



THE BOOK OF
COMMON PRAYER
WHAT, WHEN, & WHY

Trinity Episcopal Church
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Session I

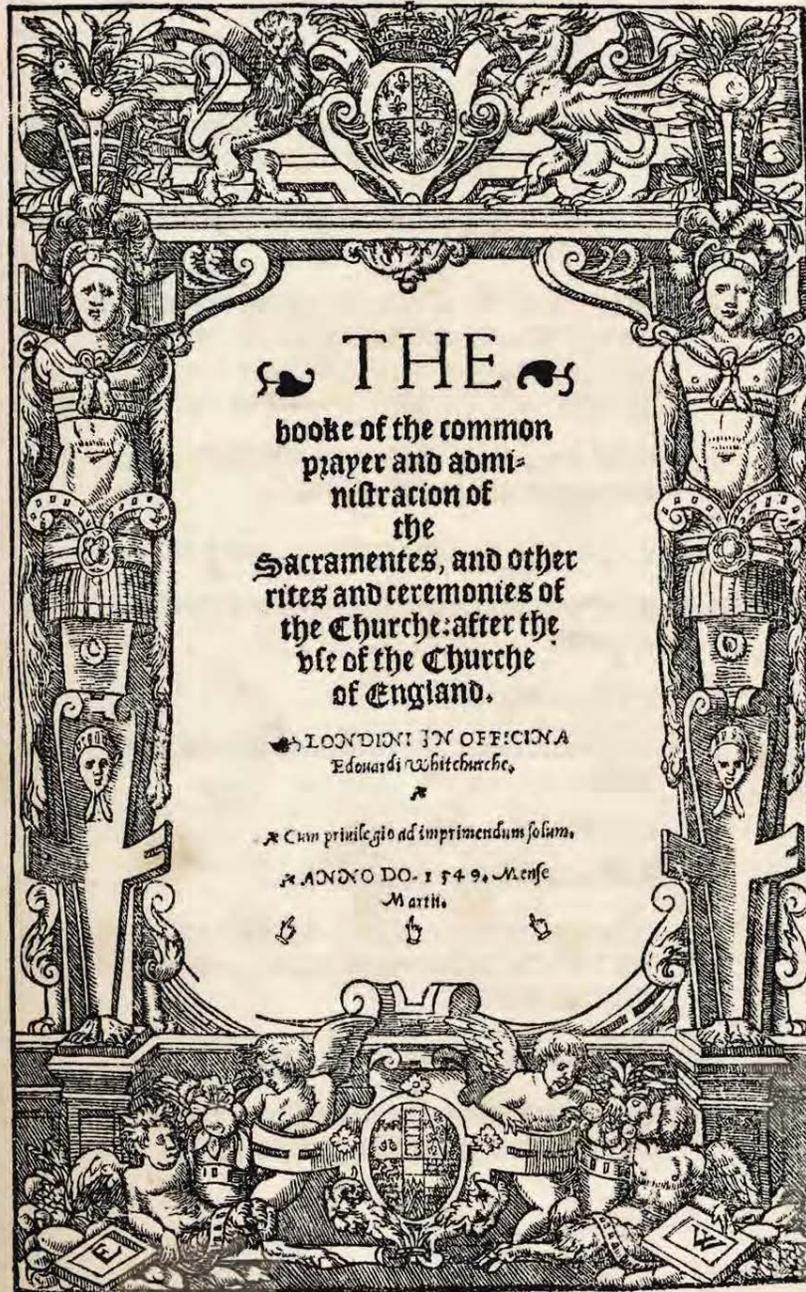
THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER AND ITS (MANY) REVISIONS

As you should know, *The Book of Common Prayer* has undergone many revisions.

The Church of England has published Prayer Books in 1549, 1552, 1559, and 1662. Since the 1662, there was an attempt to have a revision of the BCP in 1928, which failed in Parliament. So, since the C of E is “in law established,” they could not then have a new BCP. So in the early 1980s the General Synod created the *Alternative Service Book*, and in the late 1990s they created *Common Worship* which is now in general use in the Church of England.

Who was Thomas Cranmer and what did he do?

