

"JOHN WESLEY'S PRAYER BOOK REVISION: THE TEXT IN CONTEXT

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When, in 1784, Richard Whatcoat, Thomas Vasey, and Dr. Thomas Coke set sail for America, they were accompanied by John Wesley's liturgical legacy, a revision of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* entitled *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, which was transported in loose-leaf form so as to avoid the duty for bound books. Mr. Wesley is virtually silent about the process by which he prepared this liturgical book for the Methodist people. Although it is possible that his active engagement with the revision of the Prayer Book was confined to the year 1784, it is clear that his liturgical work was anticipated by a lifetime of pastoral experience, of studying ancient writers and the ritual texts of antiquity then available, of scrutinizing the liturgy of the Church of England which he believed was unsurpassed in "solid, scriptural, rational Piety,"¹ and of engagement with the liturgical issues and debates of his own day.

The construction of the *Sunday Service* is best understood by placing it within a double framework. The first context is the Methodist movement itself, wherein we find the approval but also a critique of the Prayer Book voiced by John Wesley and other Methodists. The second is the broader liturgical climate of England during the 17th and 18th centuries. Controversies that had surrounded the Prayer Book since its creation by Thomas Cranmer in 1549 persisted in Wesley's day and new liturgical questions arose in conjunction with the theological debates that ensued from the Enlightenment. Both of these contexts will be examined in order to locate Wesley's Prayer Book revision properly within the liturgical ferment of the late 18th century and to analyze the content and substance of the liturgical text itself.

I

Evidence of John Wesley's predisposition toward editing the *Book of Common Prayer* is first found in a diary entry for March 5, 1736,

¹Dated Bristol, September 9, 1784, Wesley's statement about the Church of England's liturgy is found as a preface in most extant original copies of the *Sunday Service*, and is included in contemporary reprints of that work. See *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, vol. 14, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984), 303-4.

written during the period when Wesley was beginning service as a priest of the Church of England in Savannah, Georgia. Here, between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., are twice recorded the unexplicated words that he "revised Common Prayer."² Although Wesley revered the Prayer Book and enforced the contents of its rubrics upon the citizenry of Georgia,³ clearly, even in his early ministry, he did not regard the Prayer Book as so sacrosanct as to be above improvement.

Fifteen years later, when the Methodists met in Conference at Leeds to discuss the legality and expediency of forming a separate denomination, Wesley presented the essay "Ought We to Separate from the Church of England?" which included remarks about Methodist worship within the framework of the Church of England and criticisms of specific items within the *Book of Common Prayer*. Among the items of the Prayer Book that Wesley "did not undertake to defend" were the answers of the sponsors in baptism, the entire office of confirmation, the absolution in the visitation of the sick, and the thanksgiving in the burial office. Portions of the Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque vult*) were also suspect, particularly the so-called "damnatory clauses" in which it was stated that persons could not be saved who did not adhere unwaveringly to the doctrine espoused in the creed. These blemishes, nevertheless, were to Wesley's mind insufficient cause to separate from the Church of England.⁴ Charles Wesley, concerned lest the Methodists depart from Mother Church, sought to relativize the importance of liturgical controversies even while listing some of the debated matters. He did this in a versified tract dated May 25, 1755 that was addressed to his brother John:

Nor would I e'er disgrace the Church's Cause
By penal Edicts, and compulsive Laws;
(Should wicked Powers, as formerly, prevail
T'exclude her choicest Children from her Pale)
Or force my Brethren in her Forms to join,
As every Rite and Rubric were divine,
As all her Orders on the Mount were given,
And copied from the *Hierarchy* of Heaven.
Let Others for the Shape and Colour fight
Of Garments short or long, or black or white;
Or fairly match'd, in furious Battle join
For and against the Sponsors and the Sign;
Copes, Hoods, and Surplices *the Church* miscall,
And fiercely run their heads against *the Wall*;

²Diary, March 5, 1736, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 18, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 363.

³Wesley strictly administered such rubrics as the requirements of banns or license before matrimony, the announcement of intention prior to the reception of the eucharist, and the expectation of baptism by an episcopally ordained priest before burial.

⁴"Ought We to Separate from the Church of England?" *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 571-72.

Far different Care is mine; o'er Earth to see
 Diffuse'd her true essential Piety,
 To see her lift again her languid Head,
 Her lovely Face from ev'ry Wrinkle freed,
 Clad in the simple, pure, primeval Dress,
 And beauteous with internal Holiness,
 Wash'd by the Spirit and the Word from Sin,
 Fair without Spot, and glorious all within.⁵

Herein is a foreshadowing of some of the concerns that John Wesley would later address through his 1784 revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The question of a Methodist revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* was raised prior to the 1775 Conference (again held at Leeds), first through a proposal for ordination submitted to Wesley by Joseph Benson and then by a revision of Benson's proposal from the pen of John Fletcher.⁶ Urging reformation of the Church of England through separation of the Methodists "into a general society—a daughter church of our holy mother," Fletcher pressed for the modification of the liturgy, the homilies and the articles, recommending:

That a pamphlet be published containing the 39 articles of the Church of England rectified according to the purity of the gospel, together with some needful alterations in the liturgy and homilies—such as the expunging the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian creed, &c . . .

