

Abstract

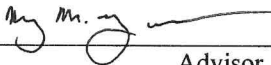
“TO WITNESS AND BLESS:
A SOCIO-LITURGICAL HISTORY OF MARRIAGE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH”

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Project under the direction of Professor Hilary Bogert-Winkler

This thesis combines the fields of history, sociology, and liturgical analysis to demonstrate both how and why the matrimonial liturgy of the Episcopal Church in the United States evolved from its English colonial roots until the present day. It shows how structural change has come slowly, while the language and theology of the service have been modified repeatedly and deliberately as an expression of the church’s understanding of marriage as well as the context in which it takes place. Attention is paid not just to the finished products of liturgical revision but also the processes that led to them and the surrounding cultural forces. The story of American marriage transforming from a means of subsistence and even survival in the 1600s to a mutual covenant of love and emotional support is told over multiple eras, culminating with the widespread approval of same-sex marriage and the new liturgical rites required to support it. Changes to the role of women in relationships and to attitudes toward marital sexuality are also narrated. It concludes with a discussion of the role of church weddings in modern society and offers several suggestions for future liturgical revision.

Approved



Advisor

Date 26 April 2026

To Witness and Bless:
A Socio-Liturgical History of Marriage in the Episcopal Church

By

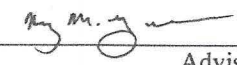
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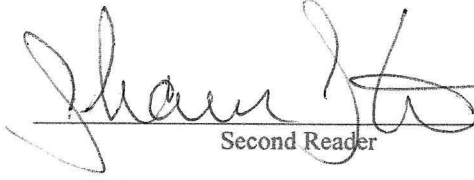
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Preface

This thesis on marriage was motivated by several overlapping circumstances. The first is the professional one that, as a parish priest, I am honored to conduct a fair number of weddings and have long found them to be a highlight of my ministry. In premarital counseling sessions, I frequently dive into the “whys” of the matrimonial liturgy – and have generally found that my initial seminary training was inadequate to explain the traditions and customs that couples are often curious about. This has required a fair amount of inquiry over the years in order for me to become conversant.

The second is an academic interest first sparked by a research paper written for Professor Hilary Bogert-Winkler’s class on the Liturgical Movement. In tracing the evolution of the Episcopal Church’s marriage liturgy through that period, I came to wonder whether perhaps the changes were prompted as much or even more by social change than they were by theological development or liturgical scholarship. This work is an attempt to expand that question to a longer time horizon.

The third is a purely personal reason. Like many adolescents, I grew up in church but drifted away in my teenage years. It was not due to any particularly cataclysmic event but simply that religion didn’t seem relevant or important to me at the time. A decade later, it was planning my own wedding that ultimately brought me back and began a journey that led to ordained ministry and a fascination with liturgies. Mysterious ways indeed!

While thanking people in this sort of undertaking is always a risky proposition due to the inevitability of missing someone important, I do need to make an attempt. First, Dr. Bogert-Winkler encouraged me throughout the genesis and writing of this

project that it would be a worthwhile undertaking, helped me shape the direction it would take, and then pushed me both to clarify and expand my thinking and writing. Her colleagues on the faculty at the University of the South have, without exception, been helpful and engaging, nurturing my love of liturgy and challenging me in all the right ways.

Second, the good people of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in La Grange, Illinois provided financial assistance and allowed me to take a sabbatical to do the bulk of this research. Their interest in my research and their insightful questions kept me motivated.

Third, oddly enough, to a man I never had the chance to meet: Bishop Kenneth Stevenson. He wrote a book in 1982 called *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* that is still both authoritative and relevant. In just a couple hundred pages, he told a 2,000-year liturgical tale that covered both East and West, along with multiple Protestant denominations. He also told the story in a style that keeps the reader engaged. His vast scope necessitated that he intentionally focused only on liturgy and neglected social history.¹ My work here is partly an attempt to bring some of that field of discourse into the discussion to enrich the story as well as continue the tale where he left off since the last few decades have seen more change than the centuries before combined. In return, my focus must be only upon the Episcopal Church of the United States (with brief recourse to its roots in the Church of England), even though the work done in other denominations has clearly been influential. It also unfortunately means that I cannot

1. Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), v. It was first published in the UK in 1982.

devote much space to the other part of marriage reform that the Church undertook during this time: that which is found in the canons.

And, finally, to my wife Stacy, without whom I never would have made it through this program – nor wanted to – and who graciously endured my absence both physically and emotionally. I think I’m finally done. Probably.

Introduction: The Cultural and Religious Significance of Marriage

A person need only watch a romantic comedy film or browse the self-help aisles of a bookstore to be reminded of the significance of marriage as a cultural institution. In his classic study of the rites of passage, Arnold van Gennep hailed marriage as “the most important of the life transitions from one social category to another” because it leads to the restructuring of families and most often a change in living situation.¹ It has functioned in various ways over time as a societal boundary marker for leaving the household of the family of origin, gaining both financial independence and dependence (from one’s parents and upon one’s spouse, respectively), engaging in morally acceptable sexual intimacy, and having and raising children.²

Marriage cannot be reduced to a singular event, however. As several sociologists more recently suggested, throughout the history of the United States, marriage has been the social institution that has most structured people’s lives and provided them with meaning.³ Marriage is far more than just a contract to live together, although it is that. It brings social scripts that define facets of life such as who earns money and who decides how it should be spent, who should perform what labor around the house, and who is in charge of child-rearing.⁴ Marriage also has vast financial and legal implications for individuals that extend beyond other forms of romantic relationships, ranging from

1. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 116.

2. Paul R. Amato et al., *Alone Together: How Marriage in America is Changing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

3. Amato et al., *Alone Together*, 1.

4. Amato et al., *Alone Together*, 1.

taxation and insurance to medical decision-making and information privacy. Marital status influences not only a person's standing in the community but also their very sense of identity and general feeling of wellbeing since, as historian of gender Nancy Cott wryly notes, marriage "can bring solace or misery – or both."⁵

In addition, despite the emotions that couples may justifiably experience on their happy day, marriage takes place inside the larger construct of society. As Lee Belford states in his doctoral dissertation, marriage is not "a purely private and personal affair with which no one else is concerned."⁶ He notes that marriage has an impact on both the legal and social status of children as well as the distribution of property.⁷ Throughout much of history, marriages have been used strategically to solidify political alliances between nations and enact peace treaties following armed conflicts.⁸ In fact, both the Reformation history of England and the more recent history of ruptures within the Anglican Communion are inextricably bound up with issues of marriage.

Given the multifaceted importance of marriage to individuals, families, and society at large, it should come as no surprise that both church and state have long had a keen interest in regulating it. For example, Christians may cite biblical references both to suggest that marriage is divinely instituted and to enforce societal norms. Canon law tends to take those norms and explicate them in sometimes excruciating detail. At the

5. Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1.

6. Lee Archer Belford, "Marriage and Canon Law in the Protestant Episcopal Church (U.S.A.)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1953), 25.

7. Belford, "Marriage and Canon Law," 24-25.

8. Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 6.

same time, political theory has often upheld marital monogamy as a cultural value that preserves social order and provides care for children.⁹ Since marriage both “prescribes duties and dispenses privileges,” as Cott puts it, there are thus rules enacted by civil and religious authorities regarding who can marry and when, by whom a wedding can be conducted and in what fashion, and if and how marriage can be ended.¹⁰ As society changes, both those rules and the understanding of marriage underlying them tend to evolve.

A slower – or, to put it precisely, a more conservative – evolution can be seen in the corresponding matrimonial liturgies. Writing a generation ago, the Anglican liturgiologist Geoffrey Cuming claimed that “of all the medieval services, Matrimony would seem most familiar to a twentieth-century worshipper.”¹¹ That claim is not without critique since just a year later, Kenneth Stevenson recognized how the second half of the twentieth century and especially the Liturgical Movement did bring thorough revision throughout Christian marriage rites.¹² But the fact remains that liturgical change has come slowly – especially to the structure of the liturgy, which Robert Taft insightfully noted often outlives the meaning ascribed to a service.¹³ Stevenson goes on to demonstrate that even though the words changed in significant ways, the shape of the

9. Cott, *Public Vows*, 10.

10. Cott, *Public Vows*, 2.

11. G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 1982), 10.

12. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 181.

13. Robert Taft, "The Structural Analysis of Liturgical Units: An Essay in Methodology," *Worship* 52, no. 4 (1978): 315.

Anglican services remained largely that of Thomas Cranmer four centuries earlier.¹⁴ This has not changed in the decades since.

This thesis intends to demonstrate that the evolution of matrimonial liturgy in the Episcopal Church has always been an intentionally slow expression of cultural and social change. Against its detractors who might claim a recent slide into moral relativism with so-called innovations like same-sex marriage, what we will see here is instead a continuous process of adjustment to what the Church (or at least its decision-making leadership) thinks marriage is and does. Rather than mindlessly bending to the whims of the world around it, the Church responds intentionally and deliberately. As Shawn Strout helpfully observes, “these theologies [of marriage] have sometimes adopted cultural norms and sometimes have countered them.”¹⁵ We will see plenty of both in this story.

Throughout, one of the subordinate goals is to give voice to a variety of individuals from each era in order to both honor their witness and hear their interpretations in their own words. Therefore, quotations are sprinkled in generously when they are relevant to the discussion. Many more could certainly be collected and a primary source reader on the history of American marriage would be a fruitful project for someone to take up. Using anecdotes in this way opens the project to a potentially justifiable critique of bias in their selection. However, the analysis of professional historians and sociologists is also used very liberally throughout in order to keep the story accurate. It also helps to balance one of the difficulties in writing liturgical history: the fact that, at least until quite recently, we are largely left with only the results of liturgical

14. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 190.

15. Shawn O. Strout, *Shepherding Souls: A Handbook for the Pastoral Offices* (New York: Church Publishing, 2024), 77.

revision and very little of the thought process behind it. We are often required to extrapolate from the cultural milieu surrounding the prayer books. Plus, as the Cambridge historian Eamon Duffy recently admitted to the public, the idea of a completely objective telling of history is just a myth – and even if one could construct such a thing, it would not be enjoyable to read.¹⁶

There are several other threads in the narrative that this project intends to tug upon since they represent two of the driving forces underlying liturgical change. The first is an intentional interest in hearing from women, a group that has often struggled to have their voices heard both in relationships and in the broader society. Although it is probably too cliché to even mention at this point, patriarchy is always part of the story – and we shall see it interwoven all throughout this one. The second is to also bring to the fore changing attitudes toward marital sexuality. Although it is still a fairly new area of psychological research, there is an emerging body of work that suggests treating sex as something sacred and holy within a relationship could have significant positive effects on marital satisfaction.¹⁷ Yet we also know that Christians often avoid the topic as being too taboo or confrontational, even in premarital counseling, despite the fact that couples still

16. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-1580*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2022), xx.

17. See, for example, the following: Krystal M. Hernandez-Kane, Annette Mahoney, and Kenneth I. Pargament, "Sanctification of Sexuality: Implications for Newlyweds' Marital and Sexual Quality," *Journal of Family Psychology* 25, 5 (2011). Krystal M. Hernandez-Kane and Annette Mahoney, "Sex Through a Sacred Lens: Longitudinal Effects of Sanctification of Marital Sexuality," *Journal of Family Psychology* 32, no. 4 (2018). Nathan D. Leonhardt, Dean M. Busby, and Brian J. Willoughby, "Sex Guilt or Sanctification? The Indirect Role of Religiosity on Sexual Satisfaction," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 12, no. 2 (2020). Nathan D. Leonhardt, Rebecca W. Clarke, and Chelom E. Leavitt, "Religiosity, Sexual Satisfaction, and Relationship Satisfaction: The Moderating Role of Sexual Mindfulness and Sexual Sanctification," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 49, no. 2 (2023).

expect it to be part of their preparation with clergy.¹⁸ The hope here is simply to start treating it as a normative part of the marital relationship.

However, this is ultimately a study of how the current wedding liturgies in the Episcopal Church came to be: a conversation back and forth between the fields of history, sociology, and liturgical analysis. In part, this is a deliberate reaction against the tendency that Lesley Northup once postulated that “liturgiologists love texts – their origins, arrangements, adjustments, hermeneutics.... Less interesting to most persons is the historical process by which the text came to be adopted.”¹⁹ To the contrary, that process can be fascinating, even when it ultimately results in very little meaningful change, such as with the 1892 Book of Common Prayer (hereinafter, BCP), which was the context in which Northup was writing. I fully agree with her that the debate and the public response are as important to understanding our liturgical history as is the finished text. Thus, at least as much attention is paid herein to the process as to the finished product, although both are certainly relevant to the goals. In other words, in order to truly understand our modern matrimonial practices, we must examine both how we got here and also why.

Chapter One begins by tracing the roots of the English marriage liturgies of 1604 and 1662 and describes how they were used, if at all, in the various colonies. It then proceeds to a description of family life in the American colonies – at least that experienced by white European immigrants and their descendants, since they are the ones who would shape the liturgical practices under consideration. The marriages of enslaved

18. Tiffany M. Cummings Aholou, Jerry E. Gale, and LaTrina M. Slater, "African American Clergy Share Perspectives on Addressing Sexual Health and HIV Prevention in Premarital Counseling: A Study," *Journal of Religion and Health* 50 (2011).

19. Lesley A. Northup, "Public Response and the Nineteenth-Century Prayer Book Revision Process," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 64, no. 2 (1995): 173.

persons, while obviously relevant to the individuals involved as well as an important religious and sociological phenomenon, are a complex topic that must be left aside for discussion elsewhere.²⁰ In order to provide a richer depiction, the chapter looks mainly at two regions that have left us sufficient data for adequate reconstruction: New England and the Chesapeake colonies of Maryland and Virginia. It shows how the immigration patterns and unique challenges in each shaped a very different family construct, although they began to converge in the eighteenth century. It finally addresses the important question of what exactly these colonial settlers thought marriage was, finding it to be a complex interplay of patriarchy, economics, and love (a word which, as we shall see, can have a variety of meanings).

Chapter Two picks up the story following the Revolutionary War, as the Episcopal Church set out as something separate from the Church of England. It studies the development of the first American prayer book and its greatly abridged marriage service. It then describes the formation of the modern American family in the half-century or so following the Revolution. This included the rising ideal of what is often called a “love match,” the notion of marrying primarily for love, as well a shift from large families working together on the farm to the notion of the smaller family existing as a respite from the economic demands of business or industry. It will also address the evolving

20. Space unfortunately precludes a proper discussion here of the painful and intertwined history of race and marriage in the United States. In short, while the marriages of enslaved persons were often given some acknowledgement by enslavers, it was generally only for self-serving purposes such as motivating productivity and maintaining tranquility. See Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 358-360. For one overview of the religious expression of enslaved Black people in the American colonies, see John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988). There is also an excellent treatment on the legacy of that worship in Lisa Allen, *A Womanist Theology of Worship: Liturgy, Justice, and Community Righteousness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021). Marriage is discussed briefly on pages 92-93.

understanding of Victorian marriage later in the nineteenth century, with a goal of showing that rather than a repression of emotion and sexuality, relationships in that era were actually increasingly sentimental. Finally, it looks at length at the process of revision behind the 1892 BCP, an interesting story of a church trying to grapple with societal evolution over the previous century that ultimately results in remarkably little change to the matrimonial service.

