

## Worship down the centuries

From the New Testament we get the impression of fairly informal worship, with many participating. Initially they met in the Temple, where worship must have been taking place, but eventually the church spread, house churches developed, and then the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, it looks like things have already become quite formal, with the church's own version of priestly leadership. Pope Clement of Rome writing about 95 AD in his Epistle to the Corinthians wrote:

*'Since all this is clear, and we have gazed into the depths of Divine knowledge, we are bound to perform in due order all that the master bade us accomplish at their proper seasons. He ordered that the offerings and services should be performed at their appointed times and seasons, not at random and without order; and also by his own supreme will he himself appointed the place and the ministers of their performance, that all might be done according to his good pleasure and so be acceptable to his will. Therefore they that make their offerings at the appointed seasons are acceptable and blessed, for in the following ordinances of the master they do not err. To the high priest are given special ministrations, a special place is reserved for the priests, and special duties are imposed on the levites, while the layman is bound by the ordinances concerning the laity.'*

In 163 AD, Justin is writing his 'Apology' and explains the harmless things that Christians do:

*'We salute one another with a kiss when we have concluded the prayers. Then is brought to the president of the brethren bread, and a cup of water and wine, which he receives; and offers up praise and glory to the Father of all things, through the name of his Son and the Holy Ghost; and he returns thanks at length ... when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgiving, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen.'*

At this point there is no mention of singing, but he does refer to reading the scriptures and being taught from them, and also to an offering for the poor. It's also clear that for Justin the day for worship is now Sunday.

Somewhere in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century a document known as *The Didache* (Teaching) was written, and included more specific instructions, including that for baptism, a jug of water may be used three times if immersion is not feasible – and preferably warm water! For the Eucharist the writer gives us prayers for the cup and then the bread (note the order), followed by an instruction that only those who have been baptised may partake. He then has a set prayer of thanksgiving, which includes an invocation: 'Remember Lord, thy church, to deliver her from all evil and to make her perfect in thy love ... let grace come, and let this world pass away ...' Interestingly a little informality is allowed in the very last sentence: 'But allow the prophets to give thanks as much as they will.'

Around 225 AD, Hippolytus is writing in Egypt, and gives us an early liturgy which looks very familiar:

*The Bishop: The Lord be with you.  
People: **And with thy spirit.***

*B: Lift up your hearts.*

*P: **We lift them up unto the Lord.***

*B: Let us give thanks unto the Lord.*

*P: **It is meet and right.***

He then gives us a Eucharistic prayer which includes a reminder of Jesus' incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection. He refers to *'that he might destroy death, break the chains of the devil, tread Hell underfoot, bring forth the righteous ...'* (The idea of the harrowing of Hell that appears in some icons.)

Again there is no reference to singing, but that cannot be taken to indicate that it did not take place. But what we can say is that within 200 years of the founding of the church (Acts 2), it has moved from informal and participatory worship, to something quite formal and organised, with a definite hierarchy of ministry.

Once we get to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, to Constantine, and the Councils which fixed things like the Creed, things are definitely set and centralised. About 400 AD we have the Rule of Augustine of Hippo in North Africa (which at that time was the 'Bible Belt' of Christendom) which sets clear instructions, and in 516 AD the Rule of Benedict which specifies 8 services daily for those who have taken religious vows. From some of these offices, our Matins, Evensong and Compline are direct descendants.

For the rest of this essay I would like to focus mainly on Britain, otherwise there will be far too much information to take in!

Christianity probably first came to Britain informally with the Romans and spread through the land they controlled. Certainly from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century we find mosaics that have had pagan symbols removed and sometimes Christian images inserted. When the Romans departed, Christian faith was left with the Britons, but as the Anglo-Saxons arrived, Christianity was pushed to north and west (the Celtic church).

Celtic worship was not based on the Roman set worship, but developed it's own style, less liturgical, closer to nature, and quite reflective. Bede, writing his History of the English Church and People around 700 AD refers to this period:

*'... faithful Christians, who during times of danger had taken refuge in woods, deserted places, and caves, came into the open, and rebuilt ruined churches. Everywhere the faith advanced victoriously; the shrines of the martyrs were built and endowed, the festivals of the church were observed, and its rites performed reverently and sincerely. The Christian Church in Britain remained in peace ...'*

Then of course came Pope Gregory sending Augustine in 597, converting the Anglo-Saxons in the south east, and a new church spread across Britain which followed the Roman ways.

