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Introduction

For just over 100 years the Alcuin Club has been involved in providing scholarly and educational material to serve the Church of England on each occasion it has found itself in the throes of liturgical revision. From the first, its publications had been preparing the ground for an informed examination of the Church's services. In the 1920s the Club produced a series of Prayer Book Revision Pamphlets; these critically surveyed the alternatives being put forward which resulted in the abortive 1927/28 proposals. After the 1939–45 War the Club's authors included many of the scholars who were to be intimately involved in the revision process which resulted in *The Alternative Service Book* in 1980 (R. C. D. Jasper, G. J. Cuming, E. C. Whitaker, Colin Buchanan, Michael Perham, P. F. Bradshaw, Colin Dunlop, Donald Gray) as well as others whose researches informed the nature of that book. Realizing that the *ASB* could never be the final word, the Alcuin Club produced two collections of essays in preparation for its revision: *Towards Liturgy 2000* (1989) and *Liturgy for a New Century* (1991). Many of the contributors to those collections have been involved in preparing *Common Worship*.

The present volume follows, then, in an established tradition, but with a difference. Instead of only involving the expertise of the current revisers, it also draws on the talents of the next generation of liturgical scholars. Geoffrey Cuming was the inspirer and motivator of many who have been involved in liturgical work in the past 25 years. At his death a memorial fund was set up, administered by the Alcuin Club, for which he had been both an author and editorial secretary. In recent years this fund has supported the Alcuin Club's younger scholars seminar. It is mostly the members of this group, imaginatively led by Professor Paul Bradshaw, who have worked collaboratively on this project, sharing their drafts and receiving helpful criticism from one another. They have also benefited from the unfailing willingness of David Hebblethwaite, Secretary of the Church of England Liturgical Commission and Alcuin Committee member, to answer queries and verify matters of detail, and also from the help given by Brother Tristram, SSF. To both of these the group would like to express their deep gratitude.

This two-volume work is intended as the successor to *A Companion to the Alternative Service Book* by Ronald Jasper and Paul Bradshaw (SPCK, London,

1985), and indeed Paul Bradshaw has very kindly permitted the historical material which he wrote for that commentary to be used by the contributors to this work and incorporated either more or less verbatim or in a condensed form into many of the chapters. However, it was not felt necessary for everything which was included in that earlier book to have its equivalent here, and parts of it can therefore still be consulted with profit. Yet while some things have been omitted, a number of new elements have also been introduced. This first volume deals chiefly, though not exclusively, with the contents of the main volume of *Common Worship*; and the second volume covers the other liturgical material that forms part of the *Common Worship* 'family'. But, just as in the *Companion to the Alternative Service Book*, because of limitations of space many important aspects relating to worship – among them questions of architecture, the use of symbolism and music – will not be treated here. It is the Alcuin Club's hope that many of them will receive the attention they rightly deserve in new additions to our series of Manuals.

We trust that this latest offering of the Alcuin Club will serve to inform and enhance the common worship of the Church and consequently give glory to God.

DONALD GRAY

Chapter 1

Services and Service Books

The Jewish Background

Jewish worship in New Testament times was still officially centred around the sacrificial cult of the Temple at Jerusalem, as it had been for centuries. There offerings were made for the nation every day, morning and evening, and additional sacrifices were offered on Sabbaths and festivals. For the majority of people, however, such worship was rather distant, and did not really impinge on them, except at the annual festivals when they might go up in pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or at other important points in their lives. For most Jews, therefore, worship centred around the home and the synagogue. In the home, prayers would be said at regular times during the day and at meals, and special ceremonies were associated with the Sabbath and other festal occasions. The precise origins of the synagogue are uncertain, but it probably came into existence during or after the exile in Babylon in the sixth century BC, and it provided a place first for the study and proclamation of the Law (and eventually of the prophetic writings too), and later, but perhaps not until after the destruction of the Temple, also for regular acts of corporate worship.

In the New Testament period Jewish worship was still fluid in its nature: the broad outlines of its rituals and practices were established, but there were no written forms or service books, and different communities followed their own inherited traditions, often with quite significant liturgical variations from one another. Moreover, even within these conventions individuals were generally still free to vary the wording of prayers and the details of ceremonial observances. Only in later centuries did a measure of uniformity emerge. There was therefore nothing particularly heretical or remarkable in groups of early Jewish Christians forming themselves into a distinct liturgical assembly or synagogue of their own, with their own distinctive pattern of worship. Other Jewish groups had already done something similar, most notably the Essenes, who regarded the worship of the Temple as corrupt and had withdrawn from all association with it, evolving instead their own system of worship and waiting for the coming of the Messiah. A large number of them lived a communal life at Qumran, and were responsible for the composition of the writings known to us as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The New Testament

Since both Jesus and the first Christian converts were themselves Jews, it is hardly surprising that one of the main influences on the shape of early Christian worship was the worship of Judaism, especially as the Christian faith was viewed by its adherents not as an alternative to the Jewish religion but as its proper fulfilment. We have no liturgical texts from this earliest period of Christian worship, not merely because none have survived, but because the Christians apparently adhered to the Jewish custom of not writing down their prayers but transmitting them orally. We have to rely for our information, therefore, on our knowledge of Jewish practice of the time, which is itself limited, and on the brief references and allusions to worship in the New Testament. The result is that, although by this means we can learn something of what early Christian worship was like, we cannot reconstruct it as fully as we would like to be able to do. What does emerge from the New Testament, however, is the strongly eschatological character of primitive Christianity: it was a movement which expected the imminent return of Christ and the fulfilment of the kingdom of God, and hence its worship and ritual practices were all powerfully shaped by this fact. This is shown, for example, by the nature of the Lord's Prayer itself ('your kingdom come, your will be done').

The Second and Third Centuries

In this period information about Christian liturgical practice is a little more plentiful. There are descriptions and allusions in a number of Christian writings, notably those of Justin Martyr at Rome around AD 165, and Tertullian and Cyprian in North Africa in the third century. Even so, there are many details about which we lack certainty. The general impression which emerges, however, is that Christian worship did not develop as a single organized whole, but, as in Judaism, with a number of variant traditions in different geographical areas, and with considerable liberty of improvization and adaptation being exercised. Earlier generations of scholars tended to search for an archetypal 'apostolic liturgy', believing that, behind the accretions of later centuries, there was a common nucleus which could be traced back to New Testament times. More recently scholars have recognized the existence of greater diversity in the practice of the early centuries, and have suggested that what was common was an archetypal shape or structure of the rites. Yet it is now emerging that even this cannot be accepted without some qualification: more variations in structure between different communities are beginning to be detected from the evidence, suggesting much more pluriformity in development from New Testament times.