Chapter Three begins by describing the state of marriage in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the era in which the love match really came to the fore, now asking much more of marriages than ever before. It was also a time marked by a rise in both egalitarianism and divorce – factors that will be shown to be related. It then details the process that led to the next BCP in 1928, a much more extensive revision than that completed in 1892. Many features of the service as we know it today were introduced (or reintroduced) in this revision, including the blessing of the wedding ring and the removal of obedience from the wedding vows. Marriage continued to evolve, however, and the social landscape changed significantly after the Second World War. As divorces began to recede and families began to expand, the 1950s have often been called the “Golden Age” of marriage in the United States. Underlying that moniker, however, was a regression in gender equality, with women often being forced out of the workforce and back into the home, changes that were challenged with the rise of feminism and civil rights activism in the following decades. The final portion of the chapter is devoted to the liturgical movement and the 1979 BCP which can be said to have resulted therefrom. It was a lengthy process unlike anything the Church had done before, and it led to a distinctly different marriage rite.

Chapter Four opens with a discussion of more recent trends in American marriage, specifically the rise in cohabitation and the growing acceptance (both socially and legally) of non-heterosexual marriages. Both of these are seen as rather drastic changes to the landscape that also have liturgical repercussions. In rather minute detail, the General Convention legislation regarding new marriage rites is traced, explaining how the current situation came to be, with the 1979 BCP now being supplemented by several additional liturgies and even a redefinition of the Book of Common Prayer no longer necessarily being a physical book.

In the conclusion, there is a discussion of why the church's role in matrimony remains relevant despite the increasing number of weddings conducted elsewhere. Several thoughts are then offered to further the conversation about future liturgical reform. Finally, two appendices provide a generalized structure of the Episcopal Church's wedding liturgy and then a comparison of its various components throughout the period under study. While not containing every detail of the story told herein, they serve to highlight the most important points and changes, as well as serve as a quick reference.

Chapter One: The Colonial Period

The English Wedding Liturgy Arrives in the American Colonies

Perhaps motivated by their recent success in colonizing Ireland, the English set their sights upon the New World in the late sixteenth century, with a focus on the mid-Atlantic region that had largely been left untouched by earlier French and Spanish settlements to the north and south, respectively.¹ Their first attempt did not meet with much success. Approximately a hundred men landed on Roanoke Island in 1585, part of what they called “Virginia” after Elizabeth I, the virgin queen.² Partly due to resistance from the local indigenous people and partly due to poor agricultural production, it was abandoned the following spring.³ The next year, in 1587, ninety-four English newcomers who were supposed to land further north were discharged from their ship in Roanoke – this time including women and children, marking the first English family settlement in the Americas.⁴ By August 1590, they had all simply mysteriously disappeared, without any evidence of their fate to this day.⁵

The first lasting English colony would have to wait several decades. The next monarch, James I, gave the land rights for Virginia to two trading companies in 1606, and

1. Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 118.

2. Taylor, *American Colonies*, 123. The island is now part of North Carolina.

3. Taylor, *American Colonies*, 124.

4. Taylor, *American Colonies*, 124.

5. Taylor, *American Colonies*, 124.

one of them, the Virginia Company, settled the following year in Jamestown.⁶ A Communion service was celebrated by their chaplain, Robert Hunt, on May 14, 1607, and the settlers also worshipped daily from the English BCP.⁷ This was the beginning of a legacy of Anglican worship in America that spread outward from Virginia and continues to this day. The matrimonial service the colonists brought with them was still largely the handiwork of Thomas Cranmer, the English Reformer from several generations earlier who adapted the late medieval liturgy of Salisbury (or *Sarum*, from the Latin).

Although there are good indications that Cranmer began revising the English marriage service by the late 1530s, there is no such extant wedding liturgy of his creation until the 1549 BCP,⁸ which included a new service entitled “The Forme of Solemnization of Matrimonie.”⁹ This has been called by liturgiologist Bryan Spinks “a conservative ‘Englishisation’ of the Sarum rite, with some modifications and omissions.”¹⁰ A detailed analysis of its sources conducted by F. E. Brightman in the early twentieth century shows that Cranmer added to the service of the Sarum Manual bits of the York Manual as well

6. Robert Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church*, revised ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1999), 10-11.

7. David Hein and Gardiner H. Shattuck, *The Episcopalians* (New York: Church Publishing, 2004), 11. The first service in North America from the English Book of Common Prayer was actually that of Robert Walfall in 1578 in what is now Canada. See J. P. Francis, "Robert Walfall – First Anglican Clergyman in Canada," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 11, no. 1 (1969).

8. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life*, Rev. ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), 226, 415. A similar conclusion, except for dating it to the early 1540s, is reached in Bryan D. Spinks, "The Marriage Service in the Church of England: Some Liturgical Considerations," *Liturgical Review* 11, no. 2 (1981): 92.

9. Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64.

10. Spinks, "Marriage Service," 92.

as translations of material from both Martin Luther and Hermann von Wied.¹¹ Unlike his fellow reformers Luther and John Calvin, whom Stevenson characterizes as “taking pruning-shears to the practices of their immediate past” in their marriage liturgies,¹² Cranmer instead was fairly restrained, at least in terms of structure. What emerged in 1549 was a liturgy based largely in the medieval Sarum rite and conducted entirely in the vernacular yet still Reformed in theology.¹³ Stevenson also describes the whole service as a “liturgical Rolls-Royce” in that it gave the idealized shape to all Anglican marriage liturgies for centuries to come.¹⁴

The reactions to the 1549 BCP were mixed, to say the least. When it came to a vote in the House of Lords, eight of its eighteen bishops voted against it.¹⁵ Yet some influential churches, such as St. Paul’s Cathedral, had begun using it before it was even authorized.¹⁶ Then, despite the book’s eventual Parliamentary mandate, Princess Mary simply ignored it, the Bishop of London resisted implementing it, many priests found ways to dress up its services with Catholic trappings, and some parts of England were in near-rebellion over it.¹⁷ The Puritans mocked it and especially objected to the use of

11. F. E. Brightman, *The English Rite: Being a Synopsis of the Sources and Revisions of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Rivingtons, 1915), xlv-xlvi, 800-817.

12. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 133.

13. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 138. Spinks disagrees, reading at least parts of the rite as still presenting a medieval theology of marriage. See Spinks, "Marriage Service," 90.

14. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 134.

15. Alan Jacobs, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 45-46.

16. MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 410.

17. Cuming, *History of Anglican Liturgy*, 70. He goes into far more detail than is required here.

wedding rings.¹⁸ It is often thought that even Cranmer himself wasn't satisfied with the 1549 BCP since, as far back as the 1940s, it's been suggested that this book was simply Cranmer's "trial balloon," as Gregory Dix characterized it, and that he had always intended further reform.¹⁹

The marriage service did, however, receive broad approval from other reformers. For example, Martin Bucer, in his *Censura*, wrote that Cranmer's opening exhortation was "excellently godly and holy," although he did suggest reordering the purposes of marriage so that procreation was no longer first.²⁰ His only other constructive suggestion was that more explanation be given to the people regarding the wedding ring;²¹ otherwise he found it entirely suitable. Given that praise from his colleagues and the fact that most of the uproar was in response to other services, Cranmer made relatively few changes to matrimony in the revised BCP of 1552. Taken together, Stevenson rightly describes that those alterations take the service "along a slightly more Protestant path."²² The marriage service in the next BCP, that of 1559, requires even less discussion since, in the words of Stevenson again, it "reproduces 1552, hardly altering a syllable."²³

Puritan dissatisfaction soon arose, partially centered on the use of wedding rings. In the 1572 *Admonition to Parliament*, the writers criticized the formula used for the

18. Cummings, *Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, xxxvii.

19. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (2015: repr., New York: Bloomsbury, 1945), 658. For a balanced assessment of that conclusion several generations later, see Jacobs, *Book of Common Prayer*, 209-210 n. 4. Find also additional agreement in MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 410.

20. E. C. Whitaker, *Martin Bucer and the Book of Common Prayer* (Essex: Alcuin Club, 1974), 120.

21. Whitaker, *Martin Bucer*, 122.

22. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 141.

23. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 142.

giving of the ring (“With this ring, I thee wed: with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goodes, I thee endow...”), claiming that it made a wife into an idol.²⁴ Similarly, the Millenary Petition of 1603 listed the wedding ring alongside other perceived abuses such as women baptizing and the use of certain vestments.²⁵ Despite the opposition, King James I personally defended the use of rings at the Hampton Court Conference, suggesting that a service could hardly be called matrimony without one.²⁶ There is evidence from letters describing the proceedings to suggest that some general agreement was reached at the Conference that clearer words should be used in marriage since the groom’s worshiping of the bride could be misinterpreted.²⁷ The King, however, reportedly shut down one of the complainers, Doctor Reynolds, by saying that if Reynolds had been married, he would know that it was entirely proper to give one’s wife all of the honor and worship possible.²⁸ With the king’s preference made clear, there were unsurprisingly no changes made at all to the marriage service in the 1604 BCP,²⁹ a book that was very similar to that of 1559 overall but was not to remain in place for quite as

24. *An Admonition to the Parliament* (University of Michigan Library Digital Collection: repr., London: J. Stroud, 1572), I.9. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A00718.0001.001>.

25. Henry Gee and William John Hardy, eds., *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1896), 509.

26. Edward Cardwell, ed., *History of Conferences and Other Proceedings Connected with the Revision of the Book of Common Prayer from the Year 1558 to the Year 1690*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 200-201. Discussed in Cummings, *Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, 740-741 n. 159.

27. Cardwell, *History of Conferences*, 200, 209, 215. Cited also in Cuming, *History of Anglican Liturgy*, 103.

28. Cardwell, *History of Conferences*, 200.

29. This is based on my review of the text found in Robert Barker, *The Book of Common Prayer: King James, Anno 1604: Commonly Called the Hampton Court Book* (London: W. Pickering, 1844), 246-253. The same conclusion is reached by Cuming, *History of Anglican Liturgy*, 104.

long as its predecessor had due to its relatively brief banishment from January 1645 during the English Civil War and the ensuing Commonwealth.³⁰

Following the Stuart Restoration in 1660 and the return of the Church of England, the BCP was brought back. The Savoy Conference of 1661 again surfaced a desire by some to clarify language in the matrimonial service, with one of the topics once more being the complaint that “with my body I thee worship” reflected an outdated and misunderstood usage.³¹ Another “exception” raised by the Presbyterian party was the requirement to proceed directly into Eucharist, which allegedly caused some who were “unfit for the sacrament” to forgo marriage and others to receive Communion unworthily. It was also noted that even then, wedding receptions were often full of less-than-holy behavior. In addition, Colin Buchanan points out that the marriage liturgy was a universal social experience and would thus call everyone to the table.³² In the bishops’ response, the concern about mandatory Communion was answered with a suggestion for the parties to perhaps act like better Christians instead and thus suppress what they termed “those licentious Festivities.”³³ Regarding the use of “worship,” however, the response was a concession to finally change the outdated language to “honour” instead.³⁴ Yet, when

30. Cuming, *History of Anglican Liturgy*, 110. Despite being illegal, there was still wide-spread use of the BCP in the 1640s and 1650s. See Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 60. In addition, the *Directory* that replaced it allowed for a certain flexibility that could be used to engage in BCP-like worship. See Cuming, 111.

31. Colin Buchanan, ed., *The Savoy Conference Revisited: The Proceedings Taken from the Grand Debate of 1661 and the Works of Richard Baxter* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 2002), 68-69.

32. Buchanan, *Savoy Conference Revisited*, 71.

33. Buchanan, *Savoy Conference Revisited*, 71.

34. Buchanan, *Savoy Conference Revisited*, 69.

Convocation took up the matter of Prayer Book revision, they did not change the language.

There were a few alterations made for that book, however. One was essentially a stage direction that had dropped out of the previous English books and was thus a return to the Sarum liturgy: that the man should stand on the right and the woman on the left.³⁵ In a concession to pastoral practicality, and in a move that would shape weddings for centuries to come, the 1662 BCP also specified that the couple repeat their vows after the priest. It is unclear whether that was already being done in actual practice, however, especially since the formula for the giving of the ring already so specified. The final words of the service were perhaps the biggest change of all. Now, the receipt of Communion was no longer mandatory but, instead, the couple should receive “at the time of their marriage, or at the first opportunity after their marriage.” This appears to have been one last accommodation to the Presbyterian objections discussed above and had the effect, as Stevenson has written elsewhere, of making the Eucharist something “no more than hoped for.”³⁶ It was likely also the beginning of the privatization of the marriage liturgy – or at least the formal recognition of a trend which had already begun.³⁷

35. Cummings, *Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, 434. As an interesting aside, the Sarum Missal gives the logic behind this as follows: “The man should stand on the right hand of the woman, and the woman on the left hand of the man, the reason being that she was formed out of a rib in the left side of Adam.” See Vernon Staley, ed., *The Sarum Missal in English*, vol. 2 (London: Alexander Moring Ltd., 1911), 144. There is also an oft-repeated explanation that the man stood on the right during medieval weddings in order to keep his sword arm unencumbered so that he could protect his bride. However, the origin of this rationale has proven hopelessly elusive.

36. Kenneth W. Stevenson, *To Join Together: The Rite of Marriage* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 96.

37. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 145.

What the English colonial settlers brought with them, then, was a liturgy that retained most of its medieval structure and even much of the language but was revised to correspond with the theological evolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was now held entirely in the vernacular and removed some of what the reformers viewed as the more superstitious aspects. As an important addition, as MacCulloch notes, Cranmer was able “to bring a new warmth and humanity into the service.”³⁸

How it was implemented – and whether it was even implemented at all – in the colonies was, unsurprisingly, geographically diverse. In the Puritan region of New England, it was the Congregational church that was established by law and Anglicanism was, as one historian has put it, an interloper.³⁹ After the Church of England became tolerated in Massachusetts in 1689, Anglican churches began to be built there but there were only seventeen congregations in the colony by the year 1750 – along with twenty-seven more in the rest of New England – with many of them meeting in schools or homes and lacking clergy.⁴⁰ While Anglicans did tend to be more influential in New England than their meager numbers might suggest,⁴¹ weddings were largely considered a civil matter in the region. Because there was no identified scriptural mandate for any sort of religious ceremony or particular officiant, the Puritan thinking prevailed that considered weddings to be a matter of contract rather than a church event.⁴² That is not to say that

38. MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 420.

39. David L. Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1993), 28.

40. Holmes, *Brief History*, 28-29.

41. Holmes, *Brief History*, 30.

42. Laurie Hochstetler, "Making Ministerial Marriage: The Social and Religious Legacy of the Dominion of New England," *The New England Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (2013): 490.

there was not a deep religious significance to marriage for the Puritans, however, who believed that God had indeed ordained marriage since the days of Adam and Eve as a covenant of mutual support.⁴³

In the journal of a Boston man named John Hull, he described being married to his fiancée in 1647 at his home, with Governor John Winthrop conducting the ceremony. No particular liturgy was used and the couple did not exchange rings.⁴⁴ The next year, the Bay Colony passed a law to solidify that tradition and require that only the magistrate or a person authorized by the courts could conduct a wedding.⁴⁵ This remained the Massachusetts pattern for decades, until the British monarchy exerted its authority by revoking the colonists' ability to govern themselves and created the short-lived Dominion of New England in 1686. One of the first orders of business for the new royal governor was to authorize, although not require, ministers to solemnize marriages – although most of them had not been ordained in the Church of England tradition given that the entire city of Boston contained only one Anglican priest at that point.⁴⁶ As time marched on, being married by a congregationalist minister began to become both a hallmark of Puritan

43. James T. Johnson, "The Covenant Idea and the Puritan View of Marriage," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 1 (1971): 108.

