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The Prayer Book of 1549

By The Rev. C. W. J. Bowles, M.A.

" A VERY godly order . . . for common prayer and administration of the sacraments, to be used in the mother tongue within the Church of England, agreeable to the Word of God and the primitive Church, very comfortable to all good people desiring to live in Christian conversation, and most profitable to the estate of this realm "—so the second Act of Uniformity of 1552 spoke of *The Booke of the Common Prayer and Administracion of the Sacramentes, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Churche after the Use of the Churche of England* of 1549. It met with the determined opposition of that redoubtable Protestant, John Hooper, who subsequently became Bishop of Gloucester. While Martin Bucer criticized certain details of the Communion Office he generally approved the new rite as " drawn from the Holy Scriptures ". Its scriptural character was one of its most notable characteristics. Latimer found " no great diversity " between its Communion Service and the one contained in the Prayer Book of 1552, but the rebels knew how much the Book differed from the old order. " We will not receive the new service," they said, " because it is but like a Christmas game." Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester, the distinguished and devoted leader of the ' Catholic ' party, considered that it had altered too much, but was prepared to use it and see that others did the same. Because in modern times it has met with the regard of many members of the Anglo-Catholic party and some have urged the superiority of its eucharistic prayer to the " dislocated canon "—mistakenly so called—of 1552 and 1662, it has not been given the respect which it deserves as a noteworthy piece of liturgical craftsmanship, nor have its foundation principles and main characteristics been honoured as they should have been as identical with those of the Prayer Book of 1662. It is proper, then, that on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of its first use its own special features and something of its importance should be noted in this journal.

I

Whether the Book received the authority of Convocation we do not know, because the records were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, but even if it did not that would be in keeping with the Tudor Monarchy's way of working. Its publication had been prepared for by much governmental propaganda directed against the evils which it was designed to remove. Its use was ordered by the first Act of Uniformity, which had passed both Houses of Parliament by 21 January, 1549, and received the Royal assent on 14 March. Its uniform use was to be put into practice throughout the whole realm not later than " the feast of Pentecost next coming " (9 June), or " if the book might be had earlier, then three weeks after a copy had been procured ". Since the earliest copies extant bear the date of 7 March it is not surprising that, according to *Wriothesley's Chronicle*, " Paul's quire, with divers parishes in London and other places in

England, began the use of the said book in the beginning of Lent, and put down the private masses as by the Act is ordained." The Book did not have the Psalter printed in it, there were no forms provided for Adult Baptism, Use at Sea, or the King's Accession, and it lacked an Ordinal, because the first English Ordinal was not published until 1550. Apart from the printing of the Litany after the service of the Holy Communion, and the essay, "Of Ceremonies, why some be Abolished and some Retayned", at the end, the order of its contents is the same as that of the 1662 Book. Its Preface, with slight emendations, now appears under the title, "Concerning the Service of the Church".

Thomas Cranmer, the chief compiler of the Book, early put it into use. On Sunday, 21 July, according to *The Grey Friars' Chronicle*, "the byshoppe of Caunterbery came sodenly to Powlles . . . and soo was there at prosessioun, and dyd the offes hym selfe in a cope, and no vestment, nor mytter, nor crosse, but a crose staffe; and soo dyd alle the offes, and hys satten cappe on hys hede all the tyme of the offes; and soo gave the communyoun hym selfe unto viii. persons of the sayd churche". The Archbishop wore an alb, but used the less traditional of the alternative vestures authorised by the Book, which stated that "whensoeuer the Bushop shall celebrate the holye communion in the churche, or execute any other publique minystracyon, he shall have upon hym, besyde his rochette, a Surples or albe, and a cope or vestment, and also his pastorall staffe in his hande, or elles borne or holden by his chapeleyne". He thus deliberately rejected the use of the chasuble, which was in plentiful supply at the Cathedral, and wore the cope, which was not even an exclusively priestly garment, being sometimes worn by laymen. The vestment and cope were alternatives also for the priest at the Holy Communion, while the assistant ministers wore "albes with tunacles". At "Matens and Euensong, Baptizyng and Burying" the dress was a surplice, with the addition of a hood for graduates in cathedrals and colleges. The hood was also to be worn by graduates when preaching in parish churches. So run the vestiarian instructions in the last section of the Book headed "Certayne Notes for the More Playne Explicacion and Decent Ministracion of Thinges, Conteined in thys Booke".