- Thomas Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury and was appointed during the reign of King Henry VIII. He came to the attention of the king because he proposed a solution to the king's marriage difficulty: to submit the facts of the case to all the faculties of theology in Europe, for their judgment.
- He was put to death as a heretic during the reign of Queen Mary (known as Bloody Mary).
- During the reign of King Edward VI, however, Archbishop Cranmer wrote the first two editions of the Book of Common Prayer . They were published in 1549 and 1552.



This is the title page of the March printing of the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549. It was printed in London by Edward Whitechurch. It was also reprinted in the fall of that year.

From Latin to English

- Thomas Cranmer took Latin liturgies from the Middle Ages and translated and adapted them into English.
- He first did this with the Great Litany, and then with the Order for Communion, before *The Book of Common Prayer* came out.
- Cranmer was heavily affected by several reformers of the 16th century.

Cranmer's Simplification

- In the high Middle Ages in the West, there were multiple liturgical books that the clergy were obliged to use. The Mass was contained in the Missal. The daily prayers of the church were in the Breviary. Bishops needed a copy of the Ordinal and the Manuale.
- Cranmer simplified all of this by putting it into one book, *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- Cranmer simplified often by removing traditional bits and pieces of liturgies.

A comparison: *Sanctus*

Latin

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Domine Deus Sabaoth.

Pleni sunt coeli et terra
gloriae tuae.

Hosanna in excelsis.

Benedictus qui venit in
nomine Domini.

Hosanna in excelsis.

Cranmer's English *BCP*

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of Hosts.

Heaven and earth are full of
thy glory.

Glory be to thee, O Lord Most
High.

Amen.

The Reformation in England

- ❖ Archbishop Cranmer saw to it that a moderate reformer from Strasburg was hired at Cambridge University to help with the revision. This theologian was **Martin Bucer**, and he read and commented on the drafts of both of Cranmer's editions of the Prayer Book.
- ❖ Bucer was a **moderate** reformer, unlike Huldrych Zwingli, who was a radical reformer. Although John Calvin and especially Martin Luther believed in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Zwingli held to a "memorialist" view. Bucer attempted to moderate between the views of Zwingli and Martin Luther.

How to unify England?

- ✓ **The Roman Catholic Church had never had a single liturgical rite.** There were many rites in England, including the Roman rite, the Sarum (Salisbury) rite, the Hereford rite, the York rite. Religious orders also had their own liturgical rites. Thus, **liturgical uniformity did not exist**, even in “this realm of England.” (Before the printing press, all manuscripts were copied by hand, usually by monks.)
- ✓ Cranmer set out to change all that!

From the Preface to the First *Book of Common Prayer* (1549):

“And where heretofore, there hath been great diversitie in saying and synging in churches within this realme: some following Salsbury use, some Herford use, some the use of Bangor, some of Yorke, and some of Lincolne: **Now from henceforth, all the whole realm shall have but one use.** And if any would judge this waye more painful, because that all thynges must be read upon the boke, whereas before by the reason of so often repeticion, they could saye many thinges by heart: if those men will waye their labor, with the profit in knowledge, which dayly they shall obtain by readyng upon the boke, they will not refuse the payn, in consideracion of the greate profite that shall ensue thereof.”

The Council of Trent

- One of the most important things that happened at the Council of Trent (1545-63) is that **the rite of the Diocese of Rome became normative for the entire Roman Catholic Church.** It was known as the *Missale Romanum* (1570). This Missal was replaced after Vatican II by the *Novus Ordo Missae*.
- **It had never been that way before!** Previously there was the Gallican Rite and many other eucharistic rites.
- This imposed liturgical uniformity on western catholic Christianity, which was a new thing.

Lex orandi, lex credendi

- The principle of *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* is strongly held in Anglicanism. This quotation comes from Prosper of Aquitaine. This is translated as “The law of praying establishes the law of believing.”
- This principle suggests that it is **how we pray and do liturgy that shapes our theology, and not the other way around.**
- **We are the only Reformation church which operates this way.**

Lex orandi, lex credendi

- One reason we operate with this principle is that we had no single great theologian in the 16th century at the time of the Reformation.
- The Lutherans had Luther, and the Reformed had Calvin.
- Mainstream Anglicans look back at the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils of the church, which are seven (7) in number.
- Anglicans usually do not commit themselves theologically to any single branch of the Reformation.

