

Preface and Acknowledgements

One of the more remarkable developments of recent years has been the return of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) to the forefront of Anglican self-awareness. For the first 300 years of its existence, the 1662 prayer book was virtually unchallenged as the supreme manifestation of Anglican devotional piety, even though by the early twentieth century various revised forms of it had been produced and were increasingly being used, especially outside England. In some places, like Scotland and the United States, an alternative prayer book tradition had been in existence for centuries, and the 1662 book was less influential, but they were exceptions to the rule, and partial ones at that. Elsewhere, the liturgy adopted after the restoration of the monarchy in Britain in 1660, slightly modified and expanded from the one that had been suppressed in 1645, was the standard text, universally recognised as such and frequently praised as a monument of English literature. As late as 1965, it was still possible for Stella Brook to publish *The Language of the Book of Common Prayer*, a study of the way in which the prayer book had established itself as a literary classic.¹ Mrs Brook knew that major liturgical revision was on the way but that it had not yet progressed very far, and her readership was still familiar with the cadences of the seventeenth-century text.

A generation and a half later, the world that she inhabited has disappeared. Today it is mostly only worshippers over 70 who are intimately familiar with the 1662 rite, and many of them have forgotten large parts of it. To younger people it is often an alien relic, not unlike the King James Bible, which they may hear intoned from time to time but with which they are only noddingly acquainted. It is not so much the content

1. S. Brook, *The Language of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965).

that is unfamiliar as the style and language in which it is presented. The ‘thees’ and ‘thous’ of the original, still lovingly preserved in early and mid-twentieth-century revisions, have disappeared and, with them, the sense of religious ‘otherness’ that had both attracted and repelled the generations that grew up with them.

The linguistic changes that have occurred in the past several years have made the greatest impression, because they are so obvious and (to those who know the original texts by heart) disconcerting. However, more important have been the theological changes, many of which have gone unnoticed by the undiscerning, which have taken us away from our Reformation moorings. The 1662 prayer book is not above criticism, nor is it immune to possible improvement, as its seventeenth-century critics already pointed out. Nevertheless, for all its defects – real and imaginary – it conveys the Gospel message in scriptural tones to a degree that none of its proposed substitutes has been able to equal. It is the desire to recapture that emphasis that has driven the recent urge to recover it for modern use; and it is for that reason, above all, that it ought to be restored to the regular worship of the Church.

In the early twentieth century, when discontent with the 1662 prayer book was starting to impact the Church of England, two clergymen, Charles Neil (1841-1924) of St Mary’s, Stamford Brook, and James Mason Willoughby (1867-1918) of St Luke’s, West Hampstead, collaborated to produce *The Tutorial Prayer Book*.² They recognised that they had inherited two generations of liturgical study, much of it learned, some of it biased in favour of a militant Anglo-Catholicism, but virtually all of it inaccessible to the general reader. They saw the need for something more serviceable, which they described as follows:

The aim of the present undertaking, as the title indicates, is to act in the capacity of a private tutor, whose duty it is to help the reader over difficult stiles, to furnish him with essentials, to elucidate the subject in a systematic manner, to keep him well abreast of the latest investigations, and throughout to consider his interests as a student.³

2. C. Neil and J.M. Willoughby (eds), *The Tutorial Prayer Book: For the Teacher, the Student, and the General Reader* (London: The Harrison Trust, 1912).

3. *Ibid.*, p. v.

The Tutorial Prayer Book appeared in 1912 and was an immediate best-seller, with 5,000 copies sold in ten months. A second edition was called for and was published in 1913, happily embracing a number of suggestions that had been made to the authors in the meantime. That edition was periodically reprinted for half a century and is now available once more in a print-on-demand format. Those who know of it find it invaluable but, although its aims have stood the test of time, it must be admitted that much of it is now out of date. The controversies of that era have either disappeared or changed character so much that it is hard for the uninitiated to follow some of their arguments. The Church is no longer torn by debates over the true meaning of the prayer book's rubrics, for example, and, although some notice must be taken of them, they no longer occupy centre stage in the way that they once did.

It also has to be recognised that the 1662 book can no longer be used quite as readily as it was a century ago, even by those who are able to overcome the (greatly exaggerated) barriers of language. Furthermore, what was originally designed for the Church of England cannot be transposed into a worldwide Anglican Communion without some adjustment, nor can the theological and liturgical research of the past century be ignored. One obvious example of the 1662 book's datedness can be seen in its baptismal rites, of which it contains no fewer than three. The first is the rite for the public baptism of infants, the second is one for their private baptism and the third – added almost as an afterthought in 1662 – is for the baptism of those who are 'of riper years'. It was included partly because the upheavals of the English Civil War had left a number of children unbaptised and partly because overseas expansion had led to the conversion of natives in other parts of the world.

Today, the private baptism of infants is discouraged and the public baptism of professing adults has become much more common, even in the lands of historic Christendom. More importantly, though, we now acknowledge that, in theological terms, the baptism of professing believers is primary and that its application to infants must be seen in that light. The 1662 order of priorities has been inverted, not by liturgical revision or advance, but by historical studies that have recovered the practice of the Early Church and made it normative for subsequent generations. Of course, none of this affects the basic doctrine of baptism, which remains unchanged. Much the same can be said for the rest of the prayer book. The underlying message is still the same today but circumstances have often made it necessary (or at least desirable) to present it in a different way.

The basic problem we face is that the 1662 rite has become frozen over time. It is embedded in the law of England and, short of dis-establishment, that situation is unlikely to change. In other parts of the world, conditions are now so different that English usage is no longer appropriate or even possible. This is most obvious in the prayers for the Sovereign and the royal family, which abound in the prayer book but are inapplicable in non-Commonwealth countries, where there are now large numbers of Anglicans. There are also other archaisms that crop up here and there which puzzle the uninitiated and sometimes lead to curious anomalies. Perhaps the most famous of these is the rubric in the service of Holy Communion that requires the celebrant to stand at the 'north end' of the table. This made sense when the table was spread lengthwise down the church but is odd when it is removed to the place traditionally occupied by the medieval altar. Why should the celebrant stand to the left of the table (the 'north end') instead of behind it, facing the congregation (the so-called 'westward' position)? Of course, that is what most celebrants now do; but it is contrary to the strict guidelines of the prayer book and there are still some parishes that adhere to them, even though common sense would recommend otherwise.

In the liturgical controversies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, observances of this kind were matters of contention between the warring parties, with defenders of the 1662 book tending to insist that no change of any kind should be allowed, while others moved progressively away from a modest updating of the text towards something quite new. Nowadays it is safe to say that everybody accepts that some degree of change is overdue, that new prayers and forms of worship should be permitted, and that a certain reordering of the material is desirable. Can this be achieved without disturbing the fundamental principles on which the 1662 book was constructed?

Recently an attempt to do just that has been undertaken in the United States by Samuel Bray and Drew Keane, who have worked in the context of a divided American Anglicanism. They have recognised the central importance of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer for the Church as a whole and have produced an International Edition that is specifically designed to address these difficulties and resolve them.⁴ It is still too early to tell whether their effort will succeed. However, they have demonstrated that modest and sensitive revision is possible and that the classical text can be recovered for modern use if it is handled properly. At the very least, they have shown what can be done and paved

4. S.L. Bray and D.N. Keane, *The 1662 Book of Common Prayer: International Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021).

the way for others who may want to develop their work further. In the meantime, their achievement has provided the inspiration for a modern guide to the 1662 book that will make it more accessible to our present generation in the way that the authors of *The Tutorial Prayer Book* did for theirs.

In seeking to achieve this aim, this *Companion* follows the order of the 1662 book, beginning with the prefatory material and following that with the daily offices (Morning and Evening Prayer), the order for the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion or the Eucharist), the rites of Christian initiation (baptism, catechism, confirmation), the occasional pastoral services, the accession service and the Ordinal. The last two are not officially part of the Book of Common Prayer but, as they are almost always printed with it, it seems wrong to exclude them.⁵ The history of the prayer book at the beginning and the Bibliography at the end are completely new, although older works that are still of value have been included in the latter. It is beyond the scope of any reasonably sized guide to the 1662 book to include all the many liturgical developments that have occurred in the past century or more, especially those that have taken place outside England. Some attention has been given to the more important of them, especially those that impinge on the prayer book in some way, but a comprehensive study of these modern texts must await a different volume.

My thanks for preparing this *Companion* go first to the Latimer Trust, which sponsored the project from the beginning, and to Adrian Brink of James Clarke & Co., who kindly agreed to publish it. I owe a considerable debt to Dorothy Luckhurst, my copy-editor, who corrected a number of errors and made some invaluable suggestions for improving the text. I am also full of admiration for the professionalism of Samuel Fitzgerald, who has seen the volume through the press and greatly improved the style and presentation at numerous points. Finally, I must mention my longsuffering students at Beeson Divinity School, who unconsciously acted as guinea pigs when I was preparing the material and who made me aware of what was needed to make it truly useful to those who love the Prayer Book and want to study it seriously. It is to them – Benjamin Bisgrove, Colby Brandt, Zachary Clemmons, Jacob Collins, Teal Cuellar, Chase Edgar, Eric Henningfeld, Cody Prewitt, Lukas Stock, Jason Varnadore, Jared Willett and Damien Zink – that this *Companion* is dedicated with affection and deep gratitude.

5. The accession service is not included in the International Edition.