According to these Notes much of the ceremonial which had previously been enjoined upon the clergy now became voluntary: "as touching kneeling, crossing, holding up of handes, knocking upon the brest, and other gestures: they may be used or left as euery mans deuocion serueth without blame". Yet the traditional marking with the sign of the Cross was ordered by the Book to accompany the blessing of the water for Baptism, the two blessings of the marriage service, and the words "vouchsafe to blesse and sanctifie these thy gyftes, and creatures of bread and wyne" in the eucharistic canon. The priest was to take the bread and cup into his hands at the words of institution, but the comparatively recent custom of the Elevation was forbidden and the ancient ceremony of the Fraction was omitted. In place of it there was a breaking of the bread for distribution; it was to be "unleauened, and rounde, as it was afore, but without all maner of printe, and somethyng more larger and thicker than it was,

so that it may be aptly deuided in diuers pieces ; and everyone shall be deuided in two pieces, at the leaste, or more, by the discrecion of the minister, and so distributed ". Another rubric makes it clear that the compilers knew that the ancient practice was for communicants to receive " the Sacrament of the body of Christ in theyr owne handes ", yet because " they many tymes conueyghed the same secretelye awaye, kept it with them, and diuersly abused it to supersticion and wickednes . . . it is thought conuenient the people commōly receive the Sacramēt of Christes body, in their mouthes, at the Priestes hande ".

A larger number of the traditional ceremonies of Baptism was retained : the signing of the Cross upon forehead and breast after the first prayer of the service, and the clothing with the chrysom and anointing with the chrism after the threefold dipping in the water. At Confirmation, a signing accompanied the laying on of hands, but no ceremony was left in the burial service except the casting of earth upon the body by the priest. The Council had already in January, 1548, forbidden certain observances which the Prayer Book omitted, such as candles at Candlemas, ashes on Ash Wednesday, palms on Palm Sunday, the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday, and the use of holy water. In the Prayer Book the chants and collect from the procession to the Easter sepulchre were retained as an introductory service, but the ceremony itself was not mentioned.

The rationale of this 1549 ceremonial and the extensive change which it represents are to be found in the tractate, " Of Ceremonies ". The purpose of ceremonies is, first, to secure a decent order and quiet discipline in the Church, and secondly, to secure the edification of the people. The complaint against the old order was that " this our excessive multitude of Ceremonies, was so great, and many of them so darke : that they dyd more confounde and darken, then declare and sette forth Christes benefites unto us ". Those that were retained in the Prayer Book " be neyther darke nor dumme ceremonies, but are so set forth that every man may understande what they dooe meane, and to what use they do serve ". We may agree with Dr. Percy Dearmer that in this Book " Protestantism there is, but it is the Protestantism that will not throw away the gold with the dross ";[1] but to worshippers in 1549 the abolition of ceremonies must have been more noticeable than their retention. When a service is conducted in an unknown tongue a large number of ceremonies may be necessary to show the evangelical nature of the rite, but when it is in the vernacular and audible then excessive ceremonial hinders rather than helps the edification of the congregation. That edification is one of the main purposes of public worship is clear both from the Prayer Book of 1549 itself and the interpretative material printed with it.

II

When we turn from ceremonial to ritual the most immediately and generally striking feature of the Book is that the services are entirely in English. Latin may have been a necessity in the mission-field of Anglo-Saxon England, but the same could not be said when there was

[1] *The Story of the Prayer Book*, p. 62.

a common speech throughout the land. The use of the vernacular also had the authority of Christian antiquity; nowhere in the early centuries was a special liturgical tongue employed. Until the issue of the English Litany in 1544 only books of private devotion had been in English, but *The Order of the Communion* of 1548 showed the direction which future events were likely to take. This was a short English office to provide for the communion of the people in both kinds and was composed of long exhortations, the Invitation, Confession, Absolution, Comfortable Words and Prayer of Humble Access; with which, only slightly altered, we are familiar. It was to be inserted into the Latin service immediately after the communion of the priest "without the varying of any other rite or ceremony in the Mass." Worshippers had scarcely had time to become accustomed to this innovation when the first English Prayer Book appeared. Its requirement of audibility in addition to the use of the vernacular made real common prayer possible. The references to the saying of prayers "in a loud voice" may read strangely to us, and the practice must have been an astonishment to those who first heard it, but this simple requirement enabled the congregation to take its proper part in public worship in a way which had not been possible for centuries. It was easier to make responses in English than in Latin, but the day of prayer said together was not yet; of the Lord's Prayer the people said only the final clause.