44. Hochstetler, "Making Ministerial Marriage," 488.

45. Hochstetler, "Making Ministerial Marriage," 490. This precedes what happened in England during the Interregnum where the August 1653 enactment of "An Act touching Marriages and the Registering thereof," would soon require marriages to be conducted by a Justice of the Peace. The law also specified a brief matrimonial liturgy to be conducted by the Justice and emphasized consent of both the couple and their parents. See C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, vol. 2 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1911), 715-718. Courts throughout Protestant Europe in the seventeenth century generally held that the marriage was effected by consent more than by ceremony. See Van Der Heijden, "Marriage Formation: Law and Custom in the Low Countries 1500-1700," in *Marriage in Europe, 1400-1800*, ed. Silvana Seidel Menchi and Emlyn Eisenach (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 164-165.

46. Hochstetler, "Making Ministerial Marriage," 494.

piety and independence from English control,⁴⁷ although not one that would have much influence upon the Episcopal Church.

The situation could not have been more different in the colonies to the south, where the Church of England remained the overwhelmingly dominant religious flavor. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, this was strongest in Maryland and Virginia, which contained 80 percent of the hundred or so Anglican churches in the American colonies at the time.⁴⁸ In a 1697 report that wasn't published until several decades later, the authors, who include Commissary James Blair, describe religion in Virginia as follows:

The Inhabitants do generally profess to be of the Church of England, which accordingly is the Religion and Church by Law establish'd. The Number of Dissenters in that Country are very inconsiderable, there not being so many of any Sort as to set up a Meeting-House, except three or four Meetings of Quakers, and one of Presbyterians.... By the Laws of the Country, the Ministers were oblig'd to produce their Orders to him [the Governor], and to shew that they had Episcopal Ordination.⁴⁹

As Brent Tarter notes, however, while it may have been clear to the writers what it meant to profess their membership in the Church of England, it is less so to the modern reader.⁵⁰ The goal was to place a church within six miles of riding distance from each home.⁵¹ Yet, the average parish in early eighteenth-century Virginia was approximately 270 square

47. Hochstetler, "Making Ministerial Marriage," 497.

48. Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 17.

49. Henry Hartwell, James Blair, and Edward Chilton, *The Present State of Virginia, and the College*, ed. Hunter Dickinson Parish (Charlottesville, Virginia: Dominion Books, 1964), 65-66. Italics omitted.

50. Brent Tarter, "Reflections on the Church of England in Colonial Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 112, no. 4 (2004): 339.

51. Holmes, *Brief History*, 21.

miles in size and contained typically one church plus several chapels, which a single parson would rotate through each month.⁵² However, far from causing them to shun religion, this actually caused the English BCP to become even more important to the colonial Virginians as spiritual practice became more important than theological propositions. As Tarter puts it, “the Book of Common Prayer was second only to the Bible in their religious lives.”⁵³

Traveling further, although there was initially no establishment of religion in South Carolina, Queen Anne was successful in having the Church of England established there by the colonial legislature in 1706.⁵⁴ A similar problem was encountered, with few churches and great distances between them.⁵⁵ In neighboring North Carolina, even fifty years after Anglicanism was established in 1715, only five of its thirty-two parishes had clergy or church buildings.⁵⁶ The situation in Georgia was even more dire, where there never exceeded five Anglican church buildings in total during the colonial era.⁵⁷

All of this resulted in Southern colonial weddings generally contravening the requirement of both the English Canons of 1604 and the BCP that they be held in the

52. Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000), 240-241.

53. Tarter, "Reflections on the Church of England," 343.

54. Prichard, *History of the Episcopal Church*, 25.

55. Nicholas M. Beasley, "Domestic Rituals: Marriage and Baptism in the British Plantation Colonies, 1650-1780," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 76, no. 3 (2007): 333.

56. Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 17.

57. Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 17.

church.⁵⁸ A study of one rare South Carolina parish that kept sufficient records, for example, found that of 115 marriages between 1758 and 1774, ninety-five of them were held in private houses, eighteen in the home of the rector, and only five in the church.⁵⁹ Similarly, while English law and liturgical rubric required the publication of banns prior to the wedding, an exception was allowed for those married under a license from the appropriate authority. This exception seemingly became the rule in the South, where a license from the governor allowed for weddings to be more of a private affair – at least for those who could afford it.⁶⁰

The Family in Early Colonial America

As the above picture might suggest, family life for English settlers in the American colonies was so heterogeneous throughout time and place that perhaps only a few broad generalizations may be drawn with much confidence. One is that the family quickly became crucial to adaptation in their new environment. As historian Steven Mintz and anthropologist Susan Kellogg together note, the colonial family was engaged in a far wider-ranging set of functions than the modern variety is expected to perform: it raised the food, made their clothing and furniture, taught the children both academics and religion, and cared for the elderly. It was thus “a workplace, a school, a vocational training agency, and a place of worship, and it carried the heavy burden of responsibility

58. This was not confined just to marriage. Preaching and burial offices were also often conducted outside of the church building. See John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 270 n.63.

59. Beasley, "Domestic Rituals," 333.

60. Beasley, "Domestic Rituals," 334-335.

for maintaining social order and stability.”⁶¹ More than just a center of colonial life, it was both a means of survival and the locus of cultural transmission.

A second observation about the colonial family is that in addition to its function, its structure was also quite unlike that in the land they left behind – although in opposite directions depending on which part of the colonial geography is being considered. The Puritan settlers to New England were consciously fighting against a perceived instability of the English family. Back in (Old) England, high mortality rates for both infants and adults, along with a mobile populace that tended to move from town to town, combined to result in relatively few three-generation households.⁶² English couples of the time were inclined to marry later in life, leading the average duration of a marriage to be as little as seventeen years and for the typical couple to have only a few children who survived beyond adolescence.⁶³ In New England, however, children rarely moved very far from their parents. This was encouraged by the practice of fathers settling their sons on plots of land surrounding their own and not transferring title to the property until their death.⁶⁴ Owing to a somewhat younger age of marriage and increased life expectancy, Puritan marriages were expected to last significantly longer in the colonies than in England.⁶⁵ In

61. Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 1.

62. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 8.

63. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 8.

64. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 9.

65. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 13.

one particular town whose records were studied, the average marriage duration was twenty-four years,⁶⁶ or about 40 percent longer than those in England.

Additionally, New England couples overall had far more children than their English counterparts. The vignette of Judith Coffin as told by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, while not representative, serves as an excellent example of the Puritan ideal.⁶⁷ As a widow with three prior children, Judith married Tristram Coffin of Newbury, Massachusetts in 1653. Over the next sixteen years, she bore ten more children. Beginning in 1677, she gained at least one grandchild per year, with an average of four annually between 1686 and 1696. By the time of her death in 1705 at age 80, she was said to have physically seen 177 of her descendants. This was reflected in her epitaph, which lauded her as a “sober, faithful, fruitful vine.” Additionally, seven of the ten Coffin children still resided within the confines of Newbury. A perhaps more realistic portrait is portrayed by the records of Hingham, another coastal Massachusetts town, which showed a still-impressive average of about 7.6 children per family for couples married before 1691.⁶⁸

The situation in the more southernly colonies of the seventeenth century was almost diametrically opposed to that of New England. As Mintz and Kellogg succinctly summarize, “for colonists south of the Chesapeake Bay, a high level of mortality, a short average life span, a low average duration of marriage, and a sharply skewed sex ratio all

66. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 8-16.

67. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 146-149.

68. Daniel Scott Smith, "The Demographic History of Colonial New England," *The Journal of Economic History* 32 (1972): 177.

contributed to an environment in which family relationships were ephemeral.”⁶⁹ In Maryland and Virginia, parents often died young due to diseases like typhoid, dysentery, and endemic malaria.⁷⁰ These diseases were not common in New England, and neither were the frequent crop failures or contaminated drinking water frequently found in the South.⁷¹ All of these challenges combined to cause the average immigrant man in Maryland to live to be just forty-three years old, with less than a 30 percent chance of seeing age fifty; women could expect even shorter lives.⁷² This frequently left families to be held together by widows or step-parents and gave children more autonomy in decisions about their marriages and careers.⁷³

Much of the difference in family life was also driven by a starkly different pattern of immigration between north and south. In New England, there was a large wave of Puritan migration following the 1620 settlement in Plymouth, Massachusetts, that was driven largely by religious motives and dissatisfaction about life in England and numbered at least 21,000 people.⁷⁴ But then there were few new immigrants after 1640 due to the English Civil War, which allowed for a more stable family and stronger kinship bonds to develop.⁷⁵ In fact, the migration pattern reversed for a time, with many returning

69. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 36.

70. Daniel Blake Smith, "The Study of the Family in Early America: Trends, Problems, and Prospects," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1982): 9.

71. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 37.

72. Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1977): 542.

73. Smith, "Study of the Family," 9.

74. James M. Volo and Dorothy Donneen Volo, *Family Life in 17th- and 18th-Century America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006), 15-16.

75. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 36.

to England in order to, as Alison Games puts it, “serve God and preserve the faith in the home country, not in a wilderness periphery.”⁷⁶

In Maryland and Virginia, however, immigration was about seven times that in New England throughout the seventeenth century, consisting mainly of indentured servants who were both young and unmarried.⁷⁷ Lois Green Carr and Lorena Walsh studied the demographics of the immigrants to Maryland in the second half of the seventeenth century and found that 85 percent of them – both men and women – were indentured for a period first set by statute in 1661 as four, and then soon after, five years of service.⁷⁸ This greatly delayed marriage until later in life because servant women were contractually barred from marrying unless someone paid her master for the remainder of her term.⁷⁹ As a result, half of women were over twenty-five years old at age of first marriage.⁸⁰ The process of finding a spouse would prove more even difficult for men, since they represented about three-quarters of immigrants from the 1650s through the 1680s and not much less than that for the remainder of the century.⁸¹

Due to the high mortality rates, the average Chesapeake marriage lasted only seven years⁸² (less than half the duration of those in England and less than one-third of those in New England). Most married women had only three or four children, few of

76. Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 203.

77. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 36.

78. Carr and Walsh, "Planter's Wife," 542-545.

79. Carr and Walsh, "Planter's Wife," 548.

80. Carr and Walsh, "Planter's Wife," 551.

81. Carr and Walsh, "Planter's Wife," 545.

82. Carr and Walsh, "Planter's Wife," 552.

whom would survive to adulthood.⁸³ For those who did make it to the age of eighteen, the majority had already lost one parent to death and perhaps one-third were orphans.⁸⁴

Natural population growth would only begin to outpace immigration in most of the Chesapeake colonies in the waning years of the century.⁸⁵ Mintz and Kellogg conclude with a surprising observation about the Southern family:

All this might lead one to expect devastating consequences for family life, but this does not appear to have been the case. Marriages may have been short lived and unstable, parent-child ties fragile, bonds to extended kin tenuous, and yet reliance on kin and neighbors, far from being weak, was strong. And parents, far from treating their children with indifference, developed affectionate, loving relationships with their offspring.⁸⁶

Although the challenges were different, the family helped immigrants adapt to life throughout the colonies.

The third generalization is that American colonial families were patriarchal, but perhaps just ever-so-slightly less so than one might expect. In the Puritan towns, for example, each family unit received one vote in community matters, and it was ordinarily cast by the father as head of household, although his wife could vote in his absence.⁸⁷ That same father enjoyed not only the social responsibility but also the legal duty to approve any suitors for his daughters and to consent to his children's marriages.⁸⁸ His legal rights were not absolute, though. For example, a law passed by the Plymouth

83. Carr and Walsh, "Planter's Wife," 552.

84. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 38.

85. Daniel Blake Smith, "Mortality and the Family in the Colonial Chesapeake," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8, no. 3 (1978): 409-411.

86. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 38.

87. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 6.

88. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 3.

Colony in 1646 required a wife's consent to any sale of real estate.⁸⁹ How that provision was implemented in actual family life remains to be seen.

To the south, society revolved around what historian Stephanie Coontz characterizes as “male displays of wealth, power, and consumption,” with plantations – owned and run by men – arising as self-contained villages.⁹⁰ When the planter died, however, wills during this period generally included provisions for care of the widow, with some even given control of the family business and a portion of the manor house for their own use.⁹¹ There was an old English tradition (called the “widow's dower”) that was retained in most of the colonies of a widow being given use of at least one-third of a deceased man's real estate, although she did not technically own it and thus could not sell it or bequeath it to her heirs should they be different than her husband's.⁹² This seems to follow the general contours of the English legal precept of coverture, which Lawrence Stone only somewhat cynically describes as “by marriage, the husband and wife became one person in law – and that person was the husband.”⁹³ At best, colonial wives could enter into a written agreement before or after the marriage to retain some amount of control over their property.⁹⁴

89. Stephanie Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families 1600-1900* (New York: Verso, 1988), 95.

90. Coontz, *Social Origins*, 77.

91. Coontz, *Social Origins*, 82-83, 94.

92. Linda K. Kerber et al., eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 85.

93. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800*, Abridged ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1979), 136.

94. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 10.

Yet women were given at least selected authority within the domestic sphere. Ulrich has influentially argued that colonial women served as “deputy husbands” who possessed broad household responsibility, while also greatly lacking in true economic and social opportunity.⁹⁵ Make no mistake: women were still subordinate to men in every arena of life and were expected to defer to their husbands and take his opinions as their own.⁹⁶ Indeed, it was commonly held that women who refused to be submissive were a primary source of social chaos and that enforcement of women’s social and sexual norms was necessary to restore order.⁹⁷ Female chastity was assumed to be part of maintaining a single woman’s virginal value for her future husband,⁹⁸ a belief that was certainly not limited to this context and that has been described in a variety of cultures over history.

We must pause briefly to remember that women were not the only category of people oppressed by social stratification in the colonial era. By the end of the seventeenth century, there were enslaved black persons to be found in all thirteen of the original colonies, although they numbered probably less than 4,000 in the year 1675, as opposed to over 100,000 in the British West Indies.⁹⁹ Similarly, there were something like one to two million Native Americans residing in the territories that would later become the United States and Canada when European settlement began.¹⁰⁰ They were killed in vast swaths by diseases and violence, many were enslaved, and those who survived would

95. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 37.

96. Coontz, *Social Origins*, 95-97.

97. Brown, *Good Wives*, 31.

98. Brown, *Good Wives*, 31.

99. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 32.

100. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 26.

soon find themselves displaced from their ancestral lands. By one estimate, only 10 percent of the Native American population of New England remained by the 1670s.¹⁰¹ These families have their own valuable and important stories that have left a great mark upon the United States but telling them must be left to others since their impact on the Episcopal Church was, quite shamefully, minimal.

101. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 30.

Changing Patterns in the 18th Century

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, there were a number of changes in store for the colonial settler family as population growth began to outstrip the available resources.

Coontz helpfully summarizes the impact of these economic factors on family life:

Many forces had begun to undermine the patriarchal, corporate order of the seventeenth century. The old household system had worked as part of a stable economy in which parents passed on land or occupations to children who had few alternatives. In the context of plentiful land and an inelastic supply of labor, the corporate household economy had allowed for rapid population growth, as children could be utilized in agrarian production at an early age or put out to work in a household with higher labor needs. But by the early 1700s the growth of population was putting considerable pressure on the foundations of the traditional household economy.¹⁰²

How this played out, however, again varied geographically. What follows is a brief sketch of the developments in the two regions previously discussed.

