

### **PART III: MORNING PRAYER IN THE UNITED STATES**

*[We question] Whether all the PSALMS of DAVID, are applicable to the state and condition of christian societies, and ought to be read **promiscuously**, as they now are; and whether some other method, of reading them might not be appointed; including, a **choice** of psalms as well for ordinary use, as for the festivals and fasts, and other special occasions, of public worship?*

*...Whether all the lessons which are appointed to be read in the ordinary course are well chosen; and whether many of them may not be subject to one or more of the following objections, viz. - 1. Either inexpedient to be read in mixt assemblies; or 2. Containing genealogies and passages either obscure, or of little benefit to be read in our congregations; or 3. Improperly divided; sometimes abrupt and unconnected in their beginning, as having respect to something that hath gone before; and sometimes either too short or too long, and apocryphal lessons included among the number?  
(Preface, Proposed Book of Common Prayer, 1786)*

At the time of the Revolution, Anglican colonists were using the 1662 Prayer Book. As in England, the most common Sunday morning liturgy was Morning Prayer, the Litany, and Ante-Communion. There was always a shortage of Anglican clergy in the United States, which became worse after the Revolution as many clergy, with their strong English ties and their ordination vows of loyalty to the king, left the new United States.

#### **The “Proposed” Prayer Book, 1786**

The original thirteen colonies, now states, were administratively independent, and their Anglican churches were independent. While everyone agreed that the BCP needed to be revised for the changed political situation, there was no central authority to manage that. Two different state coalitions emerged. One group, led by the church in Connecticut, thought that the way forward was to establish the episcopacy in the United States immediately and then the bishops and clergy would form the organization. Ten clergy (out of 14 total) in Connecticut elected Samuel Seabury as their bishop, and, after no success in England, he was ordained bishop in Scotland in 1784 and returned to Connecticut in 1785.

In the meantime, another group of mostly central states, started by Maryland, began to cooperate and in 1785 held the first “general Convention” convention of both clergy and laymen from seven states. It, and the second General Convention in 1786, established a legal entity under the name “The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America” (PECUSA), formed a governing body with both lay and clergy delegates, and arranged to have men elected from Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and Virginia as bishops. Two of them couldn’t proceed, but the other two, William White of PA and Samuel Provost of NY, were ordained in London in 1787.

In 1786, even before electing bishops, this General Convention issued a revised Prayer Book. It removed the outdated political references, but also made several innovations in accordance with the rather anti-doctrinal spirit of the times that were not universally well received. It was accepted by some participating states but rejected by others, and was anathema to the New Englanders. The principal innovations affecting MP are these:

- Some generic non-penitential opening sentences were added, making them opening sentences for the whole office, rather than just the beginning of the penitential introduction.
- A few words in the Lord's Prayer were modernized.
- Psalms were still to be read by day, as originally set out, but they condensed each day's Psalms into a single psalm by simply eliminating unwanted verses.
- The principle of reading every single word in the Bible was abandoned, and they adjusted the lectionary to eliminate some of the objectionable or boring material. It was still largely consecutive.
- The *Gloria in excelsis* could be said instead of the *Gloria patri* following the psalms. The *Benedicite* was eliminated as an option after the first lesson.
- They kept the Apostles' Creed, but eliminated the phrase "He descended into hell."
- Only one Collect was kept ("Peace"), the formerly allowed anthem was scrapped, and they removed the politically inappropriate prayers and inserted the litany and the general thanksgiving (a standalone prayer in the 1662 BCP). They kept the prayer of St. John Chrysostom and the Grace.

The 1786 Proposed Book of Common Prayer actually contained a small selection of hymns. This was an innovative idea for an Anglican prayer book, one that did not continue in subsequent editions. Only the texts are included. It was assumed that whomever would be leading the singing would know how to select a tune based on the meter of the hymn, that is, the number of syllables in each line of text. The leader would either choose a tune that was well known by all so that it could be sung together, or would 'line out' the hymn, a system where the song leader would sing the hymn one line at a time with the congregation repeating after the leader line by line. One of the hymn texts included in this prayer book is still in our hymnal today, Nahum Tate's *While shepherds watch their flocks by night*. It's likely that our Seventeenth and early Eighteenth century forebears used the same tune we know, which was originally published in Thomas Estes' *The Whole Book of Psalms* in 1592, and later perhaps American composer Daniel Read's setting, which we'll hear now

Musical Example: *While shepherds watch their flocks by night* sung by the Grace Cathedral Choir of Men and Boys, under the direction of John Fenstermaker.

## The First American Prayer Book, 1789

A few years later, these two groups managed to compromise their differences; this had been far from a sure thing, and both sides made serious compromises. The Constitution was adopted in 1789 at a third General Convention in which 10 states/dioceses participated. As other states agreed to the constitution, they were accepted into PECUSA. The last of the original 13, Georgia, joined in 1823.