Cranmer's two daily offices of Mattins and Evensong were intended to be congregational services. For some time it had been a custom to say the numerous medieval offices in two groups, and in August, 1547, an Injunction was issued that Prime and Hours were to be discontinued and no more than Mattins and Vespers said. Cranmer's 1549 offices were both conflations of the old services and great simplifications of them. Their structure was identical, virtually the same as it is now, but there was no penitential introduction and no series of prayers after the third collect. The Litany and the Holy Communion, which regularly followed Mattins, contained all the necessary material for intercession. The elements of the offices had been used in the Church for centuries. No psalms were provided as alternatives to the canticles; *Benedicite* was to be used in Lent and *Quicunque Vult* immediately after *Benedictus* on the six major festivals. At Mattins the Psalms were to be preceded by *Venite* "without any Invitatory". The omission of this seasonal sentence of Scripture with its nine-fold repetition is an example of Cranmer's plan to cut off, as the Preface said, "Anthemes, Respondes, Inuitatories, and suche like thynges, as did breake the continuall course of the readyng of the scripture". The whole Psalter was arranged on a monthly instead of a weekly cycle because, as Cranmer said of the Psalms, "of late tyme a fewe of them haue been dailye sayed (and ofte repeated) and the rest utterly omitted." Two lessons of a regular chapter's length each were an innovation on medieval custom, but, because so much legendary matter and repetition had been omitted, Cranmer could still commend the order for its shortness. By this arrangement the primitive ideal of edification through worship had been restored, namely, that people "should continuallye profite more and more in the knowledge of God,

and bee the more inflamed with the loue of his true religion." The Apocrypha was read throughout October and November. Very few Holy Days had special lessons and the Calendar was simplified beyond popular recognition. Collects suggesting the medieval cult of the saints were utterly lacking.

The great events of marriage, sickness, thanksgiving after childbirth, and burial, were provided with liturgical observances. With marriage and burial a celebration of the Holy Communion was enjoined, and a mother who came to " The Purificacion " was expected to receive the Holy Communion if there was a service. The sick were provided for by extended Communion, which is different from the modern practice of reservation. If a sick person desired the Sacrament on a day when there had been no service in the church, then the priest was to go and visit him " afore noone " and " reverently celebrate " in the house. The sick man might be anointed if he desired it, but on the forehead and breast only, which is a much simpler observance than the sevenfold medieval anointing. Of all these occasional services it is the Burial of the Dead which differs most from the 1662 order. It has more psalmody, which on the whole strikes a more joyful note, and there are prayers which clearly join the living and departed in one petition. There is one request for the dead man " that the sinnes whiche he committed in this world be not imputed unto him, but that he, escaping the gates of hell and paynes of eternall derkenesse, may euer dwel in the region of lighte ". The service clearly teaches a disembodied but conscious state between death and the final resurrection when the flesh, " made pure and incorruptible," will be received again. The lesson from I Corinthians 15 appeared and, compared with the medieval services, this Order had a striking note of trust and assurance.

The doctrine of the Baptism service is the same as that of the 1662 form, but the rite itself is closer to the medieval forms. The first part, which included an exorcism, was held at the church door, and then the priest took one of the children by the right hand and led the procession into the church, saying, " The Lorde vouchesafe to receyue you into his holy housholde, and to kepe and gouerne you alwaye in the same, that you may haue euerlasting lyfe." A rubric made it clear that the questions were being asked of the child, which made its promises by the godparents. There was no thanksgiving section such as we now know, and the blessing of the water, which was to be changed once a month, was printed separately at the end of the private baptism service. The Catechism was printed in the Order of Confirmation, which consequently lacked an exhortation and ratification of vows, and the Bishop (or such as he should appoint) was to "appose" the candidates in some of the questions before confirming them. The laying-on-of-hands was accompanied by a formula and preceded by a prayer.

III

The Order of the Communion of 1548 prepared the way for the first English Communion Service. Not only did it bring the communion of the people into greater prominence and restore the cup to them,

but it made a serious break with the old ritual. Corporate confession followed by absolution was an innovation made necessary by the abolition of compulsory private confession. This was now a special ministry offered to anyone "whose conscience is troubled and greued in anything, lackyng comforte or counsaill". The exhortation (repeated in the 1549 Book) which contained these words continued with an appeal for mutual charity between those who needed or did not need this particular ministration.

