

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER: ITS MAKING AND LANGUAGE

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Any reformation is a quest for better things. But the Reformation is the specific movement for reform that took place in the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century, gave birth to the Protestantism and resulted in the establishment of the Reformed or Protestant Churches. *The Book of Common Prayer* cannot properly be understood unless it is studied within the whole context of the Reformation, as it is a product of the circumstances peculiar to the English Reformation. It is the Book of the English Liturgy. In its origin it was rather treated as an instrument of ecclesiastical policy, whether by the government or by the episcopate; but, in virtue of its enormous merits, after so many years of being in use, it is securely lodged in the affection of the English speaking peoples.

For centuries, and more notoriously in the late Middle Ages, from which the 16th century reformers emerged, the church, particularly in the office of the papacy and its surroundings, had been deeply involved in politics and less worried about God's kingdom than about the kingdom of money. Inasmuch as money is said to be the root of all evil, the church's increasing power and wealth contributed to the bankruptcy of its spiritual force and message of salvation. Everything in the church, said the critics, was sold for money: indulgencies, pardons, masses, candles, ceremonies, curacies, benefices, bishoprics, the papacy itself. Too many scandals, too many inconveniencies, too many injustices, too much ignorance (Chadwick, 1986).

Everywhere there appeared to be not only a need of reform but a cry for reformation. In the course of history there have always been some dominating figures emerging now and then to take the lead on the way to new times. What they pursue may well be the same end, but the different aspects of reality are interpreted successively and complementary so that what the one does can only be properly understood in the light of what the other has done or is about to do. Erasmus of Rotterdam, a great humanist scholar, was one of the first proponents of Catholic Reform. He wrote the *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, still in Latin, where he explained the lines of a new theology, which should be simpler and more Biblical than that of the Scholasticism. He also published an edition of the

Greek New Testament and a fresh Latin translation of it. Being such a competent humanist, he was somehow compelled to deal with the classical languages, and he did so in order to lay the appropriate bases for future translations into vernaculars. Indeed, Erasmus wanted everyone to have direct access to the Bible and, therefore, to be able to read it in the vernacular. All the rest, all those superstitions, devotions, cults of statues, credulities, indulgencies... he termed as ridiculous. There was a celebrated saying in the 16th century: "Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it" (Chadwick 39). If not the same egg, another was certainly hatched by Henry VIII.

Luther wanted to go to the theological root of the problem, that is, the perversion of the church's doctrine of redemption and grace, "sola scriptura, sola fide", not that complex system of indulgencies and good works. While in England the origin of Reformation was not a theological doctrine, but a domestic affair, and then a question of discipline and politics. Henry VIII established the Anglican Church as a consequence of Pope's refusal to grant him the divorce. He proclaimed himself as the Supreme Head of the Church, and was concerned with the organizing of the new church detached from Rome (Olivera). Together with the translation of the Bible into English, one thing was essential: the preparation of a liturgy in English, which gave birth to *The Booke of Common Prayer and administracion of Sacramentes, and other Rites and Ceremonies after the Use of the Church of England*.

Thomas Cranmer had been in favour of king's divorce, and was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He was the favourite ecclesiastic in the cause of the reform of worship. He became acquainted with the liturgical reform in several Lutheran centres in Germany, which determined his mind for vernacular services. There were also many others who wanted English to replace Latin as the language of the liturgy, because "the divine service was ordained to be said in the church for the edifying of the people, that they, hearing the words of the Gospel and the examples of the holy saints, might be stirred and moved to follow their steps" (Starkey 129).

The work of compiling the First Prayer Book, 1549, is attributed by the *Act of Uniformity* to "the Archbishop of Canterbury and certain of the most learned and discreet bishops and other learned men of the realm" (Ratcliff 13). Prior to the *Act of Uniformity* a considerable number of books was required for the performance of liturgical services, but now all the prayers, ceremonies and sacraments were gathered in the Book, ranging from The Order of the Morning Prayer, through The Order of the Holy Communion, or The Catechism, to Forms and Prayer on Accession of Sovereign. The Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are

held to be the most important in the Anglican Communion. Dealing with every section of *The Prayer Book* would exceed the limits of any article or chapter of a book. As I think that one of the centres of interest, from a theological as well as philological point of view, lay and still lies in the Eucharist or Holy Communion, that is the section I have chosen as a reference in this paper.

