

Summary Document by Rev. David Peer

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The Development of the Book of Common Prayer

The purpose of this document is to trace the development of the Canadian Book of Common Prayer from its origins in England to today.

A great resource for anyone interested in the Canadian Book of Common Prayer is the Prayer Book Society website <http://prayerbook.ca/the-prayer-book>, where you can find the 1962 Canadian Prayer Book online.

Another great resource online is a site hosted by the Society of Archbishop Justus incorporated in 1997 as a non-profit corporation in the State of New York <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/>. It has a number of Anglican historical publications concerning the Prayer Book.

What is the Book of Common Prayer, how does it function for the Church of England and other Anglican Churches?

The 1962 Canadian revision of *The Book of Common Prayer* is the official prayer book of the Anglican Church of Canada. It is the second Canadian edition in a line of Books of Common Prayer, originating in the sixteenth century English Reformation.

The Book of Common Prayer includes official doctrinal positions, such as the Creeds, the Solemn Declaration of 1893, and the 39 Articles of Religion. It is also the source for the forms for administering: Holy Communion (along with the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels used at Communion and other services), Baptism, Matrimony, and Burials. It also contains the ordination rites of the Anglican Church.

The Book of Common Prayer also includes the offices, services of morning and evening prayer, along with tables for reading through the Bible yearly and Psalms monthly as a part of the offices.

The Book of Common Prayer also contains a number of other services and prayers for specific occasions or needs, such as an order of service for young people, the Litany, the prayers for the sick, and prayers for use at sea.

Early development in England

The first officially sanctioned liturgy in English was published under the reign of Henry VIII. He decreed in June 1544, that there were to be “set forthe certayne godly prayers and suffrages in our natyve Englyshe tongue”¹. It was an exhortation and litany to be said during processions to pray for God's favour during times of troubles.

Archbishop Cranmer wrote the Litany and drew from the Sarum processional, Luther's Litany, and the Greek Orthodox Litany.

Services in England had always been conducted in Latin; and though there were various “uses”, e.g. Sarum, York, and Hereford, they were all derived from the Roman liturgy.

¹ http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Litany1544/Exhortation&Litany_1544.htm

Prayer book development in England began as an effort to consolidate different “uses” or rites in the Church in England into English, to simplify the rubrics, and to increase the use and reading of scripture.

1548 Initial Developments

The Order of the Communion in English had been inserted into the Latin Mass. It was not only in the vernacular but introduced completely new material in the form of the Exhortations, Invitation, Confession, Absolution, Comfortable Words, and Prayer of Humble Access.

1549 Prayer Book

Thomas Cranmer was the principal author of the first complete Book of Common Prayer, in 1549 under Edward VI. It was made compulsory by the Act of Uniformity (1549).

The Collects for the Sovereign and the final Thanksgiving became part of the “Supper of the Lord and Holy Communion, commonly called the Mass” of 1549 and has remained part of the English liturgy ever since. One of the aims of the English reformers was to reduce the several uses of the Mass to a single one, the English Mass of 1549.

The first Act of Uniformity (1549) imposed “The Book of the Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church after the Use of the Church of England”

1552 Prayer Book

The 1549 Prayer Book was intended only as an interim rite — the real changes were introduced in the second BCP of 1552.

The revision, undertaken by Cranmer showed the influence of foreign reformers then resident in England. It made possible a wide diversity of views regarding the Eucharist but it attempted to eliminate everything which could support the Catholic view of the Mass as a propitiatory sacrifice or allow any interpretation of Transubstantiation of the consecrated elements. It was no longer called the Mass, but “The Order of Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion.”

The 1552 Prayer Book was in use for about eight months when Queen Mary repealed the legislation, suppressed the 1552 Book, and restored Roman Catholicism in England.

1559 Prayer Book

In 1559 Elizabeth I restored the Prayer Book with additional rubrics, including directions for the altar table to remain in the chancel.

1604 Prayer Book

In February 1604 the Fourth or Jacobean Prayer Book was issued.

1645 to 1660 Interregnum

From 1645 to 1660, under the Commonwealth and Protectorate, Parliament suppressed the prayer book.

1662 Prayer Book

By Christmas 1661, after the restoration of the Monarchy in England, Convocation (the equivalent of Synod for the Church of England) completed the Fifth Prayer Book, which is the official Prayer Book of the Church of England today. The next year Parliament annexed the Prayer Book to the Act of Uniformity (1662). Important alterations in the 1662 revision was the use of the new Authorized Version of the Bible for the Lessons (interestingly, the Psalter remains in the Great Bible translation) and the further nullification of the anti-Catholic features of 1552.

