

Background of Early Liturgy and Worship

Consider that when the diocese was formed, in 1970, we were using the 1928 Prayer Book. And so, our theology was more conservative, in the sense of using the language of sin and judgement – and hell more prominently.

The language in the 1928 Prayer Book is derived from English spoken in the 16th and 17th centuries. But much of the form is from much earlier.

The first Christians had no explicitly liturgical books. Apparently they continued the ritual pattern of Judaism, but interpreted and remodeled it in accordance with the Christian gospel.

Once the church moved further from its Jewish roots and sought to adapt itself to the languages, culture, and thought of the Gentile world, there developed a type of book, the church order, which contained descriptions of various liturgies, models for prayers, and directions for the conduct of rites. The most important of these orders still extant are: the *Didache*, and Eastern document probably dating from the second century; the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, usually considered a Roman document (c. 215 CE); the *Didascalia*, a third century Syrian document; and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a Syrian document of the late fourth century which used the three earlier church orders as sources.

Early in the fourth century, Christianity was officially recognized by the Roman State and ensuing monastic movement and theological controversies led to the elaboration of the liturgy, more theological definition within the rites, strict regulation of the functions of various orders or ministers, and the establishment of fixed, written texts.

The 16th century Reformation, and the invention of the printing press, led to many new liturgical texts in Europe and England. Following King Henry VIII's break with the papacy, the *Book of Common Prayer* was introduced in England. The Act of Uniformity required its use beginning on Whitsunday, June 9, 1549.

Following the American Revolution, in 1789, the American *Book of Common Prayer* was adopted. It was revised in 1892 and again in 1928 and in 1979.

In the early church, active participation of all those present was assumed, with the Bishop, or Elder, or Presbyter (Priest) leading the assembly. In later centuries and into the Middle Ages, participation by the laity diminished. It was revived after the Reformation and in our current liturgical forms lay participation is assumed and encouraged.

Before the adoption of the 1979 Prayer Book, Morning Prayer was the normative Sunday morning service, with Eucharist being held approximately once each month. This was generally true throughout the Episcopal Church.

Most of the above adapted from Marion J. Hatchett, Commentary on the American Prayer Book (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

