

PART II: THE REFORMATION AND MORNING PRAYER IN ENGLAND

The number and hardness of the Rules...and the manifold changings of the service, was the cause, that to turn the Book only, was so hard and intricate a matter, that many times, there was more business to find out what should be read, than to read it when it was found out.
(Preface, 1549 BCP; reprinted in 1979 BCP, p. 866)

Glorious, complex, and musically sophisticated choral music reached a high point in England in the century immediately preceding the Reformation. We'll hear an example of a canticle setting by Robert Fayfax, who was a singer, composer, and gentleman of the King's Chapel from 1497 until his death in 1521. In this setting, the verses of the Magnificat alternate between plainchant for the odd-numbered verses and intricate polyphony for the even-numbered verses.

[Musical example of pre-Reformation polyphony: Robert Fayrfox's Magnificat, sung by The Sixteen, directed by Harry Christophers]

Some of the Reformation Principles that Cranmer incorporated into MP:

- Marking the holiness of time by prayer is good for all Christians, not just the professionals. But since King Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries, no one can any longer carry out the full monastic eight hours of prayer. Something simpler is needed.
- Scripture (including Psalms) are primary to Christian life and devotion, and should be disinterred from all the interruptions and accretions that have reduced them to a few repetitive snippets and isolated passages. Scripture should be read and prayed in full and consecutively.
- Even though church and society remain hierarchical, all Christians have direct access to God. A priestly intermediary is not required, although priestly leadership remains.
- Daily offices should be accessible to everyone, not just to the professionally trained. Because of printing, literacy, while still far from universal, was no longer largely a clerical monopoly. An authorized book could be put into the hands of a large number of ordinary people. Simplicity and repetition meant that even the illiterate could learn the constant parts of the service.
- Worship should be in English. Fortunately Henry VIII had finally allowed a legal English Bible, the Great Bible of 1539, the very first "Authorized Version." It was largely the work of Miles Cloverdale, using the illegal work of his predecessors.

- The spiritual culture of the time emphasized human sinfulness and unworthiness and the need for God’s forgiveness. The Reformation did not change that, but insisted that God’s forgiveness was not a commercial transaction such as so many masses or so many prayers buying a sinner forgiveness, but rather the result of God’s own loving and undeserved action.

“Common” Prayer

There are a number of overlapping reasons why Cranmer named the book of liturgies he assembled “Common” Prayer.

- The liturgies were to be uniform over the whole country; common to everyone in England. Uniformity had always a goal, but now seemed achievable with the new technology of printing. (Spoiler alert: it wasn’t.)
- Liturgies were designed to be prayed in “common.” Although often priest or leader and people took different roles in the service, all roles were needed to make up the whole of the service.
- All liturgies were simplified; most of the possible variations were eliminated. Anyone could set up any service of the church with only the Prayer Book and the Bible and perhaps a hymnal. There were no service books restricted to the clergy alone; everything needed for liturgy was commonly available.
- The Prayer Book was common to all orders in the church, both clergy and laity, in their private prayers as well as public liturgy. While the daily offices were required of the English clergy, they were available and used by lay people in institutions such as schools and in private prayer, and were often made part of a lay person’s rule of life.

The First Three Prayer Books, 1549, 1552, and 1569

- King Henry VIII was opposed to most English Liturgy. His son King Edward VI succeeded him at age 10 in 1548; and the first Book of Common Prayer was issued in 1549, followed quickly by a revision in 1552. The young king died in 1553.

However, during Edward’s brief reign came a new innovation. In 1550 a new edition of the 1549 Prayer Book was printed—the *Book of Common Prayer, Noted*. Archbishop Cranmer had John Merbecke set the traditional chant tones which had been used for worship in Latin to the English texts of the 1549 book. He also composed settings for the Communion service, still found in our modern hymnals. Cranmer was a staunch believer in “FOR EVERY SYLLABLE, ONE NOTE” school of sacred music. He wanted every syllable of sacred text to be easily understood.

[Musical example: Merbecke’s setting of the Nunc Dimittis, sung by the Ambrosian Singers conducted by Denis Stevens.]

- Under Queen Mary I, the Prayer Book was banned and the Roman Catholic Church was re-established in England. Queen Mary died in 1558.
- Queen Elizabeth I in 1559 restored the use of the Book of Common Prayer in a third edition, the “Elizabethan Prayer Book.” It was largely the 1552 book, with no significant changes in the daily offices. It was the first BCP used in the New World, by Sir Francis Drake in 1579 and by the first English settlers in 1585 and 1607.

Rather than try to impose change on the prayer book itself, Elizabeth issued a Royal Injunction encouraging the continued employment of church musicians, and new compositions for the Reformed church. Church music in the royal courts, in the cathedrals, and in the colleges during her reign did very well. One of the best known of the Tudor musicians was Thomas Tallis. Already an old man when she took the throne, he had composed for Catholic Henry, Protestant Edward, and Catholic Mary. Without missing a beat he turned his pen back to music for Protestant worship when Elizabeth took the throne.

[Musical example: Tallis’ Venite from his Dorian Service, sung by the Chapelle du Roi under the direction of Alistair Dixon.]

