

**SOME PRINCIPLES OF  
LITURGICAL REFORM: A  
CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE  
REVISION OF THE BOOK OF  
COMMON PRAYER**

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Some Principles of Liturgical Reform: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Book of  
Common Prayer by W. H. Frere

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# SOME PRINCIPLES OF LITURGICAL REFORM

A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS  
THE REVISION OF THE BOOK OF  
COMMON PRAYER

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## PREFACE

THE suggestions which are contained in this book deal for the most part with broad liturgical principles and with the general procedure of Prayer Book Revision, rather than with details. In their present form they are the outcome of several sets of recent lectures on the subject given to different audiences; but in a sense a longer history lies behind them. Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since, as a theological student, I became convinced that the problem of Prayer Book Revision was one that must before long occupy the attention of the Church. The subject fascinated me, and liturgical study became an occupation which I have tried to pursue, however intermittently, ever since.

The moment now seems to have come, in the course of a definite movement towards revision, when the private person may venture forward and offer very tentatively to the authorities such

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suggestions as he best can, arising out of his own liturgical studies and his practical experience of the needs. Such suggestions are necessarily very tentative. It is for the authorities to weigh them, if they judge that there is anything in them that is worth their attention; and to verify the statements of fact or of opinion; as it is for them to decide, whether or no any of them is to be adopted as an official proposition of the Church, and so be submitted to the consideration of the Church as a whole.

Let not the reader then expect to find here either a finished treatise or a single orderly consistent plan of revision. No one is more conscious than the writer how rough in themselves, and how roughly stated, the suggestions are; and he has in places deliberately made alternative proposals in preference to urging a single view. Deliberately too the field is narrowed down as far as possible, so as to include only the large issues which are of general interest, and to exclude minor reforms, verbal amendments, questions of translation or of readjustment, and the like. Most church-goers have an interest in one or two of such points, which happen to have fixed themselves on their attention or jarred upon their nerves, and they

are apt to attach to them an exaggerated importance; but, in fact, the details of revision as a whole fall neither within the sphere of interest nor the sphere of competence of the average worshipper, while the broad principles, if they can be unfolded before him, should both attract his consideration and win his approval.

It is said that at the last revision, in 1661, some six hundred alterations were made; but most people, on seeing the new book, probably thought that it had been altered only in a relatively few points. The same must be the case again whenever the Church is prepared to make a thorough revision; and again the detailed work will be done in the quiet of a committee-room.

But principles come before details, not only in order of importance and of general interest, but also in order of logic and of time. Therefore, whether the Church proceeds now to such a detailed revision, or whether it postpones that task and is content for the present with a very much smaller project, the principles which must govern revision, in whatever degree it is undertaken, need to be stated, criticised, amended, it may be, and formulated as rules of conduct. Until this is done, all proposals to alter a rubric here and a phrase there, or to prune this and

amplify that, are worse than useless. The best that can be hoped for them is, that proving abortive themselves, they may give place to something more thorough.

Notes and references to authorities in justification of the statements made, or opinions formulated, have been for the most part suppressed, as being unnecessary in a book of this kind. It is particularly easy to dispense with them in this case, as I have had an opportunity elsewhere to say my say on the History and Rationale of the Prayer Book.

When the details of revision come to be considered, a precious mine of information and suggestion will be found in the two volumes of the late Bishop of Edinburgh (Dr. Dowden), entitled *The Workmanship of the Prayer Book* and *Further Studies in the Prayer Book*. There is also much of value in Staley, *Liturgical Studies*.

For a discussion of the relation of Church and State, and the blame attaching to the latter for its unconstitutional actions which have led to the present lack of order, see Bruce, *Relationship of Church and State* (1910).