

## Colonial America – A new country and a new Prayer Book

*“Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”* (A Collect for Guidance, BCP, p. 100)

The colonial years (1730-1770) – The Great Awakening and its impact on church life

- A broad movement that hoped to transform the established religious focus from reserved worship services and rational theological teaching to a new understanding of personal piety that incorporated emotional investment and renewed enthusiasm from each congregant
  - “It was not enough to understand intellectually the basic Reformation doctrine of justification by faith; one had to “feel” that doctrine on a personal level.” (*A History of the Episcopal Church*, Prichard, p. 47)
- Although the colonial Anglican Church was slow to incorporate many aspects of the Great Awakening, the new understandings of religious life were eventually incorporated to some degree, with some important results:
  - Personal religious experiences became a significant aspect of one’s life due to the Awakening’s emphasis on personal conversion
  - Preaching became a central part of community worship
  - Ministry opportunities for women and black Americans improved
  - Small gatherings were important – creating greater access for all people and facilitating improved religious education, understanding and participation (*A History of the Episcopal Church*, Prichard, p. 59-65)

A new Prayer Book

- Finding common ground for the Book of Common Prayer
  - The southern and middle states vs. the New England states
    - New England favored minor changes, hoping to remain close to the English Prayer Book and differentiate themselves from the Congregational majority
    - Outside of New England, there was a strong desire to adopt the prevailing sentiment of evangelical Protestantism and strong representation of the laity
  - The Proposed Prayer Book of 1786
    - Based on the English Prayer Book, but eliminated:
      - References to the King and Parliament; the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds; clergy were not called “Priests;” and the Baptismal service did not require the sign of the cross and did not mention “regeneration” (“The Colonies and States of America,” Hatchett, p. 177)
    - The 1786 Prayer Book was rejected as too extreme in its changes
  - The 1789 Prayer Book
    - Accepted upon the restoration of many of the controversial changes of 1786
    - Athanasian Creed still omitted, but much else restored
    - Ultimately, the approved Prayer Book was a compromise of the New England “Anglicans” and the southern and middle states “evangelical Protestants.”

- The Prayer Book in the life of the church
  - The compromise reflected the characteristics of the new country
    - Consistent with the greater role of laity and the needs of the country (forms of worship, especially Morning and Evening Prayer) and recognition that the Great Awakening had left a lasting impact
  - Revisions emphasized the piety of the new church: seeking to capture its connection with tradition (through the English and Scottish churches) and its desire to incorporate a personal and simple piety forged from the uniquely American religious experience

Lex Orandi – Lex Credendi: “The law of praying is the law of believing”

- “Anglicanism came to see Christian faith from the perspective of fairly small communities whose life was gathered up, celebrated, and formed through common worship. The circumstances of England and the English Reformation made this possible”  
(*The Christian Moral Life*, Sedgwick, p. 29)
  - Anglicanism was formed in the English Reformation, but the Anglicanism practiced in the Colonies was a product of its English beginnings as well as life in America
  - The Prayer Book was a reflection of the practicing beliefs of the people in the US and their beliefs would continued to be shaped, informed and strengthened by its use.
- “Prayer was not separate from daily life but the celebration and offering of all of life in God. In turn, study was not academic but meditative. Specifically, the study of scripture was a matter of standing before scripture in order to listen and experience how God has been present in the changing times of life, in the whole cycle of events from birth to death, in joy and in sorrow. Work as well was a form of prayer and study. Whether in the work of the garden or in managing community matters, work was life in God, without which prayer and study were together like a soul without a body, form without content.” (Sedgwick, p. 30)
  - In the quote above Sedgwick speaks of the Anglican understanding of the Christian moral life, but his description is particularly appropriate to our understanding of the life of worship in the nascent Episcopal Church in the United States.
  - The church was the center of the community and the corporate prayer life of the community served as the source and strength of the individual.
  - As outlined below, the theology of “Lex Orandi – Lex Credendi” was not simply an “accident” or an outcome of negotiated compromises for the new American Prayer Book, but a theology with deeply held Anglican roots.

Praying and believing in early America: an Episcopal understanding of sacramental life

- “As a matter of practical piety, Christian convictions are expressed in Anglicanism more in terms of relationships than as matters of belief...” – what one believes is certainly important, but being in communion with one’s brothers and sisters in Christ is what shapes and nurtures one’s beliefs and is the expression of participation in the Body of Christ.
- Three important expressions of Christian faith as understood in Anglicanism:
  - Faith is incarnational: “God, the meaning and power that is the source of life is given in this world but is not reducible to the material world.”
  - Faith, as expressed in its covenantal character, is corporate: “The relationship or bond that gives wholeness to life brings the individual into relationship with all of life.”

- Faith, as expressed in its piety, is sacramental: “Incarnate, the covenant with God is revealed and deepened through what are variously called signs, symbols, and sacraments...For example, a kiss or an embrace points to love and shares in the deepening creation of that love. A kiss signifies love and, in turn, creates as it deepens that love....As sacrament, the authority of Word and sacrament is not in revealing or stating right belief but in drawing the Christian more deeply into relationship with God.” (Sedgwick, p. 27-28)
- “Practical piety as a way of life is what is meant by discipleship.” (Sedgwick, p. 29)
- The members of the new Episcopal Church in the United States understood their lives in the manner described above and their corporate worship and lifestyle reflected this truth.

For our Lenten journeys:

- Reflect on the shape and substance of your common worship experience and make an effort to incorporate into your daily life the practical piety that is revealed in understanding Christian faith as incarnational, corporate, and sacramental.

Information obtained from the following sources:

*The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety*, by Timothy F. Sedgwick. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).  
ISBN: 978-0802-846471

“The Colonies and States of America,” by Marion J. Hatchett, pp. 176-185 of *The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, edited by Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).  
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*A History of the Episcopal Church*, revised edition, by Robert Prichard. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999)  
ISBN: 978-0819-218285

*The Story of Christianity, Vol. 2: The Reformation to the Present Day*, by Justo L. González. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985).  
ISBN: 978-0060-633165