The traditional doctrine about transubstantiation, as explained by St Thomas Aquinas, distinguished between the substance and the accidents. The mystery of the Eucharist lies in the change of the substance of the bread into the substance of the Body of Christ, while the accidents, namely, the colour and taste and shape, remain those of bread. Many philosophers, nominalist theologians and reformers, among whom several Oxford and Cambridge scholars, thought this doctrine irrational, because they could only conceive a change of substance to mean a change of accidents at the same time. They might believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation as a question of faith only, for in such mysteries the reason is helpless. Faith and reason are lodged upon different planes. It is wastepaper to seek a concord between them (Chadwick).

As it is known, the guiding principle in Luther's doctrine is justification by faith, which implies a shift from metaphysical reason and external acts of religion to mind and heart. As far as the Eucharist, Lutheran teaching is that transubstantiation is not warranted by Scripture, which only demands a belief in the Real Presence so that the bread and wine are the Body and Blood of the Lord, but no further definitions of the mystery are given. Probably, the Real Presence could be preserved by means of substituting one preposition for another, so that instead of saying that the divine gift is *under* or *in* the accidents of bread and wine, we might say that it is *with* them, which does not imply a change of substance. The new word then would be *consubstantiation*, that is, the two substances together, one of them apparent to the senses and the other to be known by faith only.

Before the publication of the first Prayer Book, 1549, Cranmer, who was one of the authors of The Order of the Communion, had abandoned the Catholic belief that the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. Nevertheless, the traditional words in the Prayer of Consecration are kept: "This is my Body which is given for you", "This is my Blood which is shed for you". And so is the sentence at the receiving of the Holy Communion: "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul into everlasting life" (the same for the Blood). The second sentence of the formula, which adds a step forward, was introduced at the time of the second version of the Book, as we shall see. All that means, first, that

different ways of interpreting or explaining the Real Presence are available without changing the words, and, second, that the whole work is an English supplement to the Catholic Mass in order to fulfil what was required about the administering of the Holy Communion to the people "under both kinds, that is to say, of bread and wine" (Brook 23).

From the day of its publication, the 1549 Book did not please any sides: the conservatives thought it was too radical and the reformers too conservative. In other words, "the mixture of retention of the old and introduction of the new in the first Book of Common Prayer brought down upon it the censure of both convinced Romanists and convinced Reformers" (Brook 28). Therefore, before it came into general use, the Book was destined for amendment. The final words of the Rubric placed before the second Exhortation hint by themselves at further changes to come: "vntill other order shalbe prouided". A strong impulse on the same direction was given by the Eucharistic doctrine taught by the Swiss Reformers, to whom Cranmer was sympathetic. Zwingli considered the Sacraments as symbols or signs of the Covenant between God and man. The Lord's Supper, in particular, is a memorial of the Lord's death for man's salvation and a thanksgiving for it. The doctrine of the Real Presence is not sanctioned in the Bible. A spiritual gift, as it is the grace of salvation, cannot be received physically but only by faith. When he was told that in the text of the Bible Jesus said "This is my Body", he replied that it was the metaphorical way of speaking Jesus had, much in the same way as when he said "I am the door" it does not follow that he was a real door; that is, these statements cannot be understood literally. "This is my Body" means "This is a sign of my Body", i.e., to remind you of Christ's presence by faith (Chadwick).