This General Convention rejected the 1786 BCP, mostly for things not connected with Morning Prayer, so the 1786 book is usually called the “Proposed” Prayer Book. However, Convention accepted many of the Proposed Book’s changes in MP, and added others.

- It increased the number of non-penitential opening sentences.
- It accepted the principle of a shortened lectionary and the changed Lord’s Prayer.
- It kept the optional *Gloria in excelsis* and restored the *Benedicite*.
- It rejected the mangled Psalter of 1786, but did increase the number of special occasions on which selected Psalms could be used, rather than the Psalms for the day of the month.
- In the interest of peace, three options were allowed in the Apostles’ Creed: the original language of “he descended into hell,” substitute language of “He went into the place of departed spirits,” and the omission of the line altogether. The Nicene Creed was also allowed as an alternative.
- The ending prayers (after the three collects) had a prayer for the president and government; the prayer for clergy and people from 1662 was kept, a Prayer for all Conditions of Men and the General Thanksgiving were included (both freestanding prayers in the 1662 BCP), and the Prayer of St. Chrysostom and the Grace were kept.

The Nineteenth century saw great growth in the sophistication of American society, but by and large, things imported were seen as more desirable than things home-grown or home-crafted. While there were composers born on American soil as far back as pre-revolutionary times, America generally looked to England and Europe for ‘good’ music. Some churches in America started Gallery Choirs, which sang from the back balcony, without vestments, and were usually a mix of men and women. After the Oxford Movement crossed the Atlantic in the latter half of the Eighteenth Century, the best of England’s cathedral and college chapel music soon followed. A bold few churches in America started boy choirs, and moved their choirs from the back gallery to the front, or chancel, of the church. Anthems became quite popular, like this one by Samuel Sebastian Wesley.

Musical Example *Wash me thoroughly* (paraphrase of Psalm 51) by S. S. Wesley, sung by St. Paul’s Cathedral Choir directed by John Dykes Bower.

## The Prayer Books of 1892 and 1928

Several General Conventions in the nineteenth century tinkered with the 1789 BCP from time to time, but the changes were not significant, and they were not considered new editions of the Prayer Book—people just wrote them in the old copies or inserted new pages. The next formal revision, in 1892, in was quite conservative, and only minor things affected MP.

The 1928 revision was major, not so much in the structure of MP as in the number and variety of options it presented, making the service more complicated but also allowing it to be shorter. By this time, the Litany and Ante-Communion were not a regular part of a typical Sunday morning service. In order to include all the customary pieces of a complete Sunday service, the usual pattern became singing an opening hymn, praying the complete the MP service, then adding on the missing pieces after the Grace: a hymn or anthem, a sermon, an offertory (or at least a collection), announcements, closing prayers, a closing hymn. Major changes:

- The opening sentences were expanded and are clearly opening the whole service, not just the penitential section; they are arranged by seasons and the few penitential sentences left are assigned to Lent.
- The confession and absolution may occasionally be omitted, the exhortation may be replaced by a simple invitation to confession, and the shorter absolution from Holy Communion may be used.
- The Lord's Prayer may be said after the confession at the beginning or at its alternate place at the beginning of the prayer section.
- Optional antiphons are provided at the beginning of the Venite.
- A new short canticle, the *Benedictus es*, is provided as a third alternate after the OT Lesson. (It is much shorter than either the *Te Deum* or the *Benedicite*.)
- Permission to omit the contentious line in the Apostles' Creed was revoked, but the option of alternate language was retained.
- Evening Prayer (but not Morning Prayer) may have only one lesson and response.
- The three collects remain, but the minister has discretion as to what prayers should follow. The suggested prayers did not change.
- The daily rota of psalms was still indicated in the Psalter for optional use, but the lectionary (after the 1945 revision) includes selected psalms every day in the daily office lectionary. That is, the daily office lectionary integrated the psalter and the lessons. The lectionary, while still generally consecutive, skips over material considered insignificant.

## The 1979 BCP

The 1979 BCP revision was heavily influenced by the liturgical and ecumenical movements of the twentieth century. The Eucharist has largely regained its place as the principal Sunday service (except in times of quarantine!), which has led to the decline of public Morning Prayer. In spite of that, the 1979 BCP makes provision to allow an anthem or hymn and a sermon in specified places in the service, making it more suitable for a principal Sunday service. Much of its contemporary liturgical language (for example, in the canticles) is ecumenical, used across the English-speaking world.

The 1979 Prayer Book also added two additional very short daily offices, Noon and Compline.

The basic structure of Daily Morning Prayer has not changed, but there are options and choices in almost every part. There are two rites, one using traditional language, and the other more contemporary, ecumenical language. However, in either rite one may switch back and forth as needed. There is no longer one Authorized Version of Scripture but many (16 in the current canon, plus any allowed by the bishop). In addition to the Prayer Book, substantial alternative material can be found in *Enriching Our Worship*, *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, and other material offered officially by the Episcopal Church (at various levels of authorization).

The **Opening Sentences** are expanded and largely seasonal. They are optional.

### A penitential introduction

- The Confession section is optional, and makes specific provision for lay leadership in the absolution. Rite II provides short forms; Rite I provides the older forms, but they are heavily restated according to more contemporary theology.

### The Invitatory and Psalter

- The Invitatory and Psalter always begins with the same salutation and the *Gloria patri*.
- There are optional antiphons with the Invitatory Psalm; how they are used is not specified. The Invitatory Psalm may be the *Venite*, the *Jubilate deo*, or the *Pascha nostrum* (in Easter). Two other psalms are suggested in EOW.
- The psalms may still be read in the old daily rota, but are also now arranged in a seven-week cycle in the daily office lectionary. The translation is unique; it is an updating of the old Great Bible/Cloverdale version. Other translations are now allowed; we use *Psalter for the Christian People*, an update of the BCP version.
- The *Gloria patri* is said at the end of the section. Optionally, it may be said after the Invitatory or after each psalm section.

### The Lessons and Responses

- The lessons are still arranged in lesson plus canticle units. The lectionary is still arranged somewhat consecutively, but now in a two-year cycle, with three lessons a day covering both Morning and Evening Prayer. Since the readings are spread over two years, and a great deal is left out, the passages are much shorter than they were in Cranmer's original system. At any service one may read one, two, or three lessons, divided up in any coherent way, but the norm is assumed to be two lessons in the morning and one in the evening. If two lessons are desired at both Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, the second OT lesson may be taken from the alternate year.
- Any canticle may be used after any lesson. Fourteen separate canticles are given in the Prayer Book, some with old and new language versions, and the long *Benedicite*, already condensed, may be shortened even more. Seven canticles are new to the 1979 BCP. Nineteen more are given in EOW, plus still newer translations of some of the BCP canticles. Antiphons may be used with any of the canticles. In addition, a hymn may occasionally substitute for a canticle. There is a table of suggested weekly canticles (optional of course) on pp. 144-145 of the Prayer Book.

### **The Apostles' Creed**

- Choice of translations: Rite I, Rite II, or EOW, but no allowance for alternate clauses.

### **The Prayers**

- Salutation—additional options in EOW
- Lord's Prayer—choice of translations
- Choice of suffrages—two in the BCP and one in EOW
- The Collects—choice of at least one among eight
- Prayers—at the leader's discretion, but must include one of three prayers for mission OR a general intercession

Ending salutation—optional

Ending Grace or blessing, three in the BCP and one in EOW—optional

American composers have been much better represented in church music in the Twentieth and Twenty-first centuries, particularly as regards anthems, hymns, and settings of Eucharistic music. In the last several months, a flurry of composition as well as dusting off of and re-arranging of music has arisen in response to the number of Episcopal churches adopting Morning Prayer as their principal service for worship during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our final musical example is a joyful setting of the Jubilate Deo.

Musical Example: *Jubilate Deo* by Robert Powell, courtesy of St. James Music Press.

## Conclusion

Archbishop Cranmer took a very lengthy and complicated system of eight offices and reduced them to two simple offices. Over the years and editions, the offices have preserved Cranmer's basic structure but have increased in complexity while potentially decreasing in length, partly by abandoning the Reformation wish for complete and consecutive Bible readings, and partly to meet the genuine needs of more diverse users of the Prayer Book. The 1979 BCP, in a praiseworthy attempt to increase the diversity of the BCP, exponentially increased the complexity. And since 1979, more and more possibilities have been added—*Enriching Our Worship*, the *Book of Occasional Services*, *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* and its offshoots, the availability of Compline as an end of day service even shorter than the shortest Evening Prayer (but back to the snippets and lack of Scriptural variety), and thus the general non-use of Morning Prayer in both private and public settings. Ironically, we have, with the best of intentions ended up with the complexity and professionalism that Cranmer was working against. On the other hand, the daily offices lend themselves to computer use, where the decision tree is automated and each individual or group can set up the choices as are appropriate for them.

## Links

Access to a very large number of editions of the Book of Common Prayer worldwide can be found at this link:

<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/>

Access to most of the current Episcopal liturgies and resources can be found at this link:

<https://www.episcopalcommonprayer.org/existing-liturgies1.html>

Historical documents, including General Convention reports, can be found here:

<https://www.episcopalarchives.org/>