In New England, high birthrates, low mortality, and limited available real estate combined to shrink family farms as fathers repeatedly sub-divided the land to their sons over successive generations until they became too small to be economically viable.¹⁰³ This had several effects, as described by Mintz and Kellogg.¹⁰⁴ One was to result in some children – often younger sons – relocating to newer communities where there was still abundant cultivable land. Another was for alternative forms of capital to replace real estate as the primary mode of inheritance. This could consist of money, an education, or even an apprenticeship in a trade. For those families who were less affluent, it often resulted in children becoming employed by others outside the family as wage laborers

102. Coontz, *Social Origins*, 106.

103. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 18.

104. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 17-19.

who would never own the land on which they worked. One study of Southern New England suggests that by the 1730s or 1740s, a single acre of good land cost roughly a full year's wages – and a fully functional residential farm normally required about twenty acres.¹⁰⁵

Together, this all undermined the paternal authority, described above, that had been based on a father holding onto his land until death to keep his children both nearby and obedient. And it was not just male children who began to experience increased independence. By the mid-1700s, women in New England were largely allowed to select their own spouses, with plenty choosing not to marry at all.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the average age of women who did marry rose several years over the course of the eighteenth century, bringing colonial marriage more in line with the pattern of western Europe by the eve of the Revolution.¹⁰⁷ A rather vivid symptom of this decrease in parental control was a large upswing in premarital sex, something which had been kept quite low in early Puritan settlements. In the seventeenth century, less than 10 percent of brides had given birth to a child fewer than eight-and-a-half months following their wedding. By the mid-eighteenth century, that rate rose to over 40 percent.¹⁰⁸

In the Southern colonies, the trend was rather in the opposite direction: toward the stabilization of white family life.¹⁰⁹ For complex reasons still being debated, planters

105. Patricia J. Tracy, "Re-Considering Migration within Colonial New England," *Journal of Social History* 23 (1989): 95.

106. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 19.

107. Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 7-8.

108. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 19.

109. This was hardly the case among enslaved couples, who often could not live together, generally lacked legal recognition, and for whom the slave trade proved absolutely devastating to family

began to switch from servant labor to slave labor in the latter part of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁰ Life expectancies were increasing at the same time that the sex imbalance was diminishing due to the end of (primarily male) indentured servant importations by the year 1700, resulting soon in a growing population that was dominated for the first time by native-born people and not immigrants.¹¹¹ In the words of history professor-turned-filmmaker Daniel Blake Smith, “these changes helped make eighteenth-century planter families more stable, created an intimate ‘family society,’ and deepened the sense of kinship in ways rarely experienced in the seventeenth-century Chesapeake.”¹¹²

The entire economic system of the South was also undergoing a rather drastic revision beyond the switch to chattel slavery. For example, Scottish merchants inserted themselves as middlemen to broker the sale of tobacco back to England, whereas previously the gentry would directly sell both their own crops as well as those of their poorer neighbors.¹¹³ This change reduced both profits and the potential for economic and social control.¹¹⁴ Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, the social system was increasingly dominated by an elite class of native-born male planters for whom marriage was used strategically to secure both status and wealth.¹¹⁵ The average age of marriage

life. The impacts of this are still felt, long after Civil Rights Act of 1866 first guaranteed the right of marriage to African Americans. See especially the Introduction in Tera W. Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

110. For a brief summary of the issues, see Paul G. E. Clemens, "Reimagining the Political Economy of Early Virginia," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2011).

111. Smith, "Study of the Family," 9.

112. Smith, "Study of the Family," 9-10.

113. Coontz, *Social Origins*, 107-108.

114. Coontz, *Social Origins*, 107-108.

115. Brown, *Good Wives*, 247-249.

correspondingly decreased quite a bit, to as young as sixteen-and-a-half for women in one Maryland county that was studied.¹¹⁶ Along with the demographic changes, this also meant that marriages tended to last longer,¹¹⁷ resulting in far more children – perhaps as many as eight on average, with five or six often surviving to adulthood.¹¹⁸

This shift in Southern life does not mean that it had yet converged with that of New England, however. Life expectancies for Chesapeake residents had not caught up to their Northern counterparts and most children could still expect to experience the death of their parents before reaching adulthood.¹¹⁹ It would not be until the second half of the eighteenth century that the children of Southern planters would become free to select their own marriage partners.¹²⁰ As Mintz and Kellogg put it, throughout the colonies on the eve of the Revolution, “a new style of family life was beginning to emerge, emphasizing domestic intimacy, the care and nurture of children, and freedom in choice of a spouse.”¹²¹

Looking for Love in the 17th and 18th Centuries

The picture presented so far would seem to suggest that marriage was simply a form of mercantile exchange during most of the colonial period, intended only to solidify a family’s economic and social prospects and ensure the family business could continue

116. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 40.

117. Smith, "Mortality and the Family," 404-405.

118. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 40.

119. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 40.

120. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 41.

121. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 41.

to exist. That is not entirely the case. For an ever-growing number of people, marriage was seen as something bigger than an investment. Yet, as one American sociologist noted quite some time ago, “marrying for money, so common in Europe, died a slow death in this country.”¹²²

Indeed, no one less than the esteemed Benjamin Franklin spoke out against thinking of marriage simply as an economic transaction. In 1746, he wrote and published a book, claiming not to know who the author actually was. The book consisted of two letters purportedly written to continue an in-person discussion being held by several bachelors who held a rather low view of women.¹²³ In the work, Franklin wrote that “many unhappy matches are occasioned by mercenary views in one or both of the parties.”¹²⁴ Of course, the fact that he felt the need to defend this position implies that many others felt otherwise.

A similar sentiment can be drawn from the pages of the *New-England Courant*, an early newspaper founded by Benjamin Franklin’s older brother James. In December 1721, James Franklin opened an issue with a poem entitled “On Sylvia, the Fair, A Jingle.” It pokes fun at the notion of marrying for financial gain:¹²⁵

A Swarm of Sparks, young, gay, and bold,
Lov’d Sylvia long, but she was cold;

122. Ray E. Baber, *Marriage and the Family*, McGraw-Hill Publications in Sociology, ed. Edward Byron Reuter (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), 97.

123. Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 152.

124. Benjamin Franklin, *Reflections on Courtship and Marriage: In Two Letters to a Friend: Wherein a Practicable Plan is Laid Down for Obtaining and Securing Conjugal Felicity*, *Reflections on Courtship and Marriage* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1746), 7, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/apps/readex/doc?p=EVAN&docref=image/v2%3A0F2B1FCB879B099B%40EAIX-0F301599D8A72070%40-1026E097F3F31A50%401>, Readex: Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans.

125. Baber, *Marriage and the Family*, 97.

In'trest and Pride the Nymph control'd,
So they in vain their Passion told.
At last came Dulman, he was old,
Nay, he was ugly, but had Gold.
He came, and saw, and took the Hold.
While t'other Beaux their Lots Condol'd.
Some say, she's Wed; I say, she's sold.¹²⁶

When exactly this understanding of marriage fell out of favor is a somewhat complex narrative to unravel.

In the scholarship of a previous generation, it was commonly held that the idea of a “love match” – or a couple marrying primarily for love – did not begin until the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ Instead, we can see its roots much earlier. As far back as the Middle Ages, the church had encouraged couples to love each other, although this was used in the sense of “marital affection,” intended to foster an attitude of respect and deference.¹²⁸ Thus in the Sarum matrimonial rite, the declaration of consent required each member of the couple to pledge to love, honor, and keep the other.¹²⁹

By the Tudor period, most English couples could expect to find love, either before or after entering into marriage – although this was intended as a companionate love motivated by mutual liking and shied away from a romantic love based on sexual

126. James Franklin, "On Sylvia, the Fair, a Jingle," *The New-England Courant*, December 4, 1721, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.82180127>.

127. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 123. She notes that this area of scholarship is not yet unanimous.

128. Conor McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature and Practice* (Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 94-95.

129. The relevant Latin verbs are *diligere*, *honorare*, *tenere* and *custodire* for the man and *obedire*, *servire*, *diligere*, *honorare*, and *custodire* for the woman. See A. Jefferies Collins, ed., *Manuale Ad Usus Percelebris Ecclesie Sarisburiensis* (Chichester: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960), 47. In the York Manual, in which the words were printed in English, “worship” replaced “honor.” See Mark Searle and Kenneth Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 165.

attraction.¹³⁰ In fact, a saying popularized by the Elizabethan play *Jack Drum's Entertainment* was apparently that “love should make marriage, and not marriage love.”¹³¹ Demonstrating the ambivalence around the topic, a contrasting proverb from another play just a few years later suggests that “the fashion among them [the genteel] is to marry first, and love after by leisure.”¹³² Regardless of whether it was a necessary prerequisite for marriage, love was beginning to be considered one of its essential elements. Thus, the early seventeenth-century English pastor and relationship advisor William Gouge could write:

If at first there be a good liking mutually and thoroughly settled in both their hearts of one another, love is like to continue in them forever, as things which are well glued, and settled before they be shaken up and down, will never be severed asunder; but if they be joined together without glue, or shaken while the glue is moist, they cannot remain firm. Mutual love and good liking of each other is as glue.¹³³

It only follows that similar sentiments would travel across the Atlantic with the English settlers.

In this regard, both popular thought and historiography have been rather unkind in their characterizations of the Puritan émigrés who filled much of New England. For example, the early-to-mid-twentieth century American journalist H. L. Mencken, a man

130. David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 261.

131. Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Collection of the Proverbs Found in English Literature and the Dictionaries of the Period* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 398.

132. Tilley, *Dictionary of the Proverbs*, 398. This and the previous proverb were cited by Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*.

133. William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treatises* (London: John Haviland, 1622), 197. https://archive.org/details/bim_early-english-books-1475-1640_of-domesticall-duties_gouge-william_1622/. This work was also cited by Cressy. I have modernized Gouge's spelling here for ease of reading.

who had no shortage of opinions about religion, scathingly defined Puritanism as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere might be happy.”¹³⁴ Similarly, in a self-consciously satirical episode of the English television series *Black Adder*, Puritans were presented as not just being opposed to anything that brings any amount of pleasure (such as chairs or meat) but were also well aware that everyone hated them.¹³⁵

More charitably and also more accurately, as the modern pastor and theologian Belden Lane puts it, “far from being simply a dour people of stern moral exactitude, the Puritans were motivated most deeply by a passion for personal intimacy with God.”¹³⁶ Puritan culture could actually be characterized as one that delighted in the beauty of God’s creation¹³⁷ and one of the things that God both created and commanded was love.¹³⁸ This allowed the Massachusetts poet Edward Taylor to express this remarkably tender view of marriage sometime around 1682 or 1683:

A Curious Knot God made in Paradise,
And drew it out inamled neatly Fresh.
It was the True-Love Knot, more sweet than spice
And set with all the flowres of Graces dress.
Its Weddens Knot, that ne’re can be unti’de.
No Alexanders Sword can it divide.¹³⁹

134. H. L. Mencken, ed., *A Mencken Chrestomathy: His Own Selection of His Choicest Writings* (New York: Knopf, 1949; reprint, Vintage Books, 1982), 624.

135. *Black Adder*, season 2, episode 5, “Beer,” directed by Mandie Fletcher, written by Richard Curtis and Ben Elton, aired February 13, 1986, on BBC.

136. Belden C. Lane, “Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism,” *Church History* 69, no. 2 (2000): 373.

137. Lane, “Two Schools of Desire,” 374.

138. Joel R. Beeke and Paul Smalley, “Puritans on Marital Love,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 12, no. 1 (2020): 155-156.

139. Edward Taylor, “Upon Wedlock, and Death of Children,” in *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, ed. Donald E. Stanford (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1960), 468. This poem was cited in a reduced form in Beeke and Smalley, “Puritans on Marital Love,” 155. The dating comes from Stanford, 469.

Even human sexuality fell into the realm of things that were created by God and could be pleasing to God as long as the marriage bed was kept undefiled.¹⁴⁰ Opposed to the medieval Roman Catholic insistence that celibacy was superior to married life, the Puritans believed that marital love was joyfully and exuberantly sexual.¹⁴¹ Returning to the marriage advice of William Gouge, himself an English Puritan, one of the best remedies against adultery was for “husband and wife to continually delight each in other, and maintain a pure and fervent love betwixt themselves.”¹⁴² He goes on to describe the “due benevolence” that husband and wife owe each other according to First Corinthians chapter 7, suggesting that physical relations were an inherent part of marriage and not just necessary for procreation and preventing sin.¹⁴³ This sex positivity was greatly tempered, however, by the Puritan insistence that lust must still be avoided and that intercourse be enjoyed only sparingly and after first engaging in prayer together.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps, as for just about every other facet of life for the Puritans, moderation was the key.¹⁴⁵

To the south, there are signs that such restraint was not necessarily considered a virtue. A rather infamous example is found in the journals of William Byrd II, one of Virginia’s wealthy planters. He had a particularly low estimation of his wife Lucy’s

140. Daniel Doriani, "The Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 133.

141. Beeke and Smalley, "Puritans on Marital Love," 164-165.

142. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 221-222. I have once again modernized his spelling.

143. Doriani, "Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," 132.

144. Doriani, "Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," 133-135.

145. Doriani, "Puritans, Sex, and Pleasure," 139.

ability to effectively run the household and a high estimation of both her extravagance in financial expenditure and her emotional fragility, all of which caused them to argue with some regularity.¹⁴⁶ William describes an especially cold July day in 1710 during which he quarreled with Lucy after earlier reading a sermon and then taking a short nap. Their fight was soon reconciled, however, with “a flourish” that took place on the family billiard table, and the evening then found him in a much better mood.¹⁴⁷ He seems to have never actually reflected on his love for her – at least in his writings – until after her death from smallpox in 1716.¹⁴⁸

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the importance of emotional connection can be seen with far less ambiguity. Later in Franklin’s 1746 fictive letter, he describes the ideal marriage in this way:

The real Felicity of Marriage does undoubtedly consist in a Union of Minds, and a Sympathy of Affections; in a mutual Esteem and Friendship for each other in the highest Degree possible. But in that Alliance, where Interest and Fortune only is considered, those refined and tender Sentiments are neither felt or known.¹⁴⁹

When those ideals were not realized, one increasingly common outcome was divorce – at least in New England where marriage was considered to be more of a secular than religious issue.¹⁵⁰ In Massachusetts, for example, the rate of divorce increased significantly in the second half of the eighteenth century, although it was certainly never common compared to modern standards: only 158 cases in total between 1755 and

146. Paula A. Treckel, "'The Empire of My Heart': The Marriage of William Byrd II and Lucy Parke Byrd," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 105, no. 2 (1997).