By the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, the two churches (Celtic and Roman) had met up, and discovered that they had different practices. You might say that the Roman church was word-centred, and the Celtic church symbol-centred. The presenting problem was that they had a different calendar for Easter – so took place the famous Synod of Whitby in 664 AD. Bede takes up the story:

*'King Oswy opened by observing that all who has served the One God should observe one rule of life, and since they all hoped for one kingdom in heaven, they should not differ in celebrating the sacraments of heaven. The synod now had the task of determining which was the truest tradition, and this should be loyally accepted by all. He then directed his own Bishop Coleman to speak first, and to explain his own customs and their origin. The Coleman said: 'The Easter customs which I observe were taught me by my superiors, who sent me here as bishop; and all our forefathers, men beloved of God, are known to have observed these customs. And lest anyone condemns or rejects them as wrong, it is recorded that they owe their origin to the blessed evangelist Saint John, the disciple especially loved by our Lord, and all the churches over which he presided.' ... When Wilfred had received the King's permission to speak, he said: 'Our Easter customs are those that we have seen universally observed in Rome, where the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered, and are buried. We have also seen the same customs generally observed throughout Italy and Gaul when we travelled through these countries for study and prayer. Furthermore, we have found them to be observed in many different countries and languages at the same time, in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, and throughout the world wherever the Church of Christ is spread. The only people who are stupid enough to disagree with the whole world are these Scots and their obstinate aliens the Picts and Britons, who inhabit only a portion of these two islands in the remote ocean.'*

You can bet that went down well! But ultimately, the Roman practices were adopted, as the king had taken that side, and the Celtic church retreated into even further corners of our islands.

By now the Mass had become the central service of the church. This is illustrated in another story from Bede about someone who it was thought had died in battle:

*'Now this young man had a brother named Tunna who was a priest, and abbot of a monastery that is still called Tunnacester after him. And when he heard that his brother had been killed in battle, he went to see whether he could find his body. Finding another very similar to him, he concluded that it was his; so he took the body back to his monastery, gave it honourable burial, and offered many Masses for the repose of his brother's soul. And it was on account of these Masses that when anyone tried to chain him (the brother who had actually be taken prisoner) he was immediately set free. The ealdorman, whose prisoner he was, was astonished, and asked why he could not be bound. And whether he possessed any written charms like those mentioned in the fables. He replied: 'I know nothing about such things, but I have a brother who is a priest in my own province, and I am sure that, thinking me killed, he has said many Masses for me, and were I now in another life, my soul would be freed from its pains by his prayers.'*

With the arrival of the Normans, the idea of parishes, each with their own church, was formalised. There were many clergy, and in addition to parish churches, there were an increasing number of monastic foundations and chantry chapels (where sponsored Masses were said for wealthy patrons who had died).

Immediately before 1066, in 1054, the Great Schism had taken place, when the East and West had gone their own ways – the East being focussed on Byzantium and the West on Rome. From the former, the Orthodox churches were to develop.

Here in England the Roman practices and dates were observed, and services were said in Latin. In the monastic churches, 5 or 7 services daily (the Offices) was normal. By now singing had become an accepted part of these services, much of it in plainsong, using the words of the Psalms, and usually the monks and clergy became the choir. The laity, who were almost all illiterate, remained in the Nave, outside the Rood Screen. They listened to the words, and may have come to know some by heart. They observed the actions of the clergy, and were also taught by seeing illustrations of the Bible stories colourfully painted on the walls and pillars of the building.



This picture is taken from a mediaeval service book, which would have been hand written and illustrated, and shows the monks worshipping.

During the Middle Ages, various different liturgies were developed, based on the Roman practices. These 'uses' were gradually adapted in the Cathedrals of our country, the most used one being that from Salisbury Cathedral, known as 'The Sarum Rite'. They were based on monastic services, including singing, and being in Latin.

