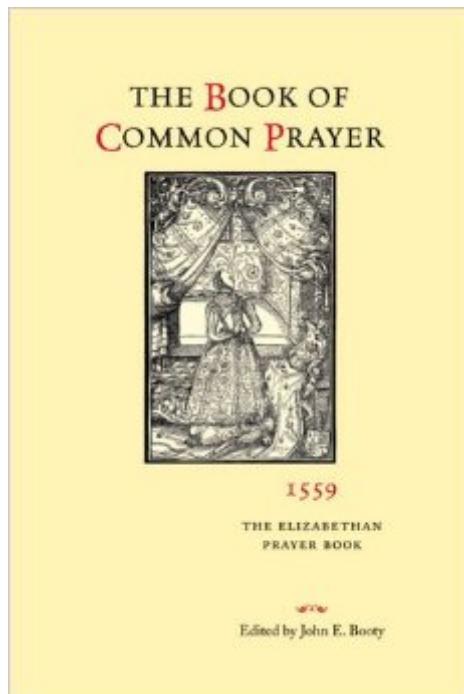


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The Book Of Common Prayer, 1559: The Elizabethan Prayer Book



Synopsis

John E. Booty's edition of The Book of Common Prayer, 1559, first published by the University Press of Virginia for the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1976 and long out of print, is now being reissued in the same handsome format as the original edition. In her foreword to the 2005 reissue, Judith Maltby writes, "It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of the 1559 Prayer Book.... Shakespeare was clearly shaped by a culture in which the vernacular was remarkably vigorous." Booty's text derives from a rare copy of the Elizabethan Prayer Book printed by Richard Jugge and John Cawode in 1559, now part of the Josiah Benton Collection of the Boston Public Library. Booty modernized spelling and punctuation, but took care not to distort the style and cadence of the Elizabethan text. To place the Prayer Book in its original cultural setting, he wrote a lengthy critical essay that traces the book's history and use during the sixteenth century. Helpful bibliographical notes enable readers to appreciate all the nuances of particular services and their contents. Particularly useful are the general index and the index of biblical passages, features unavailable in other editions of the Prayer Book. Through this magnificent document one begins to understand not only the Anglican church but also the Elizabethan culture in which Shakespeare lived, for this was one of the books that helped shape Renaissance England in all of its vitality and greatness. As Booty reminds the reader in his preface, each Sunday "in the parish churches and in the cathedrals the nation was at prayer, the commonwealth was being realized, and God, in whose hands the destinies of all were lodged, was worshiped in spirit and in truth." Published in association with the Folger Shakespeare Library

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Customer Reviews

John Booty has done a good job of making 1559 Prayer Book accessible to us. Even if you're not an Anglican Christian (Episcopalian for those of us in the U.S.) it's very interesting to read the worship tradition of so long ago, including Psalms and Gospel readings in Elizabethan English. But there are other interesting traditions lost today like a rite of thanksgiving blessing given to women who had just survived childbirth. The chapter on the History of the book itself is well worth the price of the book. I remember seeing copies of the 1559 Prayerbook as a child and wanting to read them but was unable to read the old English script they were invariably published in. This is fun.

This is a thoughtfully edited presentation of an important piece of English literature. Spelling and punctuation have been mildly updated and standardized. The rhythms and expressions of the BCP shaped the language and style of those who heard, performed, and experienced it weekly. Gaining some familiarity with the book opens new doors of understanding on Renaissance and early modern England. The essays and notes in the back provide much useful information and background. I also own the Oxford "Book of Common Prayer: the Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662", which is useful in its own right, but bought this volume because the Oxford presents only the 1662 in its entirety, with sections of the earlier books omitted when they largely conform to the later version. It is very nice to have 1559 complete and in one place. The volume is well-bound and should prove durable for many years of study/prayer.

My review's title says all I would say, save this: At prices, this is a bargain for historians, churchgoers, and scholars.

Of the many editions of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), the principal doctrinal and liturgical text of the Church of England, the 1559 Elizabethan Prayer Book has been the most influential. Along with the plays of William Shakespeare and the King James Bible, its stately and majestic prose has shaped the language and imagination of the English-speaking world. The much beloved Collect for Purity is but a sample of the incomparable liturgical prose of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the principal author of the original versions of the BCP (1549 and 1552): Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets be hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy

holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen. Fortunately, the University of Virginia Press has recently (2005) reissued the 1976 edition of the Elizabethan Prayer Book masterfully edited by John E. Booty, a noted church historian and Episcopal priest. This is a fully "working" edition of the 1559 BCP, complete with all liturgical services (Daily Office, Communion, etc.) and instructional rubrics appropriately in red print. (I use it daily for Morning and Evening Prayers.) It also contains an informative Preface written by Judith Maltby, a well-known Tudor scholar from Oxford University. Lastly, this edition concludes with an elucidative "History of the 1559 Book of Common Prayer" written by the editor, which highlights the sources, creation, intent, and influence of the Elizabethan Prayer Book. I highly recommend this version of the BCP to students of Tudor history as well as to all Anglicans/Episcopalians interested in the development of their Church's timeless liturgy.

The 1559 (Elizabethan) Book of Common Prayer sits somewhere between the 1552 (Edwardian) Prayer Book and the 1662 (Carolingian) Prayer Book that we all know, use and love - if we are Anglicans of some description, whether in or out of the established Church of England. This 1559 Prayer Book is well-bound and presented and is a privilege to use. It is the one that Shakespeare would have used and comes with red-lettering and quotes from that Bible that fore-dated the AV, the Bishop's Bible (which is most like the AV). It is large but easy to hold, to read from during service; but lacks the Articles of Religion in the back which had, by 1559, not been finalised. The spelling has been updated; and this is maybe one of the greatest attractions to having it. It also comes with an historical and very informative introduction. I would say that for both the antiquarian and the contemporary worshipper this is a must theologically, spiritually and historically.

Although George Washington used the 1662 edition of the Common Book of Prayer, this 1559 edition is basically the same prayers/readings that George Washington used. The chapter entitled 'Commination' will get your heart/mind to thinking. I would recommend this to all interested in our Founding Father, George Washington, and his Christian walk.

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