147. Treckel, "Empire of My Heart," 125.

148. Treckel, "Empire of My Heart," 154.

149. Franklin, *Reflections on Courtship and Marriage*, 8. Italics omitted.

150. Ellen Feldman, "Till Divorce Do Us Part," *American Heritage* 51, no. 7 (2000).

1786.¹⁵¹ In Virginia, where Anglican ecclesiastical rules prevailed but the colony lacked the necessary bishops and church courts to provide a divorce, all the chancery courts could offer was an order providing for separate maintenance, allowing the spouses to reside separately while the husband still provided financial support.¹⁵² Yet, by eve of the Revolutionary War, there were many who began to encourage the legislature to rethink the inability to divorce (although the first one was not granted until 1803).¹⁵³ As Stone notes, although he was writing about the situation in England during the same period, a rise in marital separations suggests that the emotional expectations placed upon marriage were also rising: “In periods when expectations are low, frustrations will also be low.”¹⁵⁴

Another excellent example of the increased emotionality of marriage toward the end of the colonial period is narrated by historian Jan Lewis, using the words of a pseudonymous colonial author:

Thus “L,” writing in the *Royal American Magazine* in 1774, explained why this “social union is so essential to human happiness.” The married man, he wrote, “by giving pleasure...receives it back again with increase. By this endearing intercourse of friendship and communication of pleasure, the tender feelings and soft passions of the soul are awakened with all the ardour of love and benevolence...In this happy state, man feels a growing attachment to human nature, and love to his country.”¹⁵⁵

151. Nancy F. Cott, "Eighteenth-Century Family and Social Life Revealed in Massachusetts Divorce Records," *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 1 (1976): 21.

152. Glenda Riley, "Legislative Divorce in Virginia, 1803-1850," *Journal of the Early Republic* 11, no. 1 (1991): 52.

153. Riley, "Legislative Divorce in Virginia," 51, 53.

154. Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 223.

155. Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1987): 689. Ellipses in original.

A similar sign of this shift can be found in another practice that began to grow throughout that century: spouses actually addressing one another by first name.¹⁵⁶

Regardless of the role of love in marriage, one thing that probably all of these Protestant colonists could agree upon was that marriage was not a sacrament. The Reformation emphasis on Scripture had convinced Cranmer and at least most of the other English reformers that marriage had not been instituted by Christ and was not required for salvation.¹⁵⁷ Thus, instead of matrimony conveying divine grace, it was beginning to be seen at the time as a means to personal fulfillment.¹⁵⁸

156. James Hitchcock, "The Emergence of the Modern Family," in *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study*, ed. Glenn W. Olsen (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 312.

157. Eric Josef Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation*, Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), 37.

158. R. V. Young, "The Reformations of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study*, ed. Glenn W. Olsen (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 271-272.

Chapter Two: The American Revolution Through the 19th Century

The Road to the First American Book of Common Prayer

As Prichard observes, “it was inevitable that the American Revolution would have major consequences for religious life.”¹ He goes on to describe the complex interplay of politics and religion as well as narrate the history of the founding of the Episcopal Church as a distinct entity from the Church of England.² Liturgically, in the earliest days following the war, the English forms of worship continued to be used as they had been before, with minor alterations – such as removing prayers for the king – either implemented sparingly by state legislatures or clergy acting on their own initiative.³

William White, who was then the rector of two churches in Philadelphia, expressed his reluctance to break from the inherited Anglican liturgy in a 1782 pamphlet entitled *The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered*:

As to divine worship, there must no doubt be somewhere the power of making necessary and convenient alterations in the service of the church. But it ought to be used with great moderation; otherwise the communion will become divided into an infinite number of smaller ones, all differing from one another and from that in England.... Whatever may in other respects be determined on this head, it is presumed the episcopalians are generally attached to that characteristic of their communion, which prescribes a settled form of prayer.”⁴

1. Prichard, *History of the Episcopal Church*, 74.

2. Prichard, *History of the Episcopal Church*, 73-98. See also Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 35-62.

3. Marion J. Hatchett, *The Making of the First American Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 37-39.

4. Richard G. Salomon and Abraham Jarvis, "William White's 'The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered' (1782)," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 22, no. 4 (1953): 455. White's work is also quoted in a reduced form in Hatchett, *First American Book*, 39.

It is worth noting that White was writing under the then-justifiable assumption that the American church would not soon be able to establish its own episcopacy, and thus issues of governance and authority were unsettled.⁵ White's recommendation in the pamphlet was that the churches of each state elect their own convention or "general vestry" for oversight until there were American bishops, and that these bodies could send representatives to larger annual and triannual gatherings.⁶

White's contemporaries can also be seen wrestling with the idea of liturgical continuity. For example, the Protestant Episcopal Church of Maryland adopted the principle in August 1783 that it should:

revise her Liturgy, Forms of Prayer, and public Worship, in order to adapt the same to the late Revolution and other local Circumstances of America... without any other or farther Departure from the venerable Order and beautiful Forms of Worship of the Church from whence we sprung, than may be found expedient in the Change of our Situation from a Daughter to a Sister-Church.⁷

Similarly, one of the organizing principles enacted by a gathering of Pennsylvania Episcopalians in May 1784 was that "Uniformity of Worship be continued, as near as may be, to the Liturgy of the [Church of England]."⁸ Throughout the country, plans were being made by local groups awaiting a larger, more authoritative body being able to gather. Until that could happen, as the modern liturgical historian Marion Hatchett put it,

5. Salomon and Jarvis, "Case of the Episcopal Churches," 435.

6. Prichard, *History of the Episcopal Church*, 84-85.

7. William Stevens Perry, *Historical Notes and Documents Illustrating the Organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (Claremont, NH: Claremont Manufacturing Company, 1874), 24. Italics omitted.

8. Perry, *Historical Notes and Documents*, 27-28. This was also quoted in Hatchett, *First American Book*, 40.

“the only hope of unity seemed to lie in making just the changes necessitated by political independence.”⁹

It was not very long, however, until both the questions of bishops and of governance were resolved. The first issue began to see progress with Samuel Seabury’s consecration to the episcopate by the Scottish Non-Jurors in November 1784, something which has become a rather legendary origin story for the Episcopal Church. Shortly thereafter, the various state and regional gatherings of Episcopalians began to meet together, and David Holmes provides this very brief overview of the initial two General Conventions, which notably did not include Seabury or any representatives from New England:

In 1785 lay and clerical delegates from seven of the nine states south of Connecticut (the Episcopal churches of North Carolina and Georgia were too weak to send delegates) met in Philadelphia in the first General Convention. There they established a constitution, drafted an American version of the Book of Common Prayer, and devised a plan to obtain English consecration for American bishops. Meeting in Philadelphia and Wilmington in 1786, the second General Convention adopted measures that allowed [William] White and Samuel Provoost...to go to England for consecration later in the year. In the meantime, Parliament had passed an act permitting the English bishops to consecrate American bishops without requiring the loyalty oath.¹⁰

Even then, with a larger organizing body in place, there was still little desire to implement radical liturgical change. For example, during a May 1785 meeting to elect its delegates, the Episcopal Church of Virginia instructed them that “should a change in the liturgy be proposed, let it be made with caution; And in that case let the alterations be

9. Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 9.

10. Holmes, *Brief History*, 53.

few, and the stile of prayer continue as agreeable as may be to the essential characteristics of our persuasion.”¹¹

That first General Convention in 1785 (which could rightly be called only a convention of the southern states¹²) began on September 27th and commissioned a sub-committee to propose a new American BCP, with William Smith as its chairman.¹³ Smith, a Scottish Nonjuror who led the College of Philadelphia for decades,¹⁴ has been described in retrospect as an effective and influential pamphleteer who had “all the love of battle, zeal for a cause, and inability to concede any virtue in his opponents.”¹⁵ In a sermon at the conclusion of the gathering, Smith expressed one of the principles that guided their work: that they lived “in a liberal and enlightened age, when Religion...is nevertheless generally better understood.”¹⁶ In this regard, Smith shared the sense of rationalism that emerged in the English church in the eighteenth century and emphasized Scripture as the main guide to worship instead of, as one writer has put it, “fine metaphysical distinctions.”¹⁷

11. Perry, *Historical Notes and Documents*, 49.

12. Indeed, most refuse to use the “General Convention” term for the meetings prior to September 1789. See, for example, William Sydnor, *The Prayer Book Through the Ages* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Morehouse, 1997), 60. The Journals themselves do not use the term until 1811. I have chosen to sparingly adopt the language used by Holmes above for easier continuity in reading.

13. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 52.

14. James Warnock, “Thomas Bradbury Chandler and William Smith: Diversity Within Colonial Anglicanism,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 57, no. 3 (1988): 276-278.

15. Carl Bridenbaugh and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 119.

16. Horace Wemyss Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith, D.D.*, vol. 2 (Ferguson Bros. & Co., 1880: repr., New York: Arno Press, 1972), 134.

17. A. Dean Calcote, “The Proposed Prayer Book of 1785,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 46, no. 3 (1977): 277-282.

Smith and his colleagues began work immediately, and by September 29th, reported that progress had been made.¹⁸ Although Seabury was not present, Smith corresponded with him and at least some of Seabury’s liturgical proposals were probably presented to the gathering.¹⁹ The official convention journal from 1785 is remarkably brief, consisting of only sixteen typeset pages – especially when compared to the modern ones, which tend to run over a thousand. Almost all it records from the business sessions on Wednesday, October 5th is that liturgical changes were read, considered, and proposed for approval by the next General Convention as “consistent with the American revolution and the Constitutions of the respective states.”²⁰ As Hatchett observes, no details of the actual changes discussed by the convention were printed in the journal, but the outcome has been recorded elsewhere.²¹

In the late nineteenth century, William Stevens Perry catalogued the liturgical alterations commended by the convention in 1785 based upon manuscripts found in the General Convention archives. Three of them pertain specifically to the wedding liturgy:

31. That in the exhortation before Matrimony, all between these words, *holy matrimony* and *therefore, if any man, &c.*, be omitted.
32. That the words *I plight thee my troth* be omitted in both places, and also the words *with my body I thee worship*, and also *pledged their troth either to other*.
33. That all after the Blessing be omitted.²²

18. Journal of Convention 1785, 6. All of the Journals of [General] Convention were helpfully collected and published online by the Archives of the Episcopal Church at <https://www.episcopalarchives.info/governance-documents/journals-of-gc>. In late 2025, they were moved to <https://episcopalarchives.org/governance-documents/journals-of-gc/>. They will be cited hereinafter as simply “Journal” and the year and page.

19. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 53.

20. Journal 1785, 11.

21. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 55, 173n.7.

22. William Stevens Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church 1587-1883* (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1885), 109. Italics in original.

The first edit removed a significant portion of the opening exhortation, including the theological assertions that marriage was instituted by God and that it signified the union between Christ and the Church. Also gone were the long-standing purposes of Christian marriage that had been given in the 1662 BCP as procreation, prevention of sin, and mutual help and comfort. These principles, however, went as far back in the tradition as Augustine of Hippo's three goods of marriage: children (*proles*), the sexual fidelity of the spouses (*fides*), and the stability of the marital household (*sacramentum*).²³ Along the way, the convention also removed any reference to the miracle of water being turned into wine in Cana – perhaps because the story was found too irrational to repeat.

The second change removed outdated language, discussed above, that was likely to provoke misunderstandings at best or idolatry at worst. With the third modification, a rather lengthy and somewhat repetitive portion of the English service was removed that had included a psalm, a series of prayers, a prescribed sermonette on the nature of marriage, and an instruction that the couple should receive Communion either immediately or at the next opportunity. It also had the unfortunate effect of eliminating the Lord's Prayer. Thus, when the Proposed Book was published the next spring, its marriage service was a greatly slimmed-down version of the English 1662 rite.

The printed version that appeared in 1786 also contained some relatively minor additional changes beyond those proposed to convention that were likely the work of an editorial committee consisting of Smith, William White, and Charles Wharton.²⁴ Hatchett suggests that they “interpreted the extent of their editorial powers rather freely” and that

23. John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 67-70.

24. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 66.

they were broadly criticized for this.²⁵ As pertains to marriage, the final edition included only a few other significant modifications beyond those described above. The first reflected a change implemented throughout the book from “priest” to “minister.” A second one altered the opening rubric to eliminate a requirement that the wedding take place in the church and was instead silent regarding the location of the service, a change reflecting the lack of churches and clergy at that time which was described above. Third, the publication of banns became subject to state law and any required format for them was omitted. An official allowance was also made for marrying under license instead of banns, which, as we have seen, was also common practice at the time.

Hatchett concludes that the Proposed Book was overall a conservative and restrained revision of the 1662 BCP.²⁶ Our look at the marriage service shows that this was indeed true in some respects, as it used the English liturgy as its base and included essentially no new content or teaching. Structurally, it would have seemed very similar to the casual attendee, although certainly much shorter of a service through which to sit. On the other hand, it eliminated plenty of the theological material that Cranmer had taken such pains to write. In the abbreviated opening exhortation, for example, the proposed American liturgy was actually closer to the medieval Latin rite than it was to that of the Church of England. The social context was also closer in some ways, reflecting the time, as James White puts it, before “weddings had finally arrived at the church’s door where other legal contracts were performed.”²⁷

25. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 85.

26. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 85.

27. James F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith*, Kindle ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 128.

Yet the Proposed Book displayed a far more modern understanding of marital sexuality that had evolved well beyond Cranmer's belief that sex was only to be utilized out of necessity for procreation and the restraint from sexual impulses,²⁸ and thus made no more reference to men as brute beasts with carnal lusts. Stevenson is thus also no doubt accurate when he calls this matrimonial liturgy in particular "a somewhat heavy-handed reduction, though this may reflect a desire for a speedy rite in an unsettled and mobile setting."²⁹ It certainly reflected the general thought process of at least one member of the editorial committee, as Wharton had written in two 1785 letters his desire to simplify the liturgy by reducing the number of prayers and repetitions contained in it.³⁰

Following the publication, the various state conventions gathered to approve the draft book for trial use, with many also proposing additional changes³¹ – although apparently none of any significance to the matrimonial rite since most of the energy seemed to be taken up with the services of Holy Communion, Morning Prayer, and Baptism. Despite its general authorization, the general reaction to the Proposed Book was lackluster, with sales reportedly quite low.³² The future first Bishop of Maryland, Thomas Claggett, wrote to a friend that "the people of this congregation...universally disapprove of ye new Book."³³ The convention of New York declined to authorize its use, in part

28. MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 58-59.

29. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 147.

30. Christopher M. Agnew, "The Reverend Charles Wharton, Bishop William White and The Proposed Book of Common Prayer, 1785," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 58, no. 4 (1989): 521-522.

31. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 87-93.

32. Sydnor, *Prayer Book*, 58.

33. Quoted in Hatchett, *First American Book*, 89.

“out of respect to the English Bishops,” and deferred a decision to the future.³⁴ It has been suggested that one of the reasons for the book’s poor reception was that many – including those present at the convention – had attempted to treat it as a *fait accompli* and not simply as a liturgical proposal for further study and discussion.³⁵ There was also a widespread concern that liturgical alteration should only be done by bishops.³⁶

When the same seven states gathered again in Philadelphia for the second arguably-titled General Convention in June 1786, this issue of authority to approve liturgical change came up once again. At the previous year’s convention, a Constitution had been adopted, and in Article IX, it allowed for use of the Proposed Book “when the same shall have been ratified by the Conventions which have respectively sent Deputies to this General Convention.”³⁷ This second convention now amended that article to allow for it to be used by the states that approved it but deferred any national authorization until “the first General Convention which shall assemble with sufficient power to ratify a Book of Common Prayer for the Church in these States.”³⁸ With that move, there was no further consideration of the Proposed Book at the convention.³⁹

It would be three years before the sufficiently authoritative gathering would finally meet. Now with three bishops in place, the nascent church could complete one of the most important tasks in the creation of its unique identity and finalize its own prayer

34. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 93.