That the most spiritual part of the Common Prayer shall be extracted and published with the 39 rectified articles, and the minutes of the conferences (or the Methodist canons) which (together with such regulations as may be made at the time of this establishment) shall be, next to the Bible, the *vade mecum* of the Methodist preachers.⁷

Fletcher's 1775 liturgical suggestions conformed, at least in part, to Wesley's concerns about the content of the Prayer Book as documented in 1755. When in 1784 Wesley produced the *Sunday Service*, he did not impulsively alter the Prayer Book but drew upon and incorporated the issues and concerns which he himself and the Methodists had raised earlier. Wesley also, in his revision, sought to address the American Methodist situation as it was interpreted through letter and direct conversation. In many ways, the circumstances in America were similar to those which had already confronted him in England, namely, the necessity of marking out a middle ground between Dissent and dominant "established" Church. Wesley's attention to compromise is evident from a letter sent to Francis Asbury from Norwich, dated October 31, 1784:

⁵"An Epistle to the Reverend John Wesley, by Charles Wesley, Presbyter of the Church of England," *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, ed. John R. Tyson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 411–12.

⁶"The Benson-Fletcher Correspondence," *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, 8 vols. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909–1916) [hereafter cited as *Journal* (Standard ed.)], 8:328–34.

⁷Letter of John Fletcher to John Wesley, August 1, 1775, *Journal* (Standard ed.), 8:332–33.

You are aware of the danger on either hand: And I scarce know which is the greater? One or the other, so far as it takes place will overturn Methodism from the foundation: Either our travelling Preachers turning Independents, & gathering Congregations each for himself: Or procuring Ordination in a *regular* way, & accepting Parochial Cures. If you can find means of guarding against both evils the work of God will prosper more than ever.⁸

Since Wesley was a man attuned to the thought and condition of his time, his efforts to construct a liturgical middle way were shaped not only by the American context, but also by a matrix of 17th and 18th-century English theology, liturgical innovation, and cultural transitions. From Wesley's attempt to synthesize and comprehend these perspectives, the Methodist *Sunday Service* was born.

II

Wesley's 1784 revision was not an anomaly of liturgical experimentation. Rather, in the age of Enlightenment it stood in a long line of efforts to amend, supplement, or supplant the *Book of Common Prayer*. Various theological and political perspectives of the 17th and 18th centuries within England often sought articulation and codification in liturgical texts. A number of revisions and proposed revisions during this period—some of which were indeed used for worship—were aimed at the comprehension of those who were situated on the fringes of the Established Church (e.g., the Puritans, who wanted to take the Prayer Book further in a Reformed direction) and those who fully supported the Church but sought enrichment of the approved liturgy (e.g., the Laudians, who advocated the restoration of particular pre-Reformation practices). Advocates of comprehension stressed the need for a liturgical synthesis which integrated diverse positions and thereby produced a unified liturgical service book. *Comprehension* was greatly preferable to mere *toleration*. Other revisions reflected the tenets of blossoming new theological and ecclesiastical movements, such as Unitarianism. Certain of these revisions drew upon the *Book of Common Prayer* for inspiration while others dismissed it entirely. Some of the proposed revisions incorporated recent liturgical discoveries gleaned from ancient texts. Newly-created material was occasionally incorporated into the framework of the *Book of Common Prayer* though sometimes it was set into entirely new orders of service. These revisions or proposals were not produced as isolated, independent entities, for they were subject to the cross-currents operational at the time of their production.

The history of *Book of Common Prayer* revision has been recorded in numerous studies and the production of variant liturgies has been

⁸Cited in Wesley F. Swift, "Five Wesley Letters," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 33 (March 1961): 11.

chronicled, particularly through the work of Alexander Elliott Peaston.⁹ In Wesley studies, however, less attention has been given to the questions of if and how Wesley utilized for his own worship book the content of historic appeals for revision and the materials which emerged from the climate of liturgical revision of his day. Certainly he was familiar with many appeals and concrete proposals, for he periodically referred to them, noting, for example, that current Methodist concerns often corresponded with past agendas. Thus, in a letter to Samuel Walker, he wrote:

Those ministers who truly feared God near an hundred years ago had undoubtedly much the same objections to the liturgy which some (who never read their works) have now. And I myself so far allow the force of several of those objections that I should not dare to declare my assent and consent to that book in the terms prescribed.¹⁰

The revisionists and schools of revision that Wesley explicitly acknowledged in his journal and letters will constitute the basis for this inquiry into possible textual influences upon or parallels with Wesley's 1784 revision. These include the Puritan school, and then such varied figures as Richard Baxter, William Whiston, Thomas Deacon, John Jones, and Samuel Clarke (as presented and revised by Theophilus Lindsey). It is not surprising that Wesley was acquainted with these revisionists and their work, for the revisions they produced or encouraged were among the best known and most influential of his day. Undoubtedly Wesley also was aware of the process by which the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* took shape and was familiar with the so-called liturgies of comprehension formulated in 1688 and 1689 which were known primarily through the second edition of Edmund Calamy's *An Abridgment of Mr. Baxter's History of His Life and Times* (1713) which Wesley read in 1754;¹¹ these will be examined as well.

III

The English Puritans of the mid-sixteenth century received many of their standards for liturgical evaluation from the continental reformers whose perspectives were articulated by the Marian exiles returning to

⁹See in particular G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 2d ed. (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), 102-46; Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, 1970, 1975), 2:329-434 and 3:79-93; W. Jardine Grisbrooke, *Anglican Liturgies of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Alcuin Club Collections, no. 40 (London: SPCK, 1958); Marion J. Hatchett, *The Making of the First American Book of Common Prayer, 1776-1789* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), 7-36; and A. Elliott Peaston, *The Prayer Book Reform Movement in the 18th Century* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1940).

¹⁰Letter to Samuel Walker, November 20, 1755, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 26, ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 612.

¹¹*Journal*, April 3, 1754, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 20, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 485.