After World War II

- After World War II, many Christian leaders saw that there was a crisis in Christian churches.
- This crisis was that the church had a massive amount of tradition, at the same time as the world was getting more and more secular.
- More and more people, in their daily lives, were moving away from what churches taught. It was felt by forward-looking theologians and church leaders that having a special, archaic liturgical language was counterproductive to the mission and ministries of the church.

After World War II

- ✘ Hence, many leaders on both sides of the Atlantic believed that reform of the liturgy was necessary.
- ✘ This included the majority of bishops of the Anglican Communion, who attended the Lambeth Conference in 1958. There was a committee which gave an extensive report, "Progress in the Anglican Communion," which was a 45 page report.
- ✘ Of these 45 pages, 21 were devoted to the revision of the Book of Common Prayer not in England but around the world.

Lambeth 1958's blueprint for the revision of the BCP

- It was regretted that the 1549 BCP and its successors omitted lessons from the Old Testament.
- It was suggested that the lessons might be separated by Psalms or portions of Psalms.
- It was recommended that at the Sunday Eucharist the order should be biblical readings, sermon, Nicene Creed.
- It was suggested to restore the *Gloria in excelsis* to its original position.

On the Psalter

“It is high time that a revised translation of the Psalter should be undertaken, such as is already in use in the Church of Ireland or such as is suggested in the Draft Prayer Book of the Canadian Church. **There can be no spiritual benefit in repeating phrases which mean nothing. Archaisms in the Psalter as in other parts of the Prayer Book need attention.** Such a revision might go some way towards reinstating the Psalter in the affection of clergy and people” (p. 2.90)

On the Liturgical Movement

“Many Churches of the Anglican Communion are in fact already engaged upon revision It must be remembered that, at any rate in some Churches, the greater part of the laity is opposed to change in services except on the most modest scale, and any attempt to make rapid or revolutionary revisions would in some places cause widespread dismay and resentment. But revision is nevertheless proceeding, and the movement cannot now be halted. The Committee’s aim has been to try to indicate the direction which this movement should take when it has begun. We are not the only branch of Christendom to have set about this task. Both in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Evangelical Churches a similar movement is in progress. And because this Liturgical Movement has already begun to draw Christians closer to one another in thought and way of worship, we cannot wish that our own Communion should stand aside.” (p. 2.93-94)

From Lambeth Resolutions 73 and 74

“73. The Conference welcomes the contemporary movement towards unanimity in doctrinal and liturgical matters by those of differing traditions in the Anglican Communion **as the result of new knowledge gained from Biblical and liturgical studies**, and is happy to know of parallel progress in this sphere by some Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians. . . .

74. The Conference, recognizing the work of Prayer Book Revision being done in different parts of the Anglican Communion, . . . **urges that a chief aim of Prayer Book Revision should be to further that recovery of the worship of the Primitive Church, which was the aim of the compilers of the first Prayer Books of the Church of England.**”

Here's what happened:

In The Episcopal Church there was enacted canonical legislation that prescribed how Prayer Book Revision was to be done, including “trial use.” That canon law was followed scrupulously.

- *Liturgy of the Lord's Supper* (1967)
- *Services for Trial Use*, 1970 (“the green book”)
- *Authorized Services* 1973 (“the zebra book”)
- *Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, 1975
- *Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, 1976
- *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979

The Book of Common Prayer of 1979

- Our current Prayer Book has been very influential in both Anglican churches worldwide and beyond.
- The Church in the Province of the West Indies adopted its first Prayer Book in 1995, and it is 80% to 90% the same as our American Prayer Book. I used it happily for 6½ years.
- The principle of including both traditional-language services and contemporary-language services helped to shape *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, the most widely used book in the Church of England.

The future

- At General Convention in Austin in 2018, there will be extensive discussion as to whether the Episcopal Church ought to enter Prayer Book Revision at this time, or to have a serious churchwide conversation about what is in the 1979 Prayer Book, or to make no changes whatsoever.
- Respectable liturgical scholars in this church are divided as to what the General Convention should do.
- I don't believe the Episcopal Church is ready to enter Prayer Book Revision at this time.

A personal note

- I was ordained in January and December of 1981 in Chicago.
- I always offer families the option of Rite I or Rite II for funerals. I explain this as “with the thees and thous or with the language we speak now.”
- I can count the number of Rite I funerals I have presided at using one hand. The large majority of bereaved families do prefer the funeral liturgy for their loved one to be in the language we speak now.