Anatomy of Morning Prayer

There were developments in Morning Prayer over these three versions, but the basic structure was pretty much fixed from the beginning. Cranmer used parts of Matins and Lauds for Morning Prayer, and parts from Vespers and Compline for Evening Prayer, plus other sources, Roman Catholic and Reformed, and his own contributions. Although we are not here concerned with Evening Prayer, it is worth noting that its structure was made almost identical to that of Morning Prayer (not the case with the pre-Reformation offices).

A penitential introduction

To meet the sensibilities of the era, a penitential sub-rite was inserted at the beginning, which was a new construction, not part of old Matins or Lauds. It had four parts:

- Introductory penitential sentences
- A exhortation (needed for education in Anglican theology for both clergy and laity)
- A Confession of Sin (originally repeated line by line after the minister)
- A long prayer of absolution

[The Lord’s Prayer]

- This was originally a private devotion before the start of the service, but Cranmer made it the beginning of the public service (after the penitence is taken care of).

The Invitatory and Psalter

- Salutation (from Matins)
The *Gloria patri*
The *Venite* (Psalm 95)
- The Psalms appointed for the day of the month. Cranmer divided the Psalter more or less equally into 60 divisions, to be prayed at MP and EP in order on every day of a thirty-day month. The excess was dropped in February, and the 30th day was repeated if there was a 31st day.
- The *Gloria patri* again..

Psalm-singing was accessible to common folk. Calvinist and Lutheran influenced Protestantism valued the singing of psalms very highly. In order to make them easier for the mostly non-literate worshippers to memorize, the psalms were translated into poetic, or metrical settings.

[Musical example: Tallis' Third Tune/Archbishop Parker's Psalm 2 sung by the Chapelle du Roi under the direction of Alistair Dixon.]

The Lessons and Responses

Two units of reading plus canticle, taken from Matins and Lauds, respectively:

- Old Testament Lesson
Te Deum or *Benedicite*
- New Testament Lesson
Benedictus or *Jubilate Deo*

The daily office lectionary appointed certain special lessons for Sundays and holy Days, but the daily lectionary was analogous to the Psalter lectionary: Start on Jan 2 and read Genesis 1, read Genesis 2 at EP, the next day read Genesis 3 at MP, etc.

The Prayers

- The Apostles' Creed, said by all (or, on specified holy days, the Athanasian Creed)
- Bidding
- Kyrie
- Lord's Prayer (second time)
- Versicles and responses
- Collect of the Day (actually the one appointed for that Sunday, used all week)
- Collect for Peace

- Collect for Grace

The service ended here after the three collects. One characteristic of MP at this time is that there are almost no choices to be made or alternatives to be selected: the only choices are which of the penitential sentences should be used and which canticle (out of two) after each lesson. Everything else is required. This makes it very easy to use: you need only a Prayer Book, a Bible for the psalms and lessons, and, if you wish to sing but don't know the tunes, a hymnal for the canticles.

More history

Morning Prayer was never intended to be the main Sunday service in a church. It was "daily," so Sunday was included and made a little special with special psalms and readings, but it was meant to be the appetizer for the Holy Communion. However, since receiving communion had become very infrequent, the Communion service became rare, and the usual Sunday service consisted of Morning Prayer, the Litany, and Ante-Communion ("Before Communion," now the Service of the Word). It wasn't until perhaps the nineteenth century that MP alone became the usual Sunday morning service. Sunday "Divine Service" was almost always led by a clergyman.

As daily Morning Prayer, on weekdays, it was simple and accessible. Anyone who was literate could lead it, and the illiterate soon had the repetitive parts memorized.

After Queen Elizabeth died in 1602, King James I made some changes, but not enough to be considered a new edition. However, King James was responsible for a new translation of the Bible in 1611, the "King James Version," which was to become the next Anglican "Authorized Version."

His son, King Charles I, was executed after the English Civil War, when Puritans ruled under Oliver Cromwell, and the Prayer Book was again banned from 1645 until King Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660.

The Last English Prayer Book

In 1662, a new, rather anti-Puritan Prayer Book was issued by King Charles II. Some of the significant changes:

- The new Authorized Version, the King James Version, replaced all scripture passages in the BCP EXCEPT the psalms. The Psalms were kept in the old (Great Bible/Cloverdale) translation, and were bound into the BCP for the first time.
- A musical rubric was added after the three collects, where the service used to end: "In Quires and Places where they sing, here followeth the anthem."

- The service was lengthened: five new required prayers were added after the three collects—for the king, royal family, and church, plus the Prayer of St. Chrysostom and the Grace.

This is still today the official Book of Common Prayer in the UK, as various political events have killed every proposed revision since then. Most current worship in the UK chooses from a very extensive online collection of other liturgies legally considered alternatives; they can be found on the C of E's website and are called "Common Worship."

Henry Purcell, whose father had sung at Charles the Second's coronation as one of the Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal, was one of England's all-time greatest composers.

[Musical example: Jubilate Deo in b-flat by Henry Purcell, sung by the modern day Choir of the Chapel Royal at Hampton Court under the direction of Carl Jackson.]