England from Protestant centers such as Geneva, Strassbourg, and Zurich.¹² Generally the concern of the Puritans was not to abandon set forms, but rather to eradicate what were perceived as Romish remnants and non-scriptural forms and theologies in the *Book of Common Prayer*. During the reign of Elizabeth, these complaints were articulated in an "Admonition to the Parliament," published in 1572 by two Puritan clergy, Thomas Wilcox and John Field. The "Admonition" formed a foundation for later Puritan critique while providing fodder for an increasingly bitter debate between supporters of the Prayer Book and the Puritans. Among the matters criticized in the "unperfected booke, culled & picked out of that popishe dunghil" were the use of the designation "priest," superstitions in baptism (e.g., signation and the use of godparents), private communion, purifications (i.e., the churching of women), holy days, the reading of services in lieu of preaching, and antiphonal recitation of the psalms.¹³ Receiving no satisfaction for their grievances, the Puritans prepared their own service books and revised copies of the *Book of Common Prayer*, an example of which is the Waldegrave Prayer Book of 1584 used in conjunction with the Geneva Bible ("Breeches Bible," 1560) rather than the Great Bible.¹⁴ Puritan Prayer Book revision prior to 1588 evidently proceeded without censure, perhaps on account of a general attitude of toleration and the fact that the liturgical alterations were quite modest.¹⁵

The "Millenary Petition" of April 1603, a statement reputed to have had one thousand clerical signatories, recapitulated the earlier Puritan "Admonition." Objections were made to the use of the Apocrypha, the length of services, priestly absolutions, the interrogatories administered to infants at baptism, the office of confirmation, and the use of the ring in marriage. The petitioners also requested the establishment of a conference to discuss their concerns.¹⁶ The recipient of the petition, James I, convened a conference at Hampton Court in January 1604, but only after he had declared (on October 24, 1603) that the Constitution and doctrine of the Church

¹²The term "Puritan," while having a variety of meanings, here refers to persons in sixteenth through eighteenth century England who sought the purification and renewal of Christian faith and life through the primary guidance of the Scriptures. A variety of theological positions, political attachments, and ecclesiastical polities were advocated within the framework of the Puritan movement; Puritanism at times included those loyal to the Church of England, as well as Separatists, Presbyterians, and Independents.

¹³"An Admonition to the Parliament," in *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt*, ed. W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas (London: SPCK, 1954), 8-34.

¹⁴Peter Hall, ed., *A Booke of the Forme of Common Prayers*, in *Fragmenta Liturgica*, vol. 1: *The Waldegrave Prayer-Book* (Bath: Printed by Binns and Goodwin, 1848).

¹⁵A. Elliott Peaston, *The Prayer Book Tradition in the Free Churches* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1964), 25-32.

¹⁶"The Millenary Petition," in *Documents Illustrative of English Church History*, ed. Henry Gee and William John Hardy (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910; repr., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1972), 508-11.

of England conformed to scripture and the primitive church. Few concessions were gained by the four Puritan delegates at the Conference who faced seventeen advocates of the Prayer Book, its rites and rubrics. The proposed reformation of the service book was limited to words of clarification, although were apocryphal readings were deemed repugnant to canonical scripture, it was conceded that they should not be read.¹⁷ In fact, the Conference resulted in decreased toleration for dissent, as heavy penalties came to be inflicted upon those who absented themselves from the Church of England's worship. The ascendancy of the Laudians during this period particularly irritated the liturgical sensitivities of the Puritans.

In March 1641, with civil war looming on the horizon, the House of Lords appointed a committee representing the predominant political, theological—and liturgical—opinions to achieve a settlement of religious disputes. The "Proceedings" that resulted included comments on innovations in doctrine and considerations upon the Prayer Book which incorporated several of the Puritan criticisms.¹⁸

The Puritan agenda took official form by the authorization in 1644 of *A Directory for the Publike Worship of God*, a collection of liturgical directions and suggestions, produced to guide the worship of England during the interregnum when the *Book of Common Prayer* was illegal. Even though the government applied sanctions against the employment of the *Book of Common Prayer* for worship, there was still clandestine usage. Some Anglican clergy, including Jeremy Taylor (whose works Wesley strongly approved), improvised by adapting or constructing liturgies. Taylor produced in 1658 a collection of offices and prayers, many of which departed from the texts of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Among his liturgical materials were provided eleven services or prayers under the heading, "Devotions and Proper Offices for Women" which included prayers for women abused by their husbands.¹⁹ Wesley, in his preserved

¹⁷"A Letter from Patrick Galloway to the Presbytery of Edinburgh, Concerning the Conference," in *A History of Conferences and other Proceedings Connected with the Revision of the Book of Common Prayer from the Year 1558 to the Year 1690*, 3d ed., ed. Edward Cardwell (Oxford: University Press, 1849; repr., Ridgewood, N.J.: The Gregg Press, 1966), 214–15.

¹⁸"A Copy of the Proceedings of Some Worthy and Learned Divines touching Innovations in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England; together with considerations upon the Common Prayer Book," in *A History of Conferences*, 270–77. G. J. Cuming describes the "Proceedings" as "an interesting compendium of unpopular Laudian practices and mildly Puritan criticisms of the Prayer Book" (*A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 110).

¹⁹Jeremy Taylor, *Collection of Offices or Forms of Prayer*, in *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor, D.D.*, vol. 8, rev. and corr. Charles Page Eden (London: Longman, Green, et al., 1865), 647–48. A general introduction to the *Collection* is found in Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 2:360–362; and Grisbrooke, *Anglican Liturgies*, 19–24; cf. Raymond A. Peterson, "Jeremy Taylor's Theology of Worship," *Anglican Theological Review* 46 (April 1964): 204–8; and Harry Boone Porter, *Jeremy Taylor, Liturgist* (London: Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1979), 90–91, 122–23.

writings, made no specific comment about Taylor's liturgical offices, but given the breadth of Wesley's knowledge of Taylor's works, one can surmise that he probably was familiar with them.

