, have mercy.*  
Lord, have mercy.

As the spirit passes into the unseen and larger world through the sunset gate this "Commendation" may be said:

Depart, O Christian Soul, out of this world,  
 In the Name of God the Father Almighty who created thee.  
 In the Name of Jesus Christ who redeemed thee.  
 In the Name of the Holy Ghost who sanctifieth thee,  
 May thy rest be this day in peace, and thy dwelling place in the Paradise of God.

Immediately after death provision is made for a Prayer reading:

Into thy hands, O merciful Saviour, we commend the soul of thy servant, now departed from the body. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech thee, a sheep of thine own fold, a lamb of thine own flock, a sinner of thine own redeeming. Receive him into the arms of thy mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. *Amen.*

This new Prayer Book is more than a directory of public worship. Great pains have been taken to provide a brief form of Family Prayer for use morning and evening in households. Nor is this all. Many new prayers are added for intimate and personal use. These include a petition "For the Spirit of Prayer"; "For Guidance"; "For Quiet Confidence"; "For the Absent"; "For Those We Love"; "For One about to Undergo an Operation" and others. Cardinal Newman's beautiful prayer beginning, "O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes," etc., finds a place, and there is added this prayer "For a Blessing on the Families of the Land":

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who settest the solitary in families; We commend to thy continual care the homes in which thy people dwell. Put far from them, we beseech thee, every root of bitterness, the desire of vain-glory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy wedlock, have been made one flesh; turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we be evermore kindly affectioned with brotherly love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

Many more or less minute details both of revision and enrichment have been passed over in this review of the changes in the Book. The rejection, by the General Conventions, of some of the recommendations of the Joint Commission is a matter for regret. The new Book is not perfect. But it is a large advance on the Books of 1789 and 1892. It is more human; more comprehensive; more truly devotional; more modern. Above all, it is more real. For these things the whole Christian world, which has always turned to the Book of Common Prayer for inspirational devotion, may be devoutly thankful.

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