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Main content

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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.

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

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Introduction. For non-members of the Catholic Church. On revisions. General Rules for Invocations and Responses. On the Index. Divine Offices for Mary's Little Remnant. Instructions. Prayers after the Divine Office. MLR Ending Prayers. Beginning and Ending Prayers for the Offices. Prime. Beginning. Prayer to God the Holy Spirit. Offering of All Catholic Masses in the World. [Prayers before Holy Communion]. Prayer before Receiving Holy Communion. The process of Prayer Book revision led to publication of editions of the BCP for the Episcopal Church in 1789, 1892, 1928, and 1979. Did you catch the mention of Scotland in there? See, the first Anglican bishop in the USA, Samuel Seabury, was consecrated in 1784 by Scottish bishops because the Church of England required its bishops to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown. So, there's a good reason for Anglicans to care deeply about changes to the Prayer Book(s). Revisions will shape the theology of subsequent generations! For a conservative take on the matter, check out this video (again by the Anglican Foundation). We're not giving a 100% endorsement to the Anglican Foundation here, by the way. John Wesley revised the Book of Common Prayer for the use of Methodists in America in four editions beginning in 1784. One frontier preacher's response may stand as typical of the neglect the book experienced-'Our preachers prefer to pray with their eyes closed.' Remaining little more than a historical curiosity until the mid-twentieth century, the Sunday Service underwent a renewal of interest as American Methodists participated in the liturgical renewal movement. Wesley's abridgment had a more significant role in British Methodism where it formed the basis of Methodist wo