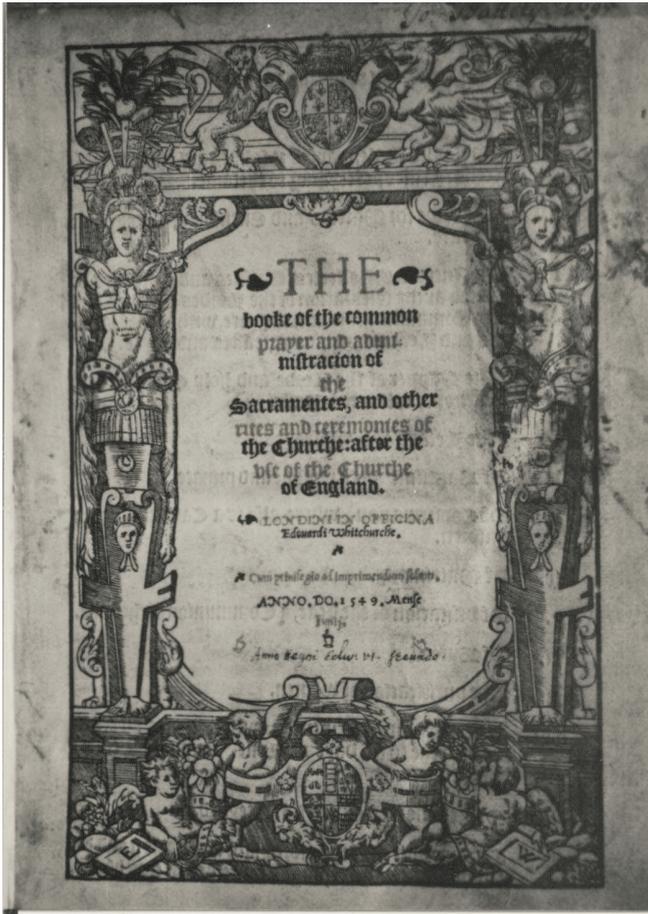
Then three significant things happened.

1. The invention of the printing press, which made it easier to distribute material.
2. The ideas of the Reformation began to spread across the nation.
3. 'The King's Matter' – Henry VIII wanting a divorce, and breaking with Rome.

As part of that break with Rome, and to help the royal purse, almost every monastery in the country had to be surrendered to the crown in the Dissolution, and shrines (such as that of Thomas Becket at Canterbury) were removed. The one good thing Henry did was to cause the Bible to be published in English for use in every parish.

The real consequence of all this came in 1547 when Henry died, the nine-year-old Edward came to the throne, and Reformers suddenly had enormous influence in the newly founded Church of England. Under the leadership of Archbishop Cranmer, the first Prayer Book was published in 1549. Out went all the Roman practices, candles, Masses, side chapels, rood screens, and the Latin language. In came services in English, the

reciting of Creeds and Ten Commandments, the reading of scripture in English, and sermons. The basic principles of the Prayer Book being that worship would now take place in the language that the people could understand, and that the liturgy be based far more on the words of scripture. The Mass was replaced by Holy Communion, which had a less dominant position than Matins and Evensong.



The title page of Edward VI's Prayer Book in 1549.

When Mary came to the throne 4 years later, everything went back to the Roman practices, but just 5 years later Elizabeth became queen, and the protestant view prevailed. Elizabeth's Prayer Book was a compromise, slightly less reformed than that of Edward – for example the words of consecration and administration can be accepted both by those who believed in transubstantiation and those with a memorialist theology (believing that communion was just a reminder).

During the period of the Commonwealth, 1649–60, it was the hard-line Puritans who had the upper hand in Parliament, and so the Prayer Book was replaced by a small publication entitled '*The Directory*'. Rather than setting out services, this book only contained a series of instructions as to how things were done, and allowed Ministers (Priests were not acknowledged) to pray in an extemporary way.

*'The Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, taking into serious consideration the manifold inconveniences that have arisen by the Book of Common Prayer in this Kingdom, and resolving, according to their Covenant, to reform Religion according to the Word of God, and the Example of the best Reformed Churches, have consulted with the Reverend, Pious and Learned Divines, called together to that purpose; And do judge it necessary that the said Book of Common Prayer be abolished, and the Directory for the Publique Worship of God, herein after mentioned, be established and observed in all the Churches within this Kingdom.'*

Changes imposed included the removal of all liturgy, vestments, festivals (including Christmas) statues, and an increased amount of prayer, Bible reading and longer sermons! Singing of Psalms was expected. And the holy table was to be placed more centrally, and orientated east-west so there was no doubting that it was not an altar. Churches built or re-ordered at this time had the pulpit as the central focus rather than any altar.

It should perhaps be mentioned that the growth of free and reformed churches, such as the Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians stem from this time, as they retained the simplicity and strictness of Reformed theology.