The second Book of Common Prayer was issued in 1552. According to the new interpretation of the Real Presence by some of the influential continental Reformers, who had come over to England as refugees, the most important changes from a doctrinal point of view, were made in The Holy Communion. Everything was rearranged so that the likeness to the Roman Mass was diminished, but, above all, a new sentence was introduced at the receiving of the Holy Communion so as to declare that the Eucharist was a memorial of Christ's sacrifice and that it was a spiritual gift received by faith: "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving". So serious the matter was that a discussion arose about kneeling to receive the Sacrament. Eventually, a compromise was reached by inserting the so-called Black Rubric: "in requiring communicants to kneel it is not meant thereby that any adoration is done, or ought to be done unto any real and essential presence there being of Christ's natural flesh and blood" (Chadwick 122).

The second Prayer Book was abolished before a year of use. In 1553 Edward VI died, and his Roman Catholic half-sister Mary succeeded to the throne. Consequently, *The Book of Common Prayer* was prohibited and the previous service books returned with the restoration of the Catholic worship.

Soon after the accession of Queen Elizabeth in 1558, procedures began to restore the 1552 Prayer Book, which was done by the *Act of Uniformity* of April, 1559. There were a few changes made, among which it is worth remarking the following: 1) The removal from the Litany of the petition for deliverance "from the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome, and all his detestable enormities". 2) The suppression of the Black Rubric to justify the practice of kneeling, as explained above. 3) The prefixing of the sentence of 1549 Book at receiving the Holy Communion to that of 1552, as we have them today making up the whole formula. All that was not useless, for it meant not as bitter a separation from Rome as it had been, on one hand, and, on the other, a door open towards the acceptance and adoration of the Real Presence.

With the accession of James I in 1603 the Puritans hoped for a revision of the Prayer Book so as to replace the Anglican with the Genevan system, but, even if a few alterations were introduced, nothing significant was changed. There was the so-called Cromwellian interregnum during which *The Book of Common Prayer* was prohibited, but its use was restored when the monarchy was re-established. Charles II made it revised in 1661 and published in 1662. A few distinguishing features of this version, as compared to the previous ones, are the inclusion of the Psalter, the substitution of the text of the *Authorised Version* for the text of the *Great Bible*, and some corrections of language for "the more proper expressing of some words or phrases of ancient usage" (Brook 34). For Anglican Englishmen the 1662 Prayer Book remains, by habit as well as by law, the normal vehicle of public worship.

The language of *The Book of Common Prayer* belongs to the period known in the development of English as *Early Modern English*, as it does the language of the *King James Bible* or *Authorised Version*, to which it is closely related (Strang). The study of its language can be dealt with from different points of view. For the time being, it is my purpose to limit myself to remarking a few lexicological features, especially those connected to the characteristics of the Renaissance movement.

The revival of the classical learning had a notorious influence on the shaping of English vocabulary. At the time of the Norman Conquest there was a flood of French loan words making their way into English, so that most of the words said to be of French origin come from the French speaking ruling classes

and French culture in England after the Conquest. Eventually, as French is a Romance language, that is, a language that has developed out of the spoken Latin of the late Roman Empire, all those words coming into English from French can be said to be of Latin origin. However, the Renaissance period is remarkable for the quantity of its direct borrowings from Latin. Classical literature became a fruitful source of information and inspiration. No wonder that hundreds of words should be adopted together with the ideas they stood for and should seem indispensable means of enriching a language which appeared rather poor as compared to the richness of Latin and Greek. The most numerous words are Latin; other words from Greek entered into English through Latin or were latinized, and quite a number of French words were remodelled into closer resemblance with their Latin originals (Jespersen, 1985). At other stages in the course of history there had already been other influences of Latin on English, namely, when the Angles, Saxons and Jutes were in contact with the Roman Empire on the Continent before going to England; when England itself was invaded by the Romans under the Emperors Julius Caesar and Claudius; and when the Christianity was preached and introduced into England by the end of 6th century (Strang).

Considering that French words are ultimately Latin in origin, and that it is ever so difficult to determine the time when a particular word was incorporated into English, it is safer to use the term Latin origin to cover both French and all the periods of direct Latin influence, unless it happens to be a special reason to distinguish between them. The thing is that, by the 16th century, English language shows a vocabulary in which the dominant place is held by words of Latin origin, at least as far as full words are concerned from a semantic point of view.

The Book of Common Prayer was produced in the heart of the Renaissance period, and, on top of that, the language of worship has always been a learned language. No wonder, then, the words of Latin origin have special frequency and significance in it. Sometimes words of Latin origin are chosen instead of native words, and they appear redundantly, two or three or even more, with no apparent addition of meaning; other times words of both origins appear side by side, frequently in pairs, with approximately the same meaning. It could be questioned whether synonyms exist or not. Firth said that a word when used in a new context is a new word; but he said nothing about two or more words, closely related to one another, and in the same context. All that can easily be proved by going through the Prayer Book; if we peruse, for example, not even the whole rite of Communion, but the three Exhortations and the Prayer of Consecration only, we find the following cases:

Religiously and devoutly disposed
 Food and sustenance in that holy Sacrament
 Search and examine your own consciences
 Holy and clean to such a heavenly Feast
 The way and means thereto
 To make restitution and satisfaction
 Injuries and wrongs done by you to one another
 Scruple and doubtfulness
 Called and bidden by God
 Grievous and unkind thing
 Injury and wrong done unto him
 Accepted and allowed before God
 wherefore then do ye not repent and amend?
 To try and examine themselves
 Lively and stedfast faith
 Humble and hearty thanks to God
 Darkness and shadow of death
 Instituted and ordained holy mysteries
 True holiness and righteousness
 A full, perfect, and sufficient
 sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction.

The least that can be said is that such striking organization of the vocabulary cannot be considered a random result, but it must obey the authors' purposes, apart from reflecting the hospitality of the Renaissance period to Latin origin words. There can be several reasons for that, among which I thought it worthy pointing out the following:

1. The authors intended to produce a learned language, and Latin was the most learned of all. But such words were mainly familiar to the upper classes, and, on the other hand, the Book was meant to be understood by ordinary people; that is why, in contrast to the Roman Church, they had changed from Latin to English, and the effect should not be, by any means, writing Latin in English. The solution to make both ends meet was writing side by side native words and words of Latin origin, whenever possible, even if nothing substantial was added to the meaning, but thus the high prestige of worship language was preserved to the contentedness of learned people or upper classes, and the ordinary people or lower classes would be able to understand.
2. Religious language is, by its own nature, a language of persuasion, which is very much favoured by conveying the same idea as many times as it is suitable, the more the better, provided that neither nuisance nor fatigue are caused.

3. Repetition is the golden rule of memory, that is, the way of helping it to keep the contents taught. The association of words gives further strength, as two or more associated words expressing the same idea in the same context are a better guarantee for a given idea to be rooted deeper and remain longer in mind, and so lead our behaviour more permanently.

After so many years in existence, the new words, or words of Latin origin, cannot be said to be new any more; they are fully incorporated into the English vocabulary and may well be supposed to be known by all English speakers. But, even so, they do continue to present a considerable degree of difficulty to the modern reader, which, in my view, may be said to be of two types:

1. If not all, many of those words have never, and, most probably, will never be understood by anybody that has not got a classical education, because, most commonly, there are not associations of ideas between them and the ordinary stock of words used in conversation; there is not, either, any likeness in root or in the formative elements to assist the understanding. Curiously enough, this assessment should mainly be applied to native speakers, as they are much more familiar with words of Anglo-Saxon origin as used in their ordinary conversation; while words of Latin origin seem more familiar in their form to Romance languages speakers, although the ideas or the message transmitted may be as strange to the latter as to the former, and, therefore, a classical education may be needed in any case. Consequently, it might be right to conclude that the large number of learned words used in a given language is apt to form or to accentuate social class divisions rather than to send messages to everybody, so that a man's culture is largely judged by the extent to which he is able to handle correctly those hard words in speech and in writing (Jespersen).
2. The second type of difficulty is more concrete and specific, and lies in the fact that words of Latin origin in *The Book of Common Prayer* bear a meaning which is different from the one we have come to attach to them in present day English. Sixteenth century Englishmen were more aware of the Latin sources where the new words came from, and such words, being then new, had not yet been changed with use. Therefore, in the *Book of Common Prayer* Latin words frequently carry the basic etymological meaning of their originals, whereas in present day English the etymological meaning either has become obscured, or has been lost, or it is not known any more. This does not necessarily mean that the present meaning did not exist at the time of Prayer Book publication, because such meaning may have existed side by side with the

etymological meaning and been used in other contexts outside the Prayer Book. Which is illustrated by the following significant examples:

We find the verb *prevent* in the Collect for the 17th Sunday after Trinity: "Lord, we pray thee that thy grace may always *prevent* and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works"; or in the Collect for Easter day: "Almighty God... we humbly beseech thee that, as by the special grace *preventing* us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect. In these, and other instances alike, *prevent* carries the etymological meaning, i.e., go before so that other works may come to good effect Which is specifically applied to the doctrine of grace: the *preventing grace*, as the theologians call it, goes before to move human hearts, or inspire good desires, so that good works may follow and, for that, the *helping grace* is needed as well; that is why we pray for it to follow us too. It is clear that the present meaning of *prevent* is misleading in the sense that we would be unable to understand either the word itself or the whole literary context, or even the whole doctrine of grace as explained by the theologians of all ages. For, in the present meaning of *prevent*, something goes before to hinder the following action from happening.

The etymological meaning of *invention* is to discover, to come upon; it is about something that exists, is hidden, but is found. This sense is preserved in the Calendar of *The Book of Common Prayer* in the feast of the Invention of the Cross, May 3rd, with the reference to the finding of the True Cross by St Helen. The present meaning is displaced from the etymological one in the sense that it does not imply the previous existence of something, but, on the contrary, it is the discovery of something new, a form of creation, or how to make or devise something new. In this way, it is known the saying "necessity is the mother of invention". Also, in present English, *invention* is used as opposed to something that is true, such as in "newspapers are full of inventions", which implies as well a displacement from the etymological meaning.

Many other examples would lead us to complete the subject of another essay.

Such essential work in the history of English literature and of English people as *The Book of Common Prayer* is still used by those who go to Church for public services, or stay at home and say prayers in private. The different stages in its making are but a sign of its significance in the origin and development of the Anglican Church; and its language reflects the culture of the Renaissance period and is an incentive to keep working for further insights into cultural and linguistic studies.

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**MASKS AND CHARACTERS IN
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
AND LOS INTERESES CREADOS**

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The many allusions to Shakespeare and some similarities between *Los intereses creados* and *The Merchant of Venice*, such as the garden and law scenes, led me to explore in *Los intereses creados* a possible deep indebtedness to *The Merchant of Venice*. The two plays share themes and formal elements.

In a sense, Benavente's adaptation of the *commedia dell'arte* masks for his characters in *Los intereses creados* reveals the latent *commedia dell'arte* figures beneath Shakespeare's characters. *The Merchant of Venice*, in turn, may be read as a play about concealed "bonds of interest" among "masked" characters. I propose that Benavente recognized this undercurrent of *The Merchant of Venice* and set about writing a kind of picaresque version of Shakespeare's play, a version in which idealism proves so strong that it can redeem even the less noble characters Benavente portrays.

In *Los intereses creados*, Benavente brings to the foreground the mercantile principles ruling society in *The Merchant of Venice* and emphasizes how they can corrupt society as well as its leaders. The question is: how can society be redeemed? In both *Los intereses creados* and *The Merchant of Venice*, love and the Christian ideal are claimed to be enough to save society from such corruption, despite Benavente's obvious skepticism. *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, sequel to *Los intereses creados* first staged nine years later, completes Benavente's response to this view, intimated in his previous scepticism: society can only be redeemed by love for one's country.

As announced in the prologue to *Los intereses creados*, the staging of the play follows the tradition of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* with its "immutable masks", and the conception of the "traditional puppet shows whose characters are worked by coarse threads" not even hidden from the audience, as Walter Starkie notes¹. Crispín describes the play the audience is about to see as

¹ Walter Starkie, *Jacinto Benavente* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 151.