The Restoration brought with it a desire on the part of the Presbyterians, who had become the dominant Puritan party, to accept a new church settlement and with it a book of set forms of prayer accommodated to their liturgical and theological positions. Comprehension, and not simply toleration, was their theological and liturgical goal. But movement toward full comprehension may not have been the preference of the new king, Charles II. Regarding the *Book of Common Prayer*, Charles stated:

And though we do esteem the liturgy of the Church of England, contained in the Book of Common Prayer, and by law established, to be the best we have seen; and we believe that we have seen all that are extant and used in this part of the world, and well know what reverence most of the reformed churches, or at least the most learned men in those churches have for it; yet since we find some exceptions made against several things there, we will appoint an equal number of learned divines of both persuasions, to review the same, and to make such alterations as shall be thought most necessary.²⁰

At a conference convened at Savoy on the Strand on April 15, 1661 to hammer out a revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*, the twelve bishops in attendance stated that they had no disagreement with the extant Prayer Book, so proposals for revision had to be prepared by their twelve Presbyterian counterparts. Criticisms came in two forms: the first, a listing of "Exceptions against the *Book of Common Prayer*"; and the second, a concrete liturgical text composed by Richard Baxter and set forward as a legal alternative to the Prayer Book.²¹

The "Exceptions" reiterated much of what had been condemned in the "Admonition" and the "Millenary Petition" and commended in the "Proceedings." The bishops' reply to the "Exceptions" dismissed the majority of the Presbyterian claims. Indeed, some of the replies from the bishops mocked the Presbyterian proposals. For example, in response to the suggestion that clergy be allowed, at their own discretion, to perform

²⁰"His Majesty's Declaration to all his Loving Subjects of his Kingdom of England and Dominion of Wales concerning Ecclesiastical Affairs," in *A History of Conferences*, 294.

²¹Although Baxter clearly preferred comprehension to toleration, he realized that only by an alternate liturgy which conformed to the "law of nature and Holy Scripture" could accommodation be attained. These matters Baxter articulated in a "Draft of a Declaration on Religion in a letter to Thomas Bampfield, April 4, 1660" (quoted in Richard Schlatter, *Richard Baxter and Puritan Politics* [New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957], 144). For additional information on Baxter and the Savoy conference see also: E. C. Ratcliff, "Puritan Alternatives to the Prayer Book: The *Directory* and Richard Baxter's *Reformed Liturgy*," in *The English Prayer Book, 1549-1662*, ed. Michael Ramsey and others (London: SPCK, 1963), 56-81; and Geoffrey Nuttall and Owen Chadwick, eds., *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662-1962* (London: SPCK, 1962), 61-148.

the burial service inside the church in cases of inclement weather (rather than at the graveside), the bishops responded that the clergy would be "helped by a cap better than a rubric."²² Also rejected was Baxter's *The Reformed Liturgy* (often identified as the "Savoy Liturgy") which for several of the rites was little more than a set form of the *Directory* with an expansion and formalization of the rubrics.²³

The revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the subsequent Act of Uniformity (which later stirred the ire of John Wesley) effectively thrust the Presbyterians and other Dissenters out of the Church of England. Nevertheless, those on the margins continued to rail against the established liturgy through theological writings (such as those by Richard Baxter²⁴) and through the chroniclers of Puritan histories (e.g., Edmund Calamy, whose *Abridgment* contained an account of the proceedings of the Savoy Conference). Sympathy toward and interest in the Puritan cause was reflected in Wesley's concern for religious toleration and by the compatibility of aspects of Puritan theology with his own. Of all the Puritan authors that John Wesley read, it was Richard Baxter who had the strongest continuing influence on him, challenging him to reflect on the place of Scripture and Christian piety in "practical divinity," ecclesiastical polity, and theological discourse. His appreciation for Baxter ("The Saints' Everlasting Rest") and other Puritan authors is evident in the inclusion of a vast array of Puritan writings, often abridged (as was Wesley's custom), in *A Christian Library*. That Wesley (and the Methodists) borrowed directly from Puritan authors for models of spiritual and liturgical praxis is clearly evident in the Methodist custom of renewing one's covenant with God which was inspired from the works of Joseph and Richard Alleine.

IV

Attempts by some Anglicans to comprehend Dissenters occurred soon after the authorization of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, spurred on by fear of the Roman Catholic attachments of the new king. Most Dissenters were willing to accept a prescribed liturgy—even a *Book of Common Prayer*—so long as material judged to be theologically offensive was expunged from it. In 1688, meetings were held to propose revisions

²²"The Answer of the Bishops to the Exceptions of the Ministers," in *A History of Conferences*, 361.

²³*The Reformed Liturgy*, appended to Edmund Calamy, *An Abridgment of Mr. Baxter's History of His Life and Times with an Account of many of those Worthy Ministers who were Ejected, after the Restoration of King Charles the Second* (London: Printed for John Lawrence, 1713).

²⁴For example, Richard Baxter, *The English Nonconformist as under King Charles II and King James II truly Stated and Argued* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, 1689).

(which were recorded in an undated folio Prayer Book), but progress was interrupted by the politics surrounding the arrival of William of Orange. Revisionary work resumed in October 1689 with an eye to accommodating the familiar liturgical criticisms of many Dissenters as well as those of the recently suspended Non-Jurors. A full revision was produced of the Prayer Book (again in a folio Prayer Book), although it was never discussed (or, *a fortiori*, approved) by Convocation.²⁵ The Prayer Book which contained the 1689 revision was kept under lock and key, although there were attempts in the 18th century to make its contents public. Only in the 19th century were editions of the revised text published. Until then, persons had to rely on secondary accounts, such as that recorded by Edmund Calamy.

