

Reformation ... How it affected people

1. The Prayer Book

15.10.2006

The prayer book is one of the unique marks of the Anglican Church. Other denominations have service books for ministers, or they have copied the idea. The Anglican Church was the first to have a prayer book for use by clergy and laity. In this diocese, there are Anglicans who do not want to have the same prayer book service week after week. Some do not want it at all. But then there have been people wanting to change it, or get rid of it, since it first appeared.

The prayer book has been a major influence around the world. and it had an enormous effect on English church life when it first began in 1549.

So today I will explain a bit of the history of why it was written and why it needed parliamentary laws to enforce ministers and lay people to use it.

In 1534, after Pope Clement VII's long and bitter argument about Henry VIII divorcing Catherine, Henry wanted to expunge papal influence from England. He did not want the pope overriding his reign. So the Church of England broke from Rome. Who would replace the pope as head of the church? Henry was already head of state, and it was believed that every Englishman was in the church, so Parliament and the bishops asked him to head of the church.

In God's providence, Thomas Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury, and he had an ally in parliament, Thomas Cromwell, chief royal agent (like a Prime Minister). They had three great objectives for the church, which took 18 yrs of forward steps, side steps and back steps to achieve.

The first was to nationalise the worship services, ie to remove foreign concepts and translate them from Latin.

The second was to make the services more inclusive. Lay people had to be involved as more than mere spectators.

The third was to make the services more

Scriptural by removing all superstitions and falsities.

Cranmer wanted the English Church to be Protestant. But apart from a small group, England was still very Catholic. Henry VIII still held Catholic beliefs, as did most clergy and laity. Most bishops were loyal to the pope. Many monks and nuns were loyal to the pope, but that group was debased as monasteries were confiscated to get money to pay for an army to stave off foreign attacks from lands loyal to the pope.

In that context, in 1543, Henry VIII set up a committee to revise the hundreds of service books that priests had to use according to the church calendar. None of the revisions made it through parliament and the committee dissolved. However the bishops asked Cranmer to be a one-man committee to look at the service books to ensure the pope's name was removed, to remove all superstitious legends, false saints and apocrypha, and to ensure services were drawn from Scripture.

That was like asking me to taste-test chocolate. Yet an even greater banquet lay ahead for Cranmer.

In 1544, in a time filled with the horrors of war and intrigue due to the split from Rome, Henry VIII wanted England united in prayer. and he wanted the prayers to be said in English. Cranmer began translating the old prayer services from the Latin, but he found them boring, repetitive and with little substance. So he added new matter.

He produced a seven page booklet of the service of Litany.

Though not a complete prayer book, it was a beginning. It put into effect the three great objectives. It was in English. The people participated in prayers by responses. and it was based on scripture, although it was not yet fully reformed, containing things like prayers to Mary and the saints.

Reformation ... How it affected people

1. The Prayer Book

15.10.2006

It also said prayers were to be audible and “said or sung”. This was the first time that prayers were directed to be said (not sung) in an English church.

In 1547, Henry VIII died, and young Edward VI, a protestant, was crowned.

The first two bills of his new parliament were the Repeal Bill (which removed the Mass and other Roman aspects of the church.) and the Communion-in-both-kinds Bill.

But how were the clergy to give out the wine? In all their hundreds of services, there was no form of service for giving wine to everyone in church. This led to a new committee to write a new service.

In 1549, a prayer book was produced. For the first time in the church’s history, both clergy and the laity would have a book which contained Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, a communion service, a baptism, confirmation and churching of women service, a wedding service and a funeral service. It also contained a new lectionary (a table of readings to read the whole Bible in a year).

Parliament argued over whether the prayer book should be used. It had a massive debate about the meaning of Holy Communion. Many people heard Cranmer’s views as he succeeded in convincing parliament against the ably argued Roman views of the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ. Cranmer said “I believe that Christ is eaten with the heart. Only the good can eat Christ’s body. The eating with our mouth cannot give us life. When the evil person eats the Sacrament, bread and wine, he neither has Christ’s body nor eats it.”

But the clergy and lay people did not want this book. It was too Roman for the Protestants, and a novelty to the Romans.

The book was rejected. However, Bishop Gardiner, who’d triumph under Queen Mary, by twisting parts of it, argued cleverly that the Prayer book was exactly in line with Roman

theology.

This so angered the prayer book committee, that when they convened again, they made the second prayer book even more clear in its theology. All Saints Day 1552 was the first time every church throughout England had to use it, with the authority of Parliament, the Bishops and the king.

But it did not last long. On Edward VI’s death, Queen Mary ordered it burnt as England became Roman Catholic again. Archbishop Cranmer and many other bishops were burnt at the stake, and Bishop Gardiner became Archbishop of Canterbury. But in 1559, Queen Elizabeth 1 ordered the restoration of the second Prayer Book, and in the Act of Uniformity, enforced it upon an unwilling church. They used it, grudgingly at first, then willingly. But within one hundred years, one third of the church wanted a change. They did not want the restrictions of a prayer book. This came not from the more catholic part of the church, but the more protestant. But that is another story.

Right from the start, the reformation was brought into effect in England through the Prayer Book and legislation. It is a protestant book, which speaks the language of the people, involves people in the service and is scriptural. The legacy of Cranmer is still with us.