

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

The *Book of Common Prayer* (hereinafter the “prayer book” or “*BCP*”) that we use is a lineal descendant of the prayer book adopted at the first real General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States in 1789. The circumstances of this adoption are set forth in the *BCP* preface (pp. 9-11). In point of fact, our prayer book was adapted from the prayer book in use in the Scottish Episcopal Church, not the Church of England.¹ The prayer book has much older roots, however, and the purpose of this outline is describe both those roots and the developments in our manual of worship which have taken place since the eighteenth century.

The Development of the Western Rite:

- 1) The Early Church conducted most worship in Greek, even in Rome, up until the fourth century.
 - a) Elements of worship in Greek remain even today, *e.g.*, the *Kyrie eleison*.
- 2) By the fifth century, the church in Rome had its own rite in Latin (the so-called “Leontine” liturgy, named after Pope Leo I).
- 3) In roughly contemporaneous fashion and later, Latin rites evolved elsewhere.
 - a) The Ambrosian Rite (Milan).
 - b) The Mozarabic Rite (Toledo, Spain).
 - c) Various “Gelasian” Rites (in France).
 - d) Most monasteries had their own variations, but these were made more uniform under the reforms of St. Benedict (7th C.)
- 4) St. Augustine of Canterbury brought the Roman Rite to Britain in *A.D.* 597.
 - a) Local variations did evolve, in part influenced by the pre-existing Celtic rites of the English church.²
 - i) In 747, the Council of Clovesho ordered the standardization of the Roman Rite in all of Britain.
 - b) The Roman Rite was reformed and standardized by Pope Hadrian I (r. 772-795). These reforms were adopted in England.
 - i) Local “uses” still existed. These were variations in the order of the Rite.
 - (1) One of these was the “Sarum Use” (Salisbury Cathedral). This was the Roman Rite basis for the first *BCP*.

Changes in Public Worship During the English Reformation:

- 1) During the early Reformation in England, no material changes were made in public worship, which remained in Latin.

¹ When Samuel Seabury journeyed to Britain to be consecrated the first American bishop, he could not be consecrated by English bishops because he could not give the oath of loyalty to the crown. He succeeded in persuading the bishops in Scotland to consecrate him (the Scottish church had been disestablished as a state church), but they conditioned this on his agreeing to adopt the Scottish prayer book for America.

² The Roman Rite as adopted in England was adopted in Germany, secondary to the missionary work of St. Boniface.

- a) Henry VIII never thought of himself as something other than a Catholic.³
- 2) Adoption of the vernacular use began in Germany in 1523, with the full Mass in German in 1526.
- 3) In 1539, the English Church adopted the use of the Bible in English. This was the first substantial liturgical reform under Henry VIII.
 - a) In the same year a manual of private prayers (*Hilsey's Primer*) was authorized, published by the bishop of Rochester.
 - b) *Hilsey's Primer* was succeeded by the *King's Primer* of 1545. This set forth a catechism, private prayers and devotions, a liturgical calendar, and certain lessons, all as found in the Sarum Use (as translated into English).
 - i) Archbishop Thomas Cranmer was instrumental in the adoption of the Primer.
- 4) In 1544 Archbishop Thomas Cranmer wrote and published *The Great Litany* in response to the king's request. This was to address national set-backs in France, and was prayed in all churches. *The Great Litany* remains in our prayer book (pp. 148-155).

The Prayer Book

- 1) Henry VIII died in 1547. In 1548, Archbishop Cranmer issued his "Order of Communion".
 - a) This was an English supplement to the Latin Missal (Sarum).
 - b) An order of service for Holy Matrimony was also set forth in English.
- 2) Cranmer, basing much of his work on the Sarum Use, published the first *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549.
 - a) "Common" prayer refers to prayer in public liturgy, as opposed to the private prayer of a person.
 - b) The 1549 prayer book includes no major liturgical or theological reforms.
- 3) Throughout this period, Cranmer was under the influence of German and Swiss Reformers, including Martin Bucer and Ulrich Zwingli. Cranmer adopted a very different eucharistic theology, and changed the prayer book to reflect this. The result is the 1552, published under Edward VI.
- 4) In 1559, under Elizabeth I, the "Elizabethan Settlement" began to take effect with the publication of the 1559 prayer book.
 - a) The 1559 book included both a more Catholic formulary for holy eucharist and a more Reformed formulary.
 - i) This broad compromise remains today, e.g., in the words of administration of eucharist found at p. 338, in Rite I.