V

The rejection of an "official" comprehensive liturgy, the passage of the Toleration Act (1689), and the prorogation of Convocation from 1717 onwards each contributed to the impetus for the production of more than fifty unofficial liturgies by persons within the Church of England and those on the fringe.²⁶ These liturgical constructions could compromise full service books or a few selected services. Morning and evening prayer and the communion service were by far the most frequent objects of revision. Books, tracts, and treatises continuing programs for revision (without providing concrete liturgical texts) also flourished during this period. The underlying motivation for numerous liturgical reformulations and proposals was the comprehension of moderate Dissenters. Nevertheless, other factors increasingly were involved, such as the incorporation of primitive Christian liturgical models, the omission of theologically questionable material, the elimination of what were deemed "archaisms" especially in language,²⁷ and the expression of newly articulated doctrinal principles, particularly those that questioned the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, a 1768 proposal by Samuel Roe of Bedfordshire encouraged emendation of the *Book of Common Prayer* by purging the "corrupt Errors and extravagant Notions of the Holy Spirit" to avoid "adding Fuel to

²⁵For a thorough study of the development of the 1688 and 1689 liturgies and the controversy surrounding them, see Timothy J. Fawcett, *The Liturgy of Comprehension, 1689* (Southend-on-Sea: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1973), 6-46. An anonymous letter on the subject of the 1689 revisionary work delineates many of the desired liturgical changes ("Letter to Dr. Tillotson, bearing date October 5, 1689," *A History of Conferences*, 453).

²⁶Peaston notes that approximately fifty-four liturgies were published from 1713 to 1854 (*The Prayer Book Reform Movement*, 34). Wesley's revision, amazingly, is not addressed by Peaston.

²⁷For example, *The Book of Common Prayer Revis'd* of 1734 sought to address the problems of outmoded language. See E. Vincent, "An Eighteenth-Century Attempt at Revision" *Theology* 14 (1927): 353-57.

the Flames of Enthusiasm" manifest among "vain Bigots and Sceptic Methodists."²⁸

John Wesley, at least from his time at Oxford, was familiar with the liturgical work of William Whiston and the Non-Juror Thomas Deacon. In February and again in December 1734, Wesley met with Whiston and, as the manuscript diary indicates, they talked about "stations" and "feasting."²⁹ Whiston himself records in the second edition of his *Memoirs* that he assisted Wesley in the latter's writing "for the observation of the old *Wednesday* and *Friday* stations," and that he hoped one day Wesley would "leave off his athanasian follies, and come intirely [sic] into old christianity."³⁰ Wesley's connection with Thomas Deacon came through one of the Oxford Methodists, John Clayton, and Wesley had subsequently read many of Deacon's works and had traveled to Manchester to meet with him. Deacon even included a portion of Wesley's "Essay upon the Stationary Fasts," which apparently had been written under Whiston's guidance, in the appendix of his *A Compleat Collection of Devotions* (1734).³¹

In their liturgical revisions, both Whiston and Deacon relied upon that which was deemed "primitive" in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* and upon the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions* and *Canons* of the fourth and fifth centuries as foundations for their liturgical revisions.³² The *editio princeps* of *Apostolic Constitutions* had been established in 1563 by Francisco Torres in Venice, and the first English translation was published by Whiston in *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd* (1711-1712). *Apostolic Constitutions* was the oldest ancient church order generally known in Wesley's day and was widely accepted as an apostolic work. In spite of the fact that his father, Samuel, questioned the authenticity of the *Apostolic Constitutions*,³³ Wesley, early in his ministry, believed them to be genuine.

²⁸Samuel Roe, *Another Pertinent and Curious Letter Humbly offered to the Public in Favour of a Revisal, and the Amendment, of our Liturgy* (Cambridge: Printed by Fletcher and Hodson, 1768), 23-26.

²⁹I am grateful to Richard P. Heitzenrater for making available this information from the still unpublished manuscript diaries.

³⁰William Whiston, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. William Whiston*, 2d ed., corr. (London: Printed for J. Whiston and B. White, 1753), 121.

³¹Thomas Deacon, "Appendix," *A Compleat Collection of Devotions* (London: Printed for the Author, 1734), 72-74.

³²Grisbrooke comments that the liturgy of Whiston (and also that of John Henley) tends toward exclusive preoccupation with the primitive materials while the liturgies of the Non-Jurors (e.g., Deacon) are more balanced with "traditional" materials (*Anglican Liturgies*, 56-67).

³³"The Constitutions would be worth gold, as showing us much of the face, discipline, and ritual of the ancient church, could we separate the dross from them. But as they are, they stink so vilely of Arian interpolations, (as does the bastard Ignatius,) from end to end, that I doubt we must despair of ever finding them sweet and clean again" ("Advice to a Young Clergyman," in *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, 2 vols., ed. Thomas Jackson [London: John Mason, 1841], 2:514).