No revision to the Prayer Book of 1662 has successfully passed the British House of Lords and the Commons, which is required since the Church of England is the state church in England. An attempt was made to revise the Prayer Book in the late 1920's but it failed to gain parliamentary approval.

Greater freedom in liturgical revision exists in other Anglican churches that do not require the approval of the British Parliament. The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada revised the Prayer Book for use in Canada in 1918 and then again in 1962.

Developments in Canada

1918 Prayer Book

In 1918, the Anglican Church of Canada (then known officially as “The Church of England in the Dominion of Canada”) published the first Book of Common Prayer for Canada (prior to this the 1662 BCP of the Church of England was used). This revision was a very conservative revision of the 1662 BCP. Very little was changed in the main services (Morning and Evening Prayer, the Litany, and Holy Communion), although a number of occasional services were added. The main reason for the lack of substantive change was disagreements between “low church” and “high church” supporters. The high church party wanted a revised eucharistic rite along the lines of the 1549 liturgy (more Catholic), while the low church party wanted to keep the 1662 with few, if any, changes.

This revision was agreed in 1918 but not authorized for use until Easter, 1922. It was in use in Canada until a revised BCP was issued in 1959.

1962 Prayer Book

The revised BCP was authorized in 1962 and according to the Preface, no major alterations were made to the Service of Holy Communion, and any changes were designed to help people understand the Services better and to provide additional Services for the Church. No alterations were made which would involve or imply any change of doctrine of the Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

1985 Book of Alternative Services (BAS) and Liturgical Renewal

Following a practice now common in the Anglican Communion, the Anglican Church of Canada initiated liturgical renewal and published alternative services to the *Prayer Book* when it published the *Book of Alternative Services* in 1985. The process of revising the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer began with a resolution in the General Synod on 29 January 1971 and fifteen years later the BAS was published.

The distinctive ethos of Anglicanism emerged in the reformation, a period of even greater liturgical change than now.² The BAS is a snapshot in the journey of liturgical renewal and its form reflects the character of the people who are engaged in liturgy in this generation. The BAS uses modern vernacular English. Using the language commonly understood was an important principle of the Reformers.

In addition to modern language, the BAS identified three important changes from the Reformation era that needed expression in liturgy:

- The role of the church is society;
- A principle of community that recognizes the importance of many different roles and functions, not just the leadership of priests; and
- A desire more flexibility and variety in liturgy.

The texts for Glory to God, the Creeds, Holy, Holy, Holy, and the Lord's Prayer were taken from the International Consultation on English Texts, which are common to all churches engaged in liturgical revision in the 1980s.

Six Eucharistic prayers are found in the new liturgy for the Eucharist in the BAS. They all use inclusive language for the People of God, but not for the Godhead:

- Prayer 1 is a new composition based on Apostolic Constitutions VIII, dating from the 4th century.
- Prayer 2 is one of the most ancient in the tradition of Hippolytus.
- Prayers 3 and 4 are taken from newer American Episcopal prayers
- Prayer 5 is a new composition and
- Prayer 6's source is from the liturgy of Basil of Caesarea and comes from the eastern tradition.

The BAS also revised the Holy Eucharist in the Language of the Book of Common Prayer (thee, thou, thine) to make adjustments for inclusivity in language on the people of God.

Moving Forward from the BAS

In their 1995 Report to the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Book of Alternative Services Evaluation Commission reported on the use of the BAS in three main areas: use of the BAS, theology of the BAS, and future patterns of worship in the Anglican Church of Canada.

² General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985) 9.

The report identified widespread use and generally favourable response to the BAS, but noted that it had also evoked a negative reaction on the part of a significant number of Anglican worshippers. The use of two different liturgical texts that embody divergent, but not incompatible, accounts of matters of faith and theology has heightened the theological distinctiveness within the Church.

The commission held that the BAS reflects a theologically orthodox understanding of the Christian faith, but noted that those supporting the two different liturgical texts have not found it easy to engage in dialogue. The Commission recommended producing a supplemental book to the BAS, rather than a full-scale revision of either the BAS or the 1962 Prayer Book, providing a Eucharistic rite that is more inclusive in the way God is imaged and salvation history described without compromising the biblical, doctrinal, and liturgical tradition of the Church.

Supplemental Rites

The liturgical renewal continued. In 1998 the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada published *Three Supplementary Eucharistic Prayers for the Book of Alternative Services and Two Services of the Word*. The main purpose of the supplemental rites was to publish five alternative rites: a Eucharistic Prayer reflecting a Reformed theological conscience, two Eucharistic prayers inclusive in language and images, a service of the word designed for simplicity and minimal preparation and another to conform to the shape of the liturgy of the word in the Eucharist.