When the monarchy returned, the kings were more catholic, but were held back from re-introducing Catholicism as they may have hoped. Eventually in 1662 came our familiar *Book of Common Prayer*, which remained the mainstay of Anglican worship for the next 3 centuries. At that time, the language used was very much the language of ordinary people. Litany was set and used without change. Items such as the *General Confession*, *The Creed*, and *The Lord's Prayer* were to be said by all, but since at that stage few could read, they were spoken parrot-fashion, phrase by phrase, and the capital letters within each indicate where each phrase should be broken.

In the preface of the BCP the rejection of some ceremonies and traditions is still expected:

*'Of such ceremonies as be used in the Church, and have had their beginning by the institution of man, some at the first were of godly intent and purpose devised, and yet at length turned to vanity and superstition; some entered into the Church by undiscreeit devotion, and such a zeal as was without knowledge; and for because they were winked at in the beginning, they grew daily to more and more abuses, which not only for their unprofitableness, but also because they have much blinded the people, and obscured the glory of God, are worthy to be cut away and clean rejected ...'*

Music became quite common, both psalms and hymns were increasingly sung by all, often to familiar tunes, and frequently accompanied by a small band in a gallery at the back – organs only being in use in larger churches and cathedrals. Incidentally, Thomas Hardy's novel *'Under the Greenwood Tree'* deals with the upset in the church choir when the vicar decides to replace the band with an organ!

In 1735 (under the reign of George III) John Wesley had a conversion experience and began preaching around the country – the start of the Evangelical Revival. He remained an Anglican priest, but his followers were not given a home within the established church, so the Methodist chapels began to be formed, and while their worship was similar to the established church, the singing of hymns became more prevalent, and that came back into the Anglican church with many hymns being composed in this era.

The next major shift in emphasis came in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the Oxford Movement, led by Pusey and Newman. This brought a number of Catholic practices back into the Anglican church, including grander liturgy, robes, liturgical colours, processions, choral music, etc. These ideas were adopted to a greater or lesser extent by individual churches, without ever having formal permission. From this point onwards we have diversity within the Anglican church, with 'high' and 'low' churches, and also in rural areas where churches would more often describe themselves as 'central'.

An interesting point we should note is that in towns and cities, where there are several parishes, we tend to find a range of different churchmanship in different buildings, and people can choose where they prefer to worship. By contrast, in rural communities where there is just one building, the need is to provide meaningful worship for people with a variety of preferences.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was becoming obvious that the language and style of the BCP was becoming very dated, and not appropriate for the era. An attempt was made in 1928 to have a revised prayer book, but at that time major decisions had to be approved by parliament – and because of the high proportion of traditional Tories, the legislation failed. One good consequence was that parliament's power was eventually limited, and synodical government came into the church.

Meanwhile, worship was already changing to suit the new century. In 1904 there was the Welsh Revival, and around the same time, Pentecostalism arrived from the USA (mainly from the Afro-Caribbean community), the Charismatic Movement developed, house groups started to flourish in the second half of the century, and there was a rise in less formal worship and a blossoming of new worship songs. It was almost as though Christianity had gone full circle, and we were back in Acts again.

The Church of England started to explore revisions to its worship. In 1965 '*Series 2*' was published – prayer booklets with modernised language. Then in 1980 we had The '*Alternative Service Book*' (ASB) which was replaced in 2000 by '*Common Worship*' CW. While retaining some of the formality of the older books, the new offerings had multiple choices and an increasing amount of supplementary and optional material. The current 'latest' offering is '*New Patterns of Worship*' which is available on-line, and from which one can extract a great variety of resources for creating worship.

If you have not yet explored *New Patterns for Worship*, you are strongly encouraged to look it up on-line on the C of E website. I'm planning that we have a session on using *New Patterns* in our Autumn term.

The current trend in worship is that services are becoming less rigid, containing smaller blocks of teaching, and are more participatory, speaking more to the emotions than the academic intellect. Also the trend is towards worship songs replacing some familiar hymns, and bands in some churches instead of choir and organ. And during C-19 lockdown we have been learning to do services that are shorter and have a broader appeal.

We learnt last week that scripture never tells us exactly *how* to worship. Now we see that down the centuries Christians have been attempting to work out what is best, but there has never been one perfect way to worship, and each style is a human construct. We tend to prefer familiarity, especially as we get older, but always there is the challenge to make worship relevant to the latest generation.

### **This week's project:**

There has been a lot to read, so not too much extra!

Have a think about what tradition(s) you feel your church mainly follows, and whether what you are offering has changed over the last twenty years. Please send me just a paragraph of reflection by next Sunday.

*Stephen Hardy – 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020*