35. Calcote, "Proposed Prayer Book of 1785," 291.

36. Sydnor, *Prayer Book*, 58.

37. Journal 1785, 10.

38. Journal 1786, 26.

39. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 93.

book. This work was to be done by the next General Convention, which met in 1789 and finally brought together what had effectively been two different denominations: a middle and southern group following the English line and Seabury's New England group following the Scottish.⁴⁰

Two sessions were held in Philadelphia, the first from July 28 to August 8, and the second from September 29 to October 16. The delegation from Connecticut, including Seabury, and Samuel Parker, a clerical deputy representing Massachusetts and New Hampshire, were all officially seated on October 2nd.⁴¹ This formal recognition of a third bishop triggered a new provision in the church constitution that split the convention into two houses: a House of Bishops and a House of Clerical and Lay Deputies, the latter electing Smith as its president the next day.⁴² One of the first orders of business for this lower house was the "appointment of committees on the different departments of the Book of Common Prayer", as White later phrased it.⁴³ As they were considering the regular services of the church, the two bishops (with Provoost missing the convention due to illness) were at work on the occasional services.⁴⁴ Since the official journal recorded little of the process, much of the history must be gleaned from White's *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*.⁴⁵

40. Prichard, *History of the Episcopal Church*, 94-96.

41. Journal 1789, 74.

42. Ibid, 73-74.

43. William White, *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America From Its Organization Up To the Present Day*, 2nd ed. (New York: Swords, Stanford, and Co., 1836), 147.

44. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 110.

45. William McGarvey, *Liturgiae Americanae or The Book of Common Prayer As Used in the United States of America Compared with the Proposed Book of 1786 and With the Prayer Book of The*

The question quickly arose as to what should form the basis of their new prayer book. White favorably recalled a resolution proposed by Parker “that the English book should be the ground of the proceedings held, without any reference to that set out and proposed in 1785.”⁴⁶ Others, however, believed that “a liturgy ought to be formed, without reference to any existing book, although with liberty to take from any, whatever the convention should think fit.”⁴⁷ In the end, White asserts, the committees’ mandate to *prepare* services as opposed to *altering* them expressed the mood of the convention – a break from their historical roots of which White did not approve.⁴⁸ A century ago, it was generally held that the 1789 General Convention did not even “deem it necessary to mention the Proposed Book, much less to abolish its use,” as one commentary puts it.⁴⁹ However, Hatchett sets forth a convincing case that the Proposed Book of 1785/6 did largely serve as the basis for their liturgical work after all.⁵⁰ Other sources included material proposed by the various state conventions and several then-recently published English books of Latitudinarian sympathy.⁵¹ It’s unclear what influenced the discussion

Church of England and an Historical Account and Documents (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Church Publishing Company, 1907), xxviii.

46. White, *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 147. This is also quoted in Hatchett, *First American Book*.

47. White, *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 147.

48. White, *Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 147.

49. Francis Procter and Walter Howard Frere, *A New History of the Book of Common Prayer with a Rationale of its Offices* (London: Macmillan, 1910), 239.

50. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 1-2.

51. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, 8-10.

regarding marriage, however, since the official journal simply notes that a “form for the solemnization of matrimony” was approved on the fourteenth of October.⁵²

Once again, however, this finished product was not actually completed by the conclusion of the convention. On its last day, the House of Deputies appointed a five-person editorial committee to “superintend the printing of the Book of Common Prayer, as set forth by this Convention.”⁵³ The committee, joined by Bishop White, began work right away on October 19th but did not provide anything to the printers until January 16, 1790, apparently due to financial and copyright concerns.⁵⁴ This time, however, the editorial committee was more faithful to its limited mandate and attempted only to implement the decisions made at the convention.⁵⁵ What they delivered to the publishing house of Hall and Sellers was a pamphlet containing most of the liturgical changes, which has helpfully been reprinted by Perry.⁵⁶ The portion relevant to matrimony is remarkably brief:

The introductory Address in the Marriage service to be read thus

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate, these two persons present come now to be joined. If any man can shew just cause, why, &c.

*At giving the Ring, the words with my body I thee worship, are omitted. And also the remainder of the service after the blessing.*⁵⁷

52. Journal 1789, 83. The House of Bishops approval is on 91.

53. Journal 1789, 85-86.

54. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 113.

55. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 115.

56. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 113, 182n.3.

57. Perry, *Historical Notes and Documents*, 456. Italics in original.

This appears to be a slight reworking of the alterations made by the Convention of 1785 that were discussed above. In fact, one of White's letters suggests that this form of the opening exhortation had been considered in 1785 but rejected.⁵⁸

Now finalized and printed, the 1789 BCP contained a matrimonial liturgy that ended up forming a hybrid between the English 1662 BCP and the American Proposed Book, as exemplified by its opening exhortation that returned to a scriptural foundation for marriage but left out its purposes. It was once again a "holy estate," but men did not go back to being "brute beasts." Similarly, the instruction just prior to the exhortation now read that the marriage should take place either in the church or "in some proper house," which seemingly reflected the reality underlying the 1785 revision. Yet it brought back the requirement that the man stand on the right and the woman on the left, which, as described in the previous chapter, was an old English tradition from the Sarum Manual that had been resurrected in the 1662 BCP. It retained the use of *minister* instead of *priest*, although other portions of the 1789 BCP returned to the older term.⁵⁹ The Lord's Prayer also made a comeback, although it was moved up to immediately follow the exchange of vows and rings. Stevenson believes this may have represented a desire to follow what was seen as Cranmer's intention of placing that element directly after the important action, as he did with baptism and eucharist.⁶⁰

In all, Hatchett sees the 1789 marriage liturgy as an abridgement of the English 1662 service that retained the civil espousal elements but eliminated the sacramental

58. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 126, 185n.45.

59. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 118, 183n.8.

60. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 147.

action afterwards.⁶¹ Indeed, a mid-nineteenth century commentator suggested that “no part of our Liturgy has been so considerably abridged, and otherwise altered from the English Book as the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony.”⁶² Although it was clearly rooted in the Anglican tradition, its shapers felt a freedom to depart from that tradition when necessary. This is because, as Stevenson puts it in his characteristically sardonic style, “American Episcopalians were in no mood to love, cherish, and obey the English Establishment.”⁶³

Marriage After the Revolution

As we saw in the previous chapter, by the latter part of the eighteenth century, the ideal marriage was one characterized by emotional connection and some version of love. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, marriage had begun to be seen more as a private relationship with public ramifications rather than a means toward economic or political advancement.⁶⁴ In addition, there were also civic consequences, since good marriages were seen as important for producing good citizens for the new country and bringing much-needed stability to its society.⁶⁵ The future president John Adams wrote of this societal impact in 1778 that “the foundations of national Morality must be laid in

61. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, 430.

62. Thomas Church Brownell, *The Family Prayer Book, or The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America; Accompanied by a General Commentary, Historical, Explanatory, Doctrinal, and Practical: Compiled from the Most Approved Liturgical Works, with Alterations and Additions, and Accommodated to the Liturgy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1850), 462.

63. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 147.

64. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 145-147.

65. Cott, *Public Vows*, 17-18.

private Families” and went on to express that children needed to learn principles and habits in the home, primarily from their mothers. He further elaborated on its importance by saying that marriage was “not only a civil and moral Engagement, but a Sacrament, one of the most solemn Vows and Oaths of Religious devotion.”⁶⁶

By the end of the eighteenth century, arranged marriages were no longer the norm and partners wanted a love match.⁶⁷ This privatization and democratization of marriage raised fears that young people would marry the wrong mate and that unions would be inherently fragile if they were only held together by emotion.⁶⁸ As we shall see in the next chapter, these fears would take over a century to actually be realized in the United States. But given the understanding of marriage as a main social underpinning of American civilization, there was an increased interest in marrying wisely after the Revolution, which Cott describes well:

Essays and doggerel...defined marital companionship, advised on choice of mate, prescribed how to achieve fairness and balance between the partners. Many fictions centered on the consequences of husband and wife being well matched or mismatched. In this flood of authorship, marriage appeared ideally as a symmetrical union. Marital relations were reenvisioned in terms of reciprocal rights and responsibilities rather than formal hierarchy. Not protection and obedience, not headship and subordination, but rather “the mutual return of *conjugal love*”...defined a happy marriage.⁶⁹

At least this was the prevailing ideal even if the goal was an ambitious one. As part of a running column that purported to be a father’s advice to his daughters, a writer in 1790

66. L.H. Butterfield, Leonard C. Faber, and Wendell D. Garrett, eds., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 123.

67. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 145-146.

68. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 149-150.

69. Cott, *Public Vows*, 16. Italics in original.

believed that “what is commonly called love among you is rather gratitude” and that “without an unusual share of natural sensibility, and very peculiar good fortune, a woman has very little probability of marrying for love.”⁷⁰ For this father, at least, marriage was grounded in mutual esteem that then turned into an attachment. Under the right circumstances, this could turn into love.

Despite the pursuit of the love match, parents could still exercise some amount of real influence, and perhaps even veto their child’s choice of spouse in the early nineteenth century.⁷¹ An example of this can be found in the collected correspondence of Eliza Southgate, who wrote her mother in September 1802 that while visiting Salem, she had met a man named Mr. (Walter) Bowne. She was poised to turn nineteen years old several weeks later. In her letter, she tells her parents that Bowne had been “particularly attentive” to her and that they had seen each other for the past four weeks on various excursions. Further, from other friends who were there, she was able to learn that he was “uniform in his conduct and *very much respected*.” Yet even though she greatly enjoyed his company, she felt that she was not able to entertain his advances without first at least discussing the matter with her parents. Thus, she wrote that she would “submit myself wholly to the wishes of my Father and you, convinced that my happiness is your warmest wish, and to promote it has ever been your study.”⁷² They married the next year, although

70. Anonymous, “A Father’s Advice to His Daughters: Friendship, Love and Marriage,” *The Christian’s, Scholar’s, and Farmer’s Magazine*, Apr/May 1790, ProQuest American Periodicals.

71. Degler, *At Odds*, 12.

72. Clarence Cook, ed., *A Girl’s Life Eighty Years Ago: Selections from the Letters of Eliza Southgate Bowne* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 138-141. Italics in the original. I learned of this correspondence from Degler, *At Odds*, 12-13.

their relationship was cut tragically short when Eliza died following the birth of their second child six years later.⁷³

Despite this new emphasis on a proper match between husband and wife, it would be a mistake to see marriages in this era as yet egalitarian in the sense that the term might be employed today. For example, when Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John in March of 1776, she asked him to shape a new national set of laws that would “remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them” since all men tended toward being tyrants when they could.⁷⁴ Yet he wrote back to her that his response had been to laugh at her idea.⁷⁵ As one legal scholar concluded, male authority would rule supreme all the way through the entire nineteenth century. Instead, he notes, the egalitarianism at play here reflected just the beginning of a gradual social trend throughout that century toward decreased deference toward social superiors, an increased sense of personal worth, and a religious focus on equality in the eyes of God.⁷⁶ It is no coincidence that the word *individualism* has been categorized as an invention of the nineteenth century.⁷⁷

After Alexis de Tocqueville came from France to visit the United States in 1831, he later called this sense of individualism a defining trait of American society.⁷⁸ In trying

73. Cook, *Girl's Life*, vi.

74. L.H. Butterfield, Wendell D. Garrett, and Marjorie E. Sprague, eds., *Adams Family Correspondence*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 370.

75. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 151.

76. Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America*, Studies in Legal History, ed. G. Edward White (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 7.

77. Koenraad W. Swart, "'Individualism' in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (1826-1860)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23, no. 1 (1962): 77.

78. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 43.

to explain the strange new nation to his countrymen back home, Tocqueville observed that its citizens tended to focus more on themselves and their family and friends, rather than the broader society.⁷⁹ So novel was this idea that Henry Reeve, the first translator of Tocqueville's work into English, had to apologize for using a French word to express an idea that had no English counterpart.⁸⁰ Individualism, or in French, *individualisme*, had grown in use following the French Revolution⁸¹ but would now be used to explain the new kind of American family that emerged in the early part of the nineteenth century.

This democratic family, as Tocqueville termed it, is described by Mintz and Kellogg as:

a form of marriage that emphasized companionship and mutual affection, by a more intense concern on the part of parents with the proper upbringing of children, and by a new division of sex roles, according to which the husband was to be the family's bread-winner and the wife was to specialize in child rearing and homemaking. Mutual affection and a sense of duty provided the basis for the democratic family's existence.⁸²

Gone was the family as the unit of society that was responsible for childcare, economic production, education and religious observance. New was the expectation that men would be the breadwinners for their families at the office or factory while women kept the house and raised children, which was a disruption of the economic partnership from the family farm days.⁸³ The new paradigm was aptly expressed in the published advice (ca. 1841) of

79. Elkin Terry Jack, "Alexis de Tocqueville's America," *National Civic Review* 106, 1 (2017): 30.

80. Nadia Urbinati, *The Tyranny of the Moderns*, trans. Martin Thom (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015), 50.

81. Steven Lukes, "The Meanings of 'Individualism'," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 1 (1971): 45.

82. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 43.

83. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 50-51.

a mother to her daughter on the occasion of her marriage, when she suggested that “it is for the man to provide, and for the wife to care and see that every thing within her circle of movement, is done in order and season.... You will be the mistress of your own house, and observe the rules in which you have been educated.”⁸⁴

This shift away from economic production also ushered in a significant change to family sizes, with the typical woman having seven or eight children at the beginning of the nineteenth century, five or six by its mid-point, and only three or four by its end such that the rearing of children replaced the birth of children as a woman’s major task.⁸⁵ Family planning was aided by the use of abortion and contraception, practices which were both often the subject of public condemnation and were increasingly regulated by the courts through the nineteenth century, yet were still commonly utilized.⁸⁶ The family was now a private refuge from the demands of a burgeoning economy instead of a driver of household industry that, at its best, now brought its members security and emotional harmony.⁸⁷ Historian Carl Degler has called the transition that included these changes and took place primarily in the first fifty years following the Revolutionary War as the beginning of the “modern American family.”⁸⁸

By the latter half of the century, parents’ influence over their daughters’ marital partners had waned even more. If they now wished to exercise their veto, their options

84. Anonymous, “Brother Jonathan’s Wife’s Advice to her Daughter on the Day of her Marriage,” *The New England Farmer*, Jan. 6, 1841, ProQuest American Periodicals.

85. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 51.

86. Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 155.

87. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 50-52.

