

THE PRAYER BOOK SOCIETY

The Book of Common Prayer

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP; also known as the Prayer Book) is the traditional service book of the Church of England, and is central to its faith. Compiled in the sixteenth century by Thomas Cranmer, and modified in 1662, the Prayer Book remains at the heart of our worship, and is the official doctrinal standard of the Church of England, as well as of most other Churches in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The Prayer Book has been familiar to generations of men and women for their regular Sunday worship and to make holy the principal events of their lives, the births, the marriages and the deaths. It has been and continues to be loved for its wonderful language, dignified and memorable but always speaking to our human condition. Phrases from it have come into everyday use and have been quoted in literature. 'Till death us do part', 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest', 'peace in our time'. After the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer is the most frequently cited book in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, and is one of the guiding influences on our language and the basis of religious expression in this nation.

The Collects, the special prayers for every week and season, are not hard to memorise and often express devotion that we cannot readily put into words. But far more important is its safeguarding of sound Christian doctrine. No book of services is based more closely on the teaching of the Bible, with words often drawn directly from biblical passages.

While modern services sometimes seem to lack the deep reverence with which we should approach God, the Book of Common Prayer continually honours His awe and majesty while also reminding us that He is a loving Father, close to each of us. It recognises the seriousness of sin and also the assurance of pardon for all who turn to God in faith. We have never really understood the reality of human wickedness, so apparent in the world around us, until we can sincerely say of our sins 'the remembrance of them is grievous unto us: the burden of them is intolerable'.

The Book of Common Prayer appears in many variants in churches inside and beyond the Anglican Communion in over 50 different countries and in over 150 different languages. Traditional Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian prayer books have also borrowed from the Book of Common Prayer, and the marriage and burial rites have found their way into those of other denominations.

The leaders of great movements in the Church have been sustained by the Prayer Book, equally with the most simple worshippers. It has inspired musical settings from some of the best church composers. It keeps its dignity and offers its comfort in every setting from the cathedral to the small country church, or the visit for a communion in the home.