Reform from Elizabeth to the Restoration:

- 1) Many arguments raged after 1559. Conferences seeking to amend the prayer book were called at many times, prominently in 1604.
 - a) Lack of agreement over what theology would be expressed in public worship was a root cause of the English Civil War.
 - i) *Much* blood was spilt over the language of the prayer book!
- 2) Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1662 Parliament adopted *The Booke of Common Prayer*.

³ The title "Defender of the Faith" had been granted to the king by the pope in 1519, for Henry's published attacks on the arguments of Martin Luther.

- a) This is the prayer book which remains official in England today.
- b) This prayer book reflects the Elizabethan Settlement.

Prayer Book Reform in America:

- 1) The Scottish prayer book which forms the basis for the 1789 American book is very similar to the 1662 English book, with some changes in the order of service, collects, etc.
- 2) No concerted effort was made to change the American prayer book throughout most of the nineteenth century.
 - a) The rise of the Anglo-Catholic movement in the second half of the nineteenth century lead to a resurgence of arguments over prayer book language.
 - i) Anglo-Catholic liturgical reformers were known as “Ritualists”.
 - (1) *The English Missal* (and an adaptation *The American Missal*), which reflected Roman usages, was developed, and adopted by about 5% of English and Episcopal churches.
 - b) In 1882 the Reformed Episcopal Church split-off from the Episcopal Church, taking about 15% of all congregations.
 - i) The REC objected to “Romanizing tendencies”.
- 3) The split-off of the REC prompted a call for prayer book revision. This resulted in the 1892 *BCP*, which contained no material changes from the 1789 book.
- 4) The 1892 book was amended in 1928. Changes were not material.

Modern Revision:

- 1) In the post-WWI era the “Liturgical Renewal Movement” arose in Europe and America, originally as a Roman Catholic movement which aimed to return to the supposedly “purer” forms of worship found in the early (pre-Medieval) Church.
 - a) The Liturgical Renewal Movement came to a head at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).
 - i) Vatican II authorized liturgical reform, which culminated in the adoption of a new Roman *Missal* in 1970.
- 2) Parallel with Roman reform, in the Episcopal Church ongoing calls for liturgical reform came from two sources:
 - a) Those of Ritualist liturgical and theological position (a small minority);
 - b) Those seeking to emphasize a return to an “Early Church” practice of liturgy being the “work of the people,” of liturgy involving the people to a much greater extent (the Vatican II position).
- 3) General Convention authorized the ongoing study of prayer book revision starting in 1967, with trial rites being published starting in 1971.
 - a) The *Book of Common Prayer* as we know it was in essentially current form as of 1975.
 - i) However, the constitution of the church requires that any change in the prayer book must be ratified by *two* sessions of General Convention.
 - ii) The 1976 and 1979 sessions of General Convention ratified the current prayer book, and it was published for use in 1979.
- 4) The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Church continues the study of liturgy. Pursuant to these studies, other rites are allowed for use in the Church:
 - a) *Enriching Our Worship* (1997): This emphasizes “inclusive” language use.

- b) *The Anglican Service Book* (1991): This is the 1979 prayer book rewritten into Elizabethan English, so that all of the modern book reads like the 1928 book. It is published by the Forward in Faith movement.
- 5) In the current prayer book Rite I is *not* simply the 1928 service. The language is similar, but the order of service for eucharist is different (*e.g.*, when the *Gloria in excelsis Deo* is prayed), reflecting a different eucharistic theology.
 - a) The wording of the eucharistic prayers is different, in ways that matter theologically.
 - b) The same battles that have been fought over the prayer book from the very beginnings are still alive!