88. Degler, *At Odds*, 8-9.

would generally be limited to either sending her away altogether or moving the entire family to another town.⁸⁹ More likely, they would acknowledge that love, which Degler has called “the purest form of individualism,” was the most important factor and would provide their consent even if they were less than thrilled with the suitor.⁹⁰ As parents’ influence over the courtship process waned, then young women’s autonomy naturally grew – especially since the European practice of chaperoning the dates of unmarried couples was not commonplace in nineteenth-century America except among urban elites quite late in the century.⁹¹ Unmarried couples were allowed or even encouraged to spend time alone together and certainly were known to express their emotions through sometimes frequent kissing.⁹²

If this sounds to the modern reader like a recipe for an uptick in rates of premarital sexual activity, that does not seem to have been the case. During course of the nineteenth century, there was a profound shift in the societal perception of sexuality – and women’s sexuality in particular – that has often been characterized in the historiography of the past as nearly full repression. A somewhat amusing expression of this tendency can be found in the diary of Captain Frederick Marryat, who reported in the late 1830s from his exploration of the United States that he had found American women who were so sensitive that they refused to use the word *leg* and instead would only speak of a *limb*. Taken to its absurd extreme, however, Marryat claimed to have seen a girls’ school that

89. Degler, *At Odds*, 12.

90. Degler, *At Odds*, 14.

91. Degler, *At Odds*, 20.

92. Degler, *At Odds*, 20-22.

even dressed the legs of its piano in trousers to protect the modesty of its pupils.⁹³ Coontz also blames this era for the creation of “white meat” and “dark meat” as circumlocutions for a chicken’s breast and thigh, respectively.⁹⁴

Yet sexuality was not entirely a taboo subject, and a cottage industry of medical texts on the subject arose. A frequently cited example of this can be found in the book written by William Acton over multiple editions in the mid-part of the century. He claimed “the majority of women (happily for them) are not much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally.”⁹⁵ He further suggested that women only gave in to their husbands’ desires out of love for them and sometimes the added knowledge that their husbands would leave them for other women if they did not.⁹⁶ Of course, it must be noted that this is the same physician who believed “beyond a doubt” that masturbation was a major cause of insanity.⁹⁷

Social theorist Steven Seidman has described the traditional understanding of Victorian sexuality that prevailed until quite late in the twentieth century in this way:

According to this view, the Victorians denied that women possess sexual feelings; they sought to purge sex of its sensual aspects and restrict its role to a procreative one; Victorian marriage was, finally, described as characteristically cold as the relations between husband and wife were emotionally distant and formal. The

93. Carl N. Degler, "What Ought To Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 5 (1974): 1467.

94. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 177.

95. Quoted in Degler, *At Odds*, 250.

96. William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life Considered in Their Physiological, Social, and Moral Relations*, 7th ed. (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1888), 181.

97. Acton, *Functions and Disorders*, 62.

Victorians, in other words, were thought to be responsible for creating the sex-negative culture that twentieth century “moderns” have rebelled against.⁹⁸

That view, while still oft repeated, has largely fallen out of favor even though its influence lingers. Indeed, although written by a medical historian thirty years ago about the situation in England, it is probably just as appropriate to the United States today that even though we “debunked the Victorians almost a century ago...we still feel compelled to grapple with their ghosts, and in no area more than their views on sexuality.”⁹⁹ Two of these particular ghosts are that they did not perceive women as sexual beings and that issues of sexuality were not fit for public conversation.

Instead, Cott has shown that during the previous colonial period, women were thought to have at least as much sexual passion as men, and oftentimes even more so – and it was mainly a reversal of that trend that primarily characterized the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ As we saw above, female hyperactive sexuality was believed to be a major source of societal ills in the previous century. Works such as Acton’s, then, served as prescriptive attempts at change and cannot be relied upon as accurately descriptive of lived experience.¹⁰¹ When he calls frequent intercourse, even between married couples, both dangerous and “almost criminal,”¹⁰² we should probably infer that he is swimming against a strong current. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century when the

98. Steven Seidman, "The Power of Desire and the Danger of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 1 (1990): 47.

99. Roy Porter, review of *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*, by Michael Mason, *The English Historical Review* 111, no. 444 (1996): 1325.

100. Nancy F. Cott, "Passionless: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4, no. 2 (1978): 221.

101. Degler, *At Odds*, 253.

102. Acton, *Functions and Disorders*, 188.

medical writers would become more interested in scientific evidence than in preaching morality.¹⁰³ Degler takes the blissfully idealistic position that by instructing couples to limit their sexual activity, Victorian era advisors and physicians such as Acton were actually attempting to increase women's autonomy in their marriages by providing relief from what they saw as men's relentless attempts at sexual excess.¹⁰⁴

A sturdier conclusion is that the Victorian era brought to the fore conversations about sexuality that would have been previously unthinkable and made them part of public political and policy discourse.¹⁰⁵ They were not trying to deny the power of sexuality as much as find and describe its appropriate limits. A counterpoint to Acton can be seen in the work of his contemporary William Hammond, who had served as Surgeon General of the Army.¹⁰⁶ In 1887, Hammond suggested that it was "the education of women in civilized communities, and the restrictions imposed upon them by the customs of society" that stood in the way of them expressing their sexuality, and not any innate biological difference.¹⁰⁷ A number of other medical writers also opposed the position taken by Acton, and this difference of opinion certainly suggests an open question and not a settled one.¹⁰⁸

103. Peter Gay, "Historiography: Victorian Sexuality Old Texts and New Insights," *The American Scholar* 49, no. 3 (1980): 374.

104. Degler, *At Odds*, 271.

105. Lynda Nead, "Fallen Women and Foundlings: Rethinking Victorian Sexuality," *History Workshop Journal* 82 (2016): 179.

106. Degler, *At Odds*, 256.

107. William A. Hammond, *Sexual Impotence in the Male and Female* (Detroit: George S. Davis, 1887), 278.

108. Degler, "What Ought To Be," 1471.

In short, the modern revisionist assessment is that the Victorians accepted sexuality as a powerful force among both men and women but wanted to shift the focus more toward pure love than carnal passion.¹⁰⁹ As Coontz puts it, “despite the stilted language of the era, Victorian marriage harbored all the hopes for romantic love, intimacy, personal fulfillment, and mutual happiness,” even if the full expression of those hopes would have to wait until the early twentieth century.¹¹⁰ Emblematic of this were the letters that Albert Janin wrote in 1871 to his girlfriend. In one, he wrote that “I kissed your letter over and over again, regardless of the smallpox epidemic at New York.” And in a second: “I cannot have a separate existence from you. I breathe by you; I live by you.”¹¹¹ This increased sentimentality made relationships of the time anything but cold and distant.

The interlocking emphases of love, individualism, and family privacy led also to new legal frameworks for the regulation of marriage as the nineteenth century developed. While there had been a long history of colonial marriages taking place outside the church – in distinct opposition to the English practice – they had still always been witnessed and documented by some religious or civil authority. In the post-Revolutionary era, however, the courts created and increasingly legitimized the concept of the common-law marriage and after the Civil War, they were legally recognized in the majority of states.¹¹²

109. Seidman, "Power of Desire," 49.

110. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 177-178.

111. Quoted in Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 178.

112. Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 69, 73.

The decreased regulation of marriage could also be seen in laws that removed most requirements about the content of a wedding, a situation that remains today. They can be exemplified by an 1843 Indiana statute, which read:

When any marriage is solemnized, the ceremony of marriage may be according to such form or custom as the person solemnizing the same may choose to adopt; but, in all cases, no particular form of ceremony shall be necessary, except that the parties shall declare in the presence of the person solemnizing the marriage, that they take each other as husband and wife; and no marriage solemnized by any person professing to be an officer or minister authorized by law to solemnize marriages, shall be adjudged to be void.¹¹³

Soon afterward, Indiana went even further by legislating that a marriage would be considered legally valid as long as the parties believed it to be such at the time.¹¹⁴

There was a corresponding incremental loosening of requirements about who could solemnize a marriage, for which Connecticut serves as an excellent example. Much as we saw earlier in the Massachusetts wedding of John Hull by Governor John Winthrop, in colonial Connecticut it was originally civil magistrates who conducted all weddings. In 1694, ministers were allowed to co-officiate with a magistrate and were given the right to do so on their own in 1702 but only within the limits of their own town – a requirement that was extended to the rest of their county in 1783. Through successive legislation in the nineteenth century, all ministers working within the state were allowed to solemnize marriages anywhere therein.¹¹⁵

Yet even as the church began to lose control over the business of matrimony, its liturgy showed a remarkable penetration into popular culture. In a humorous and helpful

113. Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 76.

114. Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 76.

115. Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 76.

analysis in January 1879, the New York Evangelist newspaper found that the outgoing mayor, Smith Ely, had married 500 couples during his short term in office, which “made 1,000 men and women candidates for either domestic bliss or the divorce courts.”¹¹⁶ It then provided a summary of new mayor Edward Cooper’s second day in office:

On the second day of his official career, he had hardly entered the Mayor’s office when a number of natives of the sunny land of Italy presented themselves, the two foremost of the group – a blooming maiden of sixteen Summers and a burly son of Tuscany – stating that they wish to get married. Mayor Cooper quietly called for the book containing the ritual used on such occasions, and proceeded to make the two one.¹¹⁷

Of note, the ritual used by the mayor is later described as including the groom promising to “love, cherish, and honor” his wife.¹¹⁸ This phrase, while not exactly matching the language of the first American prayer book, comes quite close.

As legal historian Michael Grossberg summarizes, the judicial and legislative developments placed marriage into “a special private realm of life...[that] encouraged the flowering of republican nuptial mores, most notably mate selection based on romantic love rather than parental arrangements.”¹¹⁹ It also meant that divorce became more prevalent in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, such that a Cornell professor presciently predicted in 1891 that if the trend continued, more marriages would end in divorce than in death by 1980¹²⁰ – a shockingly accurate estimate which will be

116. Anonymous, “How the Mayors Officiated at Marriages,” *New York Evangelist*, Jan 9, 1879, ProQuest American Periodicals.

117. Anonymous, “How the Mayors Officiated.”

118. Anonymous, “How the Mayors Officiated.”

119. Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 82.

120. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 181.

addressed in the following chapter. Instead, we must first take up the liturgical revisions that were taking place around that same time as that prediction.

The Little Revision That Could: The 1892 Book of Common Prayer

In an 1881 article in *The American Church Review*, William Reed Huntington – a man whose name has become almost synonymous with Episcopal liturgical reform in the late nineteenth century – mused about the possibility of revising the prayer book that had now been in use for over ninety years. “It ought not to be absolutely impossible to alter a national hand-book of worship,” he wrote, “but it is well that it should be all but impossible to do so.”¹²¹ Yet he defended the action of General Convention the previous year to form a committee to examine exactly that prospect. Made up of an equal mix of bishops, priests, and lay persons, this committee was tasked to study:

whether, in view of the fact that this Church is soon to enter upon the second century of its organized existence in this country, the changed conditions of the national life do not demand certain alterations in the Book of Common Prayer in the direction of liturgical enrichment and increased flexibility of use.¹²²

It had been Huntington himself who offered the resolution, and it carried about three-quarters of the vote of the clergy, two-thirds of the laity, and there is no record of the vote in the House of Bishops except that it was adopted without amendment.¹²³

Huntington’s concern about casual liturgical revision was something the church had been forced to address several generations earlier once the 1789 BCP was quickly

121. William Reed Huntington, "Revision of the American Common Prayer," *The American Church Review* 33, no. 2 (1881): 12.

122. *Journal* 1880, 71.

123. *Journal* 1880, 71, 152, 301.

found to need editing. A number of small changes to various services were made between 1792 and 1808. Also in 1808, the General Convention, which now consisted of deputies from seven states and a sum total of two bishops, was also the first to tackle the issue of how future revisions should be considered.¹²⁴ They passed the first reading of a resolution amending the church constitution to require that any future “alteration or addition” to the BCP would require passage by two consecutive conventions.¹²⁵ The brief four-day General Convention of 1811 then conducted a second reading of the constitutional amendment, and it was enacted.¹²⁶ With this more deliberate process, real revision was indeed made more difficult as 1,700 typographical and punctuation corrections were made in the book’s first thirty years but not many truly substantive changes after this point.¹²⁷ By Hatchett’s reckoning, other than addition of some hymns in 1826, there wasn’t another change at all to the BCP until 1832.¹²⁸

The calls for wholesale revision were soon to pick up, however. As Hatchett eloquently catalogues, the nineteenth century brought a number of new movements and challenges into conversation with the Episcopal Church:

The church was shaken in varying degrees by Hobartianism, Evangelicalism, Tractarianism, Ultramontanism, evolutionary science and philosophy, Higher Criticism, Baptismal regeneration controversy, feelings of insecurity in the face of the large scale immigration of Roman Catholics, the disruption of North and

124. Of note, that same Convention decreed that Episcopal clergy could not remarry divorced persons, unless the divorce was “on account of the other party having been guilty of adultery.” See *Journal* 1808, 254.

125. *Journal* 1808, 253.

126. *Journal* 1811, 274.

127. Sydnor, *Prayer Book*, 76.

128. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, 10.

South, Ritualism, and changes in taste and fashion in church architecture, music, and ceremonial.¹²⁹

In short, the religious landscape had changed greatly over the course of the nineteenth century, and the church would soon feel the need to keep up.

When the General Convention of 1880 formed their committee to study the prospect of revision, two reasons were given in the resolution quoted above: flexibility in worship and liturgical enrichment. The former had been a common refrain for several decades. In 1853, for example, William Muhlenberg wrote a memorial to General Convention that was signed by like-minded associates.¹³⁰ It sought a response by the bishops to changing conditions by “providing for as much freedom in opinion, discipline and worship as is compatible with the essential faith and order of the Gospel.”¹³¹ His goal was to advocate for worship that would speak in the urban context of his time, which he believed called for shorter and more frequent services – permission that would be granted by the House of Bishops in 1856 when they allowed for splitting the customarily conjoined Morning Prayer, Litany, and Ante-Communion (or Communion, which was increasing in frequency).¹³² While Muhlenberg’s call did not result in immediate modifications – likely because of the all-encompassing nature of the Civil War that was soon to follow – it was indeed the beginning of an eventual sea-change. In an editorial in *The Churchman* written about a month after the 1880 General Convention, the editors

129. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 147.

130. E. R. Hardy, "Evangelical Catholicism: W. A. Muhlenberg and the Memorial Movement," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 13, no. 3 (1944): 158-160.

131. Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum, *Documents of Witness: A History of the Episcopal Church 1782-1985* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1994), 210.

132. Michael Moriarty, *The Liturgical Revolution: Prayer Book Revision and Associated Parishes: A Generation of Change in the Episcopal Church* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1996), 15.

asserted that “everything that has characterized the progress of the Church since 1853 may be traced” to the Muhlenberg Memorial.¹³³

The second motivation, liturgical enrichment, can be seen in large part as a response to the growing popularity of ritualism in the aftermath of the Oxford Movement, a development that has been called “the *sine qua non* for the nineteenth century revision of the prayer book.”¹³⁴ This was not an evolution that came without significant controversy, however. As Northup narrates in her detailed history of the period, the General Convention of 1871 devoted a great deal of its time to debate of this very issue.¹³⁵ A committee appointed by the previous Convention called for a new canon that would have forbidden things such as incense, altar candles, processional crosses, genuflection, elevation of the Eucharistic elements, and water added to the wine. Other novelties such as surpliced choirs or choral services would require approval of both bishop and vestry.¹³⁶ The committee’s suggestions were replaced by a more modest proposal that simply generically prohibited any ceremonial action that was not specified in the BCP, the canons, or the pre-1789 tradition of the Church and still specifically condemned elevation of the elements at Holy Communion or any gesture suggesting adoration of the sacrament.¹³⁷ In a pastoral letter that same year, the House of Bishops

133. "True Progress, Slow Progress," Editorial, *The Churchman*, Nov. 20, 1880, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015086588822&seq=665>. Quoted also in Sydnor, *Prayer Book*, 78.

134. Lesley A. Northup, *The 1892 Book of Common Prayer*, Toronto Studies in Theology (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993), 31.

135. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 55-57.