"The Supper of the Lorde and the Holy Communion, commonly called the Masse," followed in the main the order of the medieval service, but the title indicated a change of emphasis. There was never to be a service without communicants and everything possible was done to secure frequent reception. *Gloria in excelsis* still came at the beginning of the service, but the Gradual was omitted and the Sermon (or Homily) became a regular instead of an unusual occurrence. Following the example of the Lutherans every reference to the eucharistic sacrifice was omitted and so were the offertory prayers, but the eastward position was taken by the celebrant. The bread and mixed chalice were solemnly placed on the altar (still so called), but the offertory sentences referred only to the collection. *Sursum Corda*, Preface, *Sanctus* and *Benedictus qui venit* followed, and then came, rather as an intrusion, the prayer "for the whole state of Christes church", which was the same as the 1662 prayer except for a thanksgiving for the saints and a petition for the departed. Between the familiar clause about the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross and the words of institution came the invocation, "Heare us (o merciful father) we besech thee; and with thy holy spirite and worde, vouchsafe to blesse and sanctifie these thy gyftes, and creatures of bread and wyne, that they maie be unto us the bodye and bloude of thy moste derely beloued sonne Jesus Christe." This is not an epiclesis of an Eastern kind, but a petition for consecration expressed in language familiar to the clergy in other connections.[1] After the words of institution came the clause, "we thy humble seruauntes do celebrate, and make here before thy diuine Maiestie, with these thy holy gifts, the memoryall whyche thy sonne hath wylled us to make." Then came the Anamnesis, the offering of "oure selfe, oure soules, and bodies," a petition for God's acceptance of "this our Sacrifice of praise and thankes geuing" and for worthy communion. The Lord's Prayer and *The Order of Communion* preceded the administration. During the Communion, *Agnus Dei* was to be sung and after it a chant called the Post-Communion. For this a lovely selection of New Testament texts was provided. Then came the prayer of thanksgiving and the blessing. For the satisfaction of consciences disturbed by the breaking of the wafers a rubric was inserted to read: "menne muste not thynke lesse to be receyued in parte then in the whole, but in eache of them the whole body of our sauiour Jesu Christ."

This service is a unique combination of Reformation doctrine and the medieval tradition of worship. It deprived the 'Catholic' of much that to him was familiar and necessary, but it does not belong to any particular form of Protestantism. Cranmer intended it as an

[1] See E. C. Ratcliff in *The Study of Theology*, ed. K. E. Kirk, p. 454.

interim rite which would be superseded by something more explicitly Protestant. Some of the changes made in the 1552 Book were due to criticisms which Bucer made of the 1549 Book, but the most striking were due to the interpretation which Gardiner put upon this service. He said that the invocation could be interpreted to teach transubstantiation, but Cranmer replied : " The bread and wine be made unto us the body and blood of Christ, (as it is in the book of common prayer), but not by changing the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's natural body and blood, but that in the godly using of them they may be unto the receivers Christ's body and blood."[1] Gardiner also understood various phrases in the sense of the medieval doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass, but Cranmer believed that there was only one other sacrifice besides that which Christ offered on the Cross, namely, that " which doth not reconcile us to God, but is made of them that be reconciled by Christ, to testify our duties unto God, and to shew ourselves thankful unto him. And therefore they be called sacrifices of laud, praise and thanksgiving." In this second kind of sacrifice " we offer ourselves and all that we have unto him and his Father."[2] The changes made in the 1552 Communion Service were intended to make it clear beyond dispute that these beliefs of Cranmer's were its teaching.

Because the rite of 1662 follows in these respects and others the 1552 Book it is found by many to be theologically and devotionally more satisfactory than the unbroken canon of 1549. It does not survive " only out of routine conservatism,"[3] and it is untrue that " it is difficult to justify on any grounds but those of expediency."[4] The 1549 eucharistic canon represents a type of prayer which began to appear in the East in the fourth century and Cranmer's intention was to provide something more primitive and more in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament. But whatever differences of opinion and practice there may be on points of detail of this kind, the Prayer Book of 1549 has left an indelible mark on all Anglican worship. It was a striking achievement.

[1] Cranmer, *On the Lord's Supper* (Parker Society Edition), p. 79 ; see also p. 271.

[2] Cranmer, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

[3] W. H. Frere, *The Anaphora*, p. 202.

[4] V. Johnstone and E. Evans, *The Story of the Prayer Book*, p. 41.