Wesley's later skepticism about the *Apostolic Constitutions* may then have influenced his opinion about Whiston's and Deacon's liturgical texts. Unfortunately he is silent on this matter. One can at least assume that he took issue with parts of the *Constitutions* on account of their anti-Trinitarian sentiment.³⁴

William Whiston's *The Liturgy of the Church of England, Reduc'd Nearer to the Primitive Standard* (1713),³⁵ was an attempt to return the worship of England to "a much better Liturgy." In the note "To the Reader," Whiston acknowledged that his liturgy, the "first Liturgy . . . of our *Reformed Church of England*," was devised to conform, though imperfectly, to the "original Liturgies of Christianity." To that end, Whiston's liturgy did not include a marriage rite since there was none provided in *Apostolic Constitutions*; however, he included a brief rubric which allowed for marriages to be solemnized by the "ordinary form." Whiston's liturgical agenda clearly was not devised primarily to address comprehension of Dissenters. Indeed, Whiston restored the previously objectionable ritual action of chrismation following baptism and also prayers for the faithful departed. Most of the liturgy was revised to address only the first person of the Trinity or, when the three persons were named together, to allow a subordinationist understanding (e.g., "Glory be to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Ghost"). Nevertheless, a few of his modifications did echo the long-standing complaints, such as the omission (as might be expected) of the Athanasian Creed, the expunction of the office for the churching women, and the provision for a single recital of the Lord's Prayer by the assembly at the celebration of Holy Communion. All was done that the "Liturgy might be more truly Primitive, and Christian, and Compleat."

Deacon's *A Compleat Collection of Devotions*, in which Whiston's liturgy was used as a source, accompanied Wesley on his journey to Georgia as did four other books by Non-Jurors, including Robert Nelson's *Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England*.³⁶ The lengthy full title of Deacon's service book provides a suitable summary of this voluminous work:

A Compleat Collection of Devotions, both Publick and Private: Taken from the Apostolical Constitutions, the Ancient Liturgies, and the Common Prayer Book of the Church of England. In Two Parts. Part I. Comprehending the Publick Offices of the Church. Humbly offered to the Consideration of the present Churches of

³⁴Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth, 1970); Nashville: Abindgon, 1970), 236.

³⁵William Whiston, *The Liturgy of the Church of England, Reduc'd nearer to the Primitive Standard* (London: Printed for the Author, 1713), no pagination.

³⁶Robert Nelson, *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England; with Collects and Prayers for each Solemnity*, 2d ed. (London: Printed by W. Bowyer for A. and J. Churchill, 1704).

Christendom, Greek, Roman, English, and all others. Part II. Being a Primitive Method of Daily Private Prayer, Containing Devotions for the Morning and Evening, and for the Ancient Hours of Prayer, Nine, Twelve, and Three; together with Hymns and Thanksgivings for the Lord's Day and Sabbath, and Prayers for Fasting Days; as also, Devotions for the Altar, and Graces before and after Meat: All taken from the Apostolical Constitutions and the Ancient Liturgies, with some Additions; And Recommended to the Practice of all Private Christians of Every Communion. To which is added, An Appendix in Justification of this Undertaking, Consisting of Extracts and Observations, taken from the Writings of every eminent and learned Divines of different Communions. And to all is subjoin'd, in a Supplement, An Essay to procure Catholick Communion upon Catholick Principles.

Two guiding principles were operative for the collection: that "modern hypotheses, customs, and private opinions" were to be laid aside in favor of the "doctrines, practices, worship and discipline" of the "Ancient and Universal church of Christ, from the beginning to the end of the Fourth century"; and that the "Liturgy in the Apostolical Constitutions is the most Ancient Christian Liturgy . . . [and] ought to be received, submitted to, and allowed its due authority."³⁷ The stated purpose of the liturgy was also twofold. First, to provide the oldest (and therefore the best) liturgical text available. Second, by returning to the early church, to produce a mutually agreeable text that would provide "a truly Catholick union" among all the churches.³⁸ Deacon's liturgical book is generally characterized by addition to the 1662 Prayer Book rather than omission. The book includes, for example, lengthy new prayers in the communion office, and also ritual texts for the admission of the penitent to penance, for the entrance of persons to the catechumenate, and for the consecration of milk and honey to be given to the newly baptized. Again the Athanasian Creed has disappeared, and inserted in its place is an adaptation of the baptismal creed from Book 7 of *Apostolic Constitutions*.

Open debate on the matter of liturgical revision was furthered by the publication in 1749 of the controversial *Free and Candid Disquisitions*,³⁹ an anonymous collection of essays primarily associated with John Jones, vicar of Alconbury. The intent of the work was to address the increasing desire on the part of many that Convocation deal with matters of liturgical revision for the sake of the advancement of Christianity according to the principles of reason and the Gospel.⁴⁰ Revision was warranted, the essayists believed, because: the reformation of the church was incomplete; the

³⁷Deacon, *A Compleat Collection of Devotions*, iii-iv.

³⁸In 1734, Deacon declared this revision to be the official liturgy and prayer book for the "Catholic Church in England." A covering title page inserted in some copies of *A Compleat Collection of Devotions* states that the service book is for the use of the "Orthodox British Church." See Grisbrooke, *Anglican Liturgies*, 115-16.

³⁹*Free and Candid Disquisitions Relating to the Church of England and the Means of advancing Religion therein. Addressed to the Governing Powers in Church and State; and more immediately directed to the Two Houses of Convocation* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1749).

⁴⁰*Free and Candid Disquisitions*, xviii-xix, 8-12.

the church constitutionally was able to make revisions; and the stress on absolute uniformity in matters of ceremonies was unjustified.⁴¹ Since Convocation had failed to act on its own (and had in fact only been meeting to deal with formal matters), the recommendation was made that it should give its blessing to revisions produced by private individuals.⁴²

Through a series of "queries and observations" supported by documentation in the appendix (with evidence dating from 1604 to 1748), *Free and Candid Disquisitions* expressed concrete suggestions regarding revision,⁴³ including the excision of psalms not suitable to Christian sensibilities, the inclusion of more hymnody in services of worship, the elimination of the prescription for the use of the wedding ring, and the provision of restrictions to prevent the use of Christian burial for unbelievers.⁴⁴ Reactions to *Free and Candid Disquisitions* were mixed, some fearing revision would open the door to heterodoxy, others regarding the document as an exemplary model, and still others using the document as a battle cry for more drastic revisions.⁴⁵ John Wesley, who began his reading of the book on August 15, 1750, regarded the work as well written but problematic, stating that "about one objection in ten appears to have weight, and one in five has plausibility." The book prompted Wesley's practical concern for what indiscriminate revision might mean for the destiny of the *Book of Common Prayer*:

And even allowing all the blemishes to be real which he has so carefully and skillfully collected and recited, what ground have we to hope that if we gave up this we should profit by the exchange? Who would supply us with a Liturgy less exceptionable than that which we had before?⁴⁶

Ultimately no official action was taken in regard to the content of *Free and Candid Disquisitions*, although there was an increasing openness to the use of topical prayers which the work had suggested.⁴⁷

⁴¹*Free and Candid Disquisitions*, 240–41.

⁴²A verse in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* expressed the tenor of the times:

A liturgy needs mending; are free thinkers
The only coppersmiths—the only tinkers?
Where are the clergy? Doth not reformation
Purely religious, need a Convocation?

Quoted in Peaston, *The Prayer Book Reform Movement*, 7.

⁴³Peaston claims that theological and practical comprehension were the primary motives for the publication of the document (*The Prayer Book Reform Movement*, 40–42). In fact, prior to the publication of *Free and Candid*, John Jones had advocated the public viewing of the withheld comprehensive liturgy of 1689 (Fawcett, *The Liturgy of Comprehension*, 46).

⁴⁴*Free and Candid Disquisitions*, 64–73, 133–39, 192, 234, 246–47, 313–15.

⁴⁵Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1878), 1:434–35.

⁴⁶*Journal*, August 15, 1750, *The Works of John Wesley*, 20: 357.

⁴⁷Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 135–36.

Free and Candid Disquisitions sparked the production of a wealth of strategies for revision,⁴⁸ among them a reclamation by Theophilus Lindsey of a 1724 Prayer Book revision by the Convocation-censured Unitarian Samuel Clarke. In turn, Lindsey's work of 1774, *The Book of Common Prayer Reformed According to the Plan of the Late Dr. Samuel Clarke*⁴⁹ (which went through many editions), prompted other revisions that often further articulated a Unitarian position.⁵⁰ Lindsey was son-in-law to Francis Blackburne, Archdeacon of Cleveland and promoter of the liberal (and failed) "Feathers Tavern Petition." Although Wesley did not specify that he had read Lindsey's liturgy, he was familiar with Lindsey through the Feathers Tavern Association.⁵¹ As in the case for Lindsey's revision, the 1784 *Sunday Service* omits the rite of confirmation.

VI

The Puritan agenda for reforming the rites of the *Book of Common Prayer* stood in stark contrast to the liturgical and theological opinions of the Prayer Book supporters during the 16th and early 17th centuries. By the late 17th century an attitude favorable to comprehension had arisen among some within the Church of England who did not simply concede Puritan concerns but agree on matters problematic or "indifferent" for the sake of the unity of the Church. While the 1689 liturgy marked the last "official" attempt at comprehension, additional efforts were made in the 18th century to solve the Anglican liturgical controversy, many of which were based in the 1689 proposal. What previously had been identified as the Dissenting agenda became, in a sense, part of the general matrix informing both "orthodox" and "heterodox" revision.

Comprehending and liberal revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer* alike addressed such matters as obsolete language, the terms employed to identify clergy, the use of the Athanasian Creed, references to the ring in marriage, and the language of "sure and certain hope of the resurrection" for all in the burial office. The original Dissenting agenda, possibly no longer specifically identified as such, had become generally acceptable concerns for those dissatisfied with the Prayer Book or with portions of it. The "prooftexting" of evidence from the 17th and 18th centuries in *Free and Candid Disquisitions* shows how widespread were some opinions held.

⁴⁸Peaston, *The Prayer Book Reform Movement*, 39–58.

⁴⁹*The Book of Common Prayer Reformed According to the Plan of the Late Dr. Samuel Clarke: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David*, 2d ed. (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1774).

⁵⁰Peaston, *The Prayer Book Reform Movement*, 59–96. Hatchett contends that Lindsey's liturgy was available to the men who revised the Prayer Book for American use in the Protestant Episcopal Church (*The Making of the First American Prayerbook*, 34–35).

⁵¹Letter of John Fletcher to John Wesley, August 1, 1775, *Journal* (Standard ed.), 8:331.

Wesley himself (see note 10 above) appeared surprised to find how close contemporary opinions were to those two generations before.

John Wesley approached the 1784 revision with an awareness of the multiplicity of 17th and 18th century schemes of revision and with sympathy for those who sought abolition of subscription to the Prayer Book.⁵² Whereas others had failed to produce a revision suitable for official adoption, it had been hoped by some, as early as 1775, that a Methodist revision using the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* as a foundation could qualify for serious consideration. John Fletcher proposed to Wesley:

What if with bold modesty you took a farther step towards the reformation of the Church of England? The admirers of the Confessional, and the gentlemen who have petitioned the Parliament from the Feathers' Tavern, cry aloud that our church stands in need of being reformed; but do not they want to corrupt her in some things, while they talk of reforming her in others? Now sir, God has given you that light, that influence, and that intrepidity which many of those gentlemen have not. You can reform, so far as your influence goes, without perverting; and, indeed, you have done it already. But have you done it professedly enough? Have you ever explicitly borne your testimony against all the defects of our Church? Might you not do this without departing from your professed attachment to her? Nay, might you not, by this means, do her the greatest of services? . . . I love the Church of England, I hope, as much as you do. But I do not love her so as to take her blemishes for ornaments. You know, sir, that she is almost totally deficient in discipline, and she publicly owns it herself every Ash Wednesday. What are her spiritual courts in general, but a catch-penny? As for her doctrine, although it is pure upon the whole, you know that some specks of Pelagian, Calvinian, and Popish dirt cleave to her articles, homilies, liturgy and rubricks. These specks could with care be taken off, and doing it in the circle of your influence might, sooner or later, provoke our superiors to godly jealousy and a complete reformation.⁵³

Such optimism was unrealistic given the widespread suspicion toward enthusiasm in general and Methodism in particular.

Wesley's alterations of the Prayer Book texts corresponded to a wide range of revisionary schemes that coalesced on particular matters. Many of the liturgical materials problematic for different revisers that have already been noted were removed from the worship book for the Methodists in North America. Gone are the Athanasian Creed, Psalms and parts of Psalms deemed "highly improper for the mouths of Christian Congregation," the sanctoral (cycle of saints' days) as "at present answering no valuable end," and readings from the Apocrypha save for one: two verses from Tobit (4:8-9) are used as one of the offertory sentences in the liturgy for the Lord's Supper.⁵⁴ The liturgical officiant is designated as "minister," "elder," or "deacon," and not "priest." Sung liturgical texts, private baptism, baptismal sponsors, priestly absolutions, the wedding ring,

⁵²Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 236-37.

⁵³Letter of John Fletcher to John Wesley, August 1, 1775, *Journal* (Standard ed.), 8:331-32.

⁵⁴Wesley makes only a few comments justifying and explaining his rationale for revision. See, for example, his preface to the *Sunday Service* dated September 9, 1784 (see above, note 1).

language of resurrection certainty in the burial rite — all of these are omitted. Absent too is the Nicene Creed from the communion rite since the Apostles' Creed would have already been recited in the preceding order for Morning Prayer. The language of the prayers is occasionally "modernized," as exemplified by the change in the Lord's Prayer from "which art in heaven" to "who art in heaven." The list could continue: Wesley's revision was characterized primarily by omission; only a few additions were made to the original Prayer Book text, such as the rubrics permitting *ex tempore* prayer. Surprisingly, none of Wesley's rubrics mention the singing of hymns. In some cases, Wesley's revision appears to be unique in its liturgical adjustments, such as the removal of the giving away of the bride from the marriage rite.

The tendency to isolate Puritan influences upon Wesley's revision has been quite strong. Some scholars, following Frederick Hunter, have concluded that Wesley had the Savoy "Exceptions" before him as recorded in Calamy's *Abridgment*, Chapter 10, while he worked through the Prayer Book.⁵⁵ Yet it is clear that the environment in which Wesley worked had already embraced many of those concerns as part of a general liturgical agenda, not necessarily identified with the Dissenting cause. Besides, as even a cursory examination of the texts within the *Sunday Service* will indicate, Wesley did not fully follow the liturgical proposals of the 17th century Puritans, nor did he incorporate into his revision all of the "Exceptions." However, Wesley did address many of the general concerns repeatedly articulated in the revisions which he acknowledged he had read. Parts of Wesley's revision may simply reflect the general tenor and trends extant in England in the late 18th century.

As with many of the revisions of his day, the *Book of Common Prayer* served as the foundation and source for Wesley's revision.⁵⁶ And like many of the revisers of his day, Wesley intended that his revision be used by persons who remained within the framework of the Church of England. That such was Wesley's original intent may be clear from the wording in the ordination certificate of Richard Whatcoat:

I do hereby recommend him to all whom it may concern, as a fit person to feed the flock of Christ, and to administer baptism and the Lord's supper, according to the usage of the Church of England.⁵⁷

Even so, Wesley's revision was an offense to many, including his brother Charles, who penned:

⁵⁵Frederick Hunter, "Sources of Wesley's Revision of the Prayer Book in 1784-8," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 23 (1941-1942): 124-33. The extreme nature of Hunter's hypothesis has been questioned by J. E. Rattenbury, F. Baker, A. R. George, and others.

⁵⁶Baker suggests that Wesley followed his normal method of abridgment — deleting or adding material to a copy of the Prayer Book (*John Wesley and the Church of England*, 242-43).

⁵⁷Quoted in P. P. Sandford, *Memoirs of Mr. Wesley's Missionaries to America* (New York: G. Lane and P. P. Sandford, 1843), 363.

Your Liturgy so well-prepar'd
To E[ngland]'s Church proves your regard,
Of churches national the best
By you, and all the world confest:
(Why shou'd we then bad counsel take
And for a worse the best forsake?)
You tell us, with her Book of prayer
No book is worthy to compare?
Why change it then for your Edition,
Deprav'd by many a bold omission?
We never will renounce our creed,
Because of Three but One you need,
No longer the Nicene approve,
The Athanasian Mound remove,
And out of your New book have thrown
God One in Three, & Three in One.⁵⁸

John Wesley's liturgical legacy, given to the American Methodists in 1784, survived intact for less than a decade before his version of the *Book of Common Prayer* itself became the object of revision. Over the course of the next two centuries, American Methodists modified their ritual inheritance by deletion, restoration, or expansion in response to the theological and liturgical agendas that confronted them—as had Wesley. Wesley's liturgical text retains a strong presence in the rites of the smaller Methodist bodies in North America. But it must be admitted that, among most Methodists, Wesley's text—even revised—has lost its privileged place.

⁵⁸S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds., *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Kingswood, 1992), 97.