136. Journal 1871, 599-600.

137. Journal 1871, 215-216.

(which had voted for the second version of the canon only to see it defeated in the clergy order of the House of Deputies) repeated their call against ritualism, which they claimed crossed the line when it moved from matters of taste to matters of doctrine.¹³⁸

At the following Convention of 1874, a canon allowing for the discipline of clergy who used unauthorized ceremonies was overwhelmingly passed after being amended to remove a statement that incense and the crucifix exemplified false doctrine – apparently a development of such national importance that it was covered by the *New York Times* the next day!¹³⁹ Yet so-called ritualistic practices could not be stopped by legislation, whether in England or the United States.¹⁴⁰ And by the end of the nineteenth century, as Hatchett observes, Episcopal churches had largely transformed from Georgian to Gothic, from metrical psalms to hymnody, from simple instruments to pipe organs, from surplices to chasubles, and from bare Holy Tables to Altars adorned with candles and crosses.¹⁴¹ With all that in mind, one might expect the Church’s next prayer book to be a radical departure from its predecessor. One would be wrong.

The road to the 1892 BCP began in earnest in 1880 when the committee formed in response to Huntington’s resolution, including Huntington himself, began their work. According to their subsequent report, the first meeting of the Joint Committee on the Book of Common Prayer (as they decided to call themselves) was the same day the

138. Armentrout and Slocum, *Documents of Witness*, 67.

139. “The Church Convention,” *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1874, 5.

140. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 22 n.23.

141. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 147.

Convention adjourned.¹⁴² The committee adopted two principles to guide their work: that they were not to alter the doctrine presented in the current BCP and that they would be guided by its principles and ritual.¹⁴³ Reflecting back five years later, Huntington gave the purposes of those two principles:

The first of them shut out wholly the consideration of such questions as the reinstatement of the Athanasian Creed or the proposal to make optional the use of the word “regenerate” in the Baptismal Offices; while the other forbade the introduction of such sentimental and grotesque conceits as “An Office for the Blessing of Candles,” “An Office for the Benediction of a Life-boat,” and “An Office for the Reconciliation of a Lapsed Cleric.”¹⁴⁴

Although these services may seem to teeter on the verge of ludicrous, Huntington points out that they were actual examples from a recent informal English resource entitled *The Priest's Prayer Book*.¹⁴⁵

The Joint Committee provided their report to the General Convention of 1883, as instructed.¹⁴⁶ Attached was a draft prayer book simply entitled the *Book Annexed* that incorporated approximately 224 modifications made by the Committee, intended both to demonstrate that a new book could look like the old one and to allow for easier comparison.¹⁴⁷ The Committee's seventeenth resolution dealt with the marriage service,

142. Journal 1883, 393-394. This was pointed out in Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 109-110.

143. Journal 1883, 394.

144. William Reed Huntington, "The Book Annexed: Its Critics and Its Prospects," *The Church Review*, Jan., 1886, 216, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hnssj1&seq=246>.

145. *The Priest's Prayer Book: With a Brief Pontifical*, 5th ed. (London: J. Masters and Co., 1876). Unfortunately, in her discussion of the quotation from Huntington, Northup neglects to mention this.

146. Journal 1883, 393ff.

147. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 117.

and it proposed only two changes.¹⁴⁸ The first was the return into the opening exhortation of marriage as “an honourable estate, instituted by God,” representing Christ and the Church, and sanctified by Jesus’s first miracle at the wedding in Cana. The other was a second option for the prayer of blessing over the couple that began, “O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob...,” had been part of the medieval English service since at least the tenth-century Pontifical of Egbert, and came to the English BCP tradition through the Sarum liturgy.¹⁴⁹ It thus attempted to restore two of the many parts of the English 1662 service excised in the making of the first American BCP.

The reaction to the committee’s work was initially overall favorable. Yet during the beginning portion of the General Convention of 1883, it was slow to be considered. As unrest grew and time diminished, the House of Bishops suggested forming a conference committee to reconcile differences between the two houses, and each house quickly appointed to it the same people who had served on the original.¹⁵⁰ In its hurried work, the conference committee struck both of the proposed changes to marriage described above, and instead made two minor suggestions. The first was to change the opening statement that marriage “is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men” to be commended “of Holy Scripture.”¹⁵¹ Although no reason for this can be located, it likely reflected the fact that the allusion was to Hebrews 13:4, which in the

148. Journal 1883, 416.

149. Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 103-106, 171.

150. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 123.

151. Journal 1883, 439. Emphasis added.

nineteenth century was no longer accepted as a composition of the apostle Paul.¹⁵² The second inserted a stage direction that the wedding ring should be laid upon the book¹⁵³ – presumably intending the prayer book being used by the priest. This must have been common practice since it is a tradition that has remained popular. It certainly was a return to the rubrics of the Sarum Manual and material retained by Cranmer and his successors in the English tradition.¹⁵⁴ In this version, the new service was hastily commended by the House of Bishops on the nineteenth day¹⁵⁵ and the House of Deputies on the twenty-first and final day.¹⁵⁶ As William McGarvey recounts in his classic history, there was so little time that many of the conference committee’s resolutions were ultimately passed without even being read.¹⁵⁷

Despite some initial positive energy, Northup reports that negative criticism arose very quickly after the Convention adjourned:

By the end of the year, the periodical press was flooded with criticism of the changes. Diocesan politics were in a state of uproar, as bishops issued inflammatory episcopal charges and pastoral letters and diocesan conventions debated the new book. Pamphlets were issued as quickly as they could be put into print. Even the secular newspapers joined the fray. A consensus against adoption of the changes developed seemingly overnight.¹⁵⁸

152. Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 36 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 42.

153. Journal 1883, 439.

154. Brightman, *The English Rite*, 804. As another interesting aside, the tradition of using the fourth finger for wedding rings goes back at least as far as the Sarum Manual, which requires the fourth finger because it contains a vein that proceeds all the way to the heart. See the Latin text in Collins, *Manuale Sarisburiensis*, 49.

155. Journal 1883, 340-342.

156. Journal 1883, 388-389.

157. McGarvey, *Liturgiae Americanae*, xliii.

158. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 127.

Even one of the bishops on the revision committee, A. Cleveland Coxe, believed that the discussion was too hurried and that significant questions had been overlooked during the process. He further suggested that it would take at least two more Conventions to reach a point of ratification.¹⁵⁹ In that prediction, he only slightly underestimated. Northup further explains the issues expressed by the various church factions:

Churchmen of all persuasions rose to oppose it. Evangelicals saw in it, correctly, a limitation of the extemporaneous prayer they coveted and an extension of catholic principles; liberals decried its timidity and failure to address modern issues; traditionalists opposed change *qua* change; catholics attacked it because it did not go far enough.¹⁶⁰

It certainly seemed that liturgical reform would be more difficult than it had at first appeared.

When the next General Convention convened in Chicago in 1886, again according to McGarvey, there had been resolutions or memorials from twenty-eight different dioceses that unfortunately were not preserved in the Journal. All that remains in the records is that they were presented and then either tabled or referred to committee. It was McGarvey's understanding, however, that "their unanimous judgement was that the Book Annexed as modified ought not to be adopted as it stood."¹⁶¹ One illuminating item that did survive in the Convention Journal was a fairly lengthy report from the Joint Committee on Marriage. Within, a modern reader can get a sense of the continued value placed on marriage by the church at the time:

The subject referred to your Committee is deemed by them to be one of the gravest that can be proposed to the consideration of intelligent men. It has direct

159. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 128.

160. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 129.

161. McGarvey, *Liturgiae Americanae*, xlv. This was also quoted in Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 136.

relation to the security and peace of every household in the land, to the stability of the social system, to the progress of mankind in civilization, and to the transmission of the principles of righteousness and religion to future generations.¹⁶²

Their work was largely a response to the rise in divorces and an attempt to determine if and when a second marriage could be solemnized in the church. In the end, there was no agreement and the matter was simply referred a new committee.¹⁶³

Yet despite the self-professed importance of marriage, there was very little discussion about changes to the wedding liturgy. Another conference committee divided the various liturgical changes passed once already by the previous convention into various schedules: Schedule A were those recommended for immediate approval, Schedule B needed further amendment and were recommended for referral to the following Convention as new matters, Schedule C were recommended for rejection, and Schedule D consisted of a new Book of Offices for which services were not already available.¹⁶⁴ The revision of the marriage service fell into the second category. As proposed by the House of Bishops, the only change was to be a slight reworking of the opening exhortation that nearly matched the language first under discussion years earlier before it was amended by the Convention of 1883. After some debate about whether marriage was commended *in Holy Scripture* or *of St. Paul*, the latter was retained.¹⁶⁵ The below figure depicts the back-and-forth changes:

162. Journal 1886, 783.

163. Journal 1886, 146, 313

164. McGarvey, *Liturgiae Americanae*, xlv-xlv. There is no mention in the Convention Journal of Schedules C and D, yet there seems to be enough external evidence that they did indeed exist. See the discussion of this issue in Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 138-139 n.257.

165. Journal 1886, 385-386.

Figure 1: The Opening Exhortation
(with emphasis added to denote changes made)

1662 BCP: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes of which Matrimony was ordained.

1789 BCP: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore it is not by any to be **entered into unadvisedly or lightly**; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

The Book Annexed: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; **which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee**; which is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

The Book Annexed as revised by Convention in 1883: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is commended **in Holy Scripture** to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

Proposed by House of Bishops in 1886: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; **which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying to us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and sanctified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought at the marriage in Cana of Galilee**, and is commended **of St. Paul** to be honourable among all men; and therefore it is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

Passed by Convention in 1889 and enacted in 1892: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and **beautified** with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore it is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

On the seventeenth day of the twenty-day Convention, with time now running short, the House of Deputies began a lengthy series of individual votes on each amendment received from the bishops. The majority of Schedule A, dealing with services other than matrimony, was ultimately approved by both Houses. By McGarvey's calculation, 100 of the 221 changes suggested by the 1883 Convention were ratified in 1886, resulting finally in approved modifications to the BCP, while eighteen more were passed for the first time and referred to the next Convention for a second reading.¹⁶⁶ Four more Schedule B proposals were rejected.¹⁶⁷ The remainder of them, including the revised matrimonial Exhortation, were not considered before Convention adjourned.

Between 1886 and 1889, the liturgical work that was not yet approved was to be taken up by a newly appointed Joint Committee on Liturgical Revision, to which Huntington was appointed but declined to serve.¹⁶⁸ In his biography of Huntington, John Suter claims that this decision was not out of disappointment in the slow pace of revision but actually out of a belief that he would be better able to serve the cause from outside the committee.¹⁶⁹ In a sermon delivered after the Convention, Huntington seemed both to criticize that more time was not devoted to the discussion of liturgy yet also be pleased with the results:

166. McGarvey, *Liturgiae Americanae*, xlvi.

167. Northrup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 142. She also counts the number that passed as seventeen, not eighteen. The latter is also recorded by Charles Hutchins, the Secretary of the House of Deputies in Charles L. Hutchins, *The Alterations and Additions in the Book of Common Prayer of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America Adopted by the General Convention in the Years 1886, 1889, and 1892* (Boston 1892), 7. My reading of the Journal suggests that Hutchins and McGarvey were correct but the difference is entirely irrelevant for the purposes of this discussion.

168. Journal 1886, 553-554.

169. John Wallace Suter, *Life and Letters of William Reed Huntington: A Champion of Unity* (New York: The Century Co., 1925), 301.

I must say the better part, of what was done at Philadelphia, stands postponed three years longer for want of time to give it proper consideration at this session, of the portion which was fully discussed and carefully deliberated upon in both houses, something like ninety one-hundredths was adopted, at that with a unanimity which, at least so far as the House of Deputies was concerned, surpassed what had been accounted almost miraculous three years before.¹⁷⁰

Similarly, Huntington wrote in a letter of November 3, 1886, that the Convention had gone more favorably than he could have even hoped and that a successful conclusion was almost certain.¹⁷¹ The general mood across the church tended to agree with Huntington and opposition largely seemed to peter out; the memorials submitted to the General Convention of 1889 now all just wanted the project completed.¹⁷²

The Joint Commission's work was presented on just the second day of this next Convention. Its report contained eighty-one resolutions for further revision as well as a proposed Book of Offices containing some new observances.¹⁷³ There was also a minority report from three committee members that led to debate about whether perhaps changes to the BCP were now being made too easily, and it was only by a slim margin that the Convention decided to continue the process at all.¹⁷⁴ Once that decision was made, the Convention ratified the eighteen resolutions that had been proposed in 1886, resulting now in a second round of approved revisions.¹⁷⁵ The fate of the eighty-one new

170. Suter, *Life and Letters*, 301. This was also quoted in a reduced form in Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 145-146.

171. Suter, *Life and Letters*, 262. This was also quoted in Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 144.

172. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 146-149.

173. Journal 1889, 637-696.

174. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 150-152.

175. There is an interesting anomaly in the Journal here, in that it records one of the eighteen was rejected by the House of Deputies (Journal 1889, 403-404). However, both Hutchins and McGarvey

changes brought by the Joint Commission was less uniform. Only fifty-two ended up passing and being referred to the next Convention for a second reading. With this, the Church believed that liturgical revision had finally come to a close, leaving just a rubber-stamp to be completed in 1892. As Northup characterizes it, “the church as a whole pronounced itself exhausted by the emotional and complicated preoccupation of its last ten years.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, when the next Convention adjourned, it had approved forty-three of the fifty-one with very little debate.¹⁷⁷

Against a current of significant resistance, it is noteworthy that the Conventions of the late nineteenth century were able to get even a modest amount of Prayer Book revision completed. For example, William Paret, the Bishop of Maryland, believed in 1889 that “a substantial majority of the clergy never desired revision, and that the overwhelming majority of the lay people regret that a line or a word has been touched.”¹⁷⁸ Whether or not that constitutes an objectively accurate assessment, it demonstrates the uphill battle that the 1892 BCP faced in its creation. It should be little surprise, then, the new book, by Hatchett’s estimation, “provided some enrichments, but retained almost every distinctive feature of the 1789 book.”¹⁷⁹

Most interestingly for our purposes, after serious debate, the matrimonial service received only one minor edit – and that was to the Exhortation (see the figure above).

reported near the time that it did indeed pass. It did not concern marriage, however. See the discussion of this issue in Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 153 n.297.

176. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 154.

177. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 158.

178. William Paret, "Prayer Book Revision," *The Living Church*, July 20, 1889. This was also quoted in Sydnor, *Prayer Book*, 83.

179. Hatchett, *First American Book*, 148.

Charles Hutchins dedicates about fifty-five pages to his collection of the changes made between 1886 and 1892, yet marriage required only a paragraph.¹⁸⁰ And, in the end, the revision served as a retrograde evolution almost back to the language of the 1662 BCP. The only real theological question under discussion was whether Saint Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, and even that was not changed. This certainly seems to be good evidence of real conservatism in the evolution of the marriage rite, although it is tempered by the fact that essentially any proposed change to the BCP that had an impact upon doctrine failed to pass during this process.¹⁸¹ Instead, the book achieved its twin goals of enrichment and flexibility in order to meet the needs of a church that was now a century older than the one that drafted the first book.

180. Hutchins, *Alterations and Additions*, 50.

181. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 166.

Chapter Three: The 20th Century through the 1979 Book of Common Prayer

Marriage in the Early 20th Century

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, many American experts declared that marriage was undergoing a crisis, although this is a cry that has often been repeated throughout time and place – at least as far back as the Greco-Roman era.¹ One Columbia University professor opined in 1934 that “the family of the twