John Wesley’s prayer book revision: The text in context

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Main content

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...
Let John Wesley guide you into a deeper prayer life—these excerpts from his prolific writings will motivate and challenge you to greater communion with God. In approximately 45 readings, Wesley explains the why and how of prayer for believers at any stage of the Christian life. Lightly edited for ease of reading, Wesley’s insights are sure to improve the way you pray!

John Wesley was an English theologian and an Anglican cleric, who lived in the 18th century. He is credited for being one of the founders of Methodism. He was educated at home in his early years, before going on to study at Charterhouse School and then acquired his bachelor’s degree from Lincoln College at University of Oxford. John Wesley. What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace. Will. John Wesley. A man of one book, a student of many. John Wesley. Even in the greatest afflictions, we ought to testify to God, that, in receiving them from his hand, we feel pleasure in the midst of the pain, from being afflicted by Him who loves us, and whom we love. Love God. John Wesley. John Wesley (ˈwɛsli; 28 June [O.S. 17 June] 1703 – 2 March 1791) was an English cleric, theologian and evangelist who was a leader of a revival movement within the Church of England known as Methodism. The societies he founded became the dominant form of the independent Methodist movement that continues to this day. Educated at Charterhouse and Christ Church, Oxford, Wesley was elected a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1726 and ordained as an Anglican priest two years later. He led the “Holy The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley. Wesley in context. The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley. The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley. Chapter. Chapter. Wesley’s great grandfather (Bartholomew Westley) and grandfather (John Westley) were victims of the great ejection of nonconforming clergy in 1662; his father Samuel was an ex-Dissenter turned “high church” Anglican priest; and his mother Susanna, the daughter of an eminent Dissenting minister, also turned tables when she became a “high church” Anglican with thinly disguised Jacobite sympathies. John Wesley’s Prayer Book book. Read reviews from world’s largest community for readers. See a Problem? We’d love your help. Let us know what’s wrong with this preview of John Wesley’s Prayer Book by John Wesley. Problem: It’s the wrong book It’s the wrong edition Other. Details (if other): Cancel. Thanks for telling us about the problem. Return to Book Page. Not the book you’re looking for? Preview — John Wesley’s Prayer Book by John Wesley. John Wesley’s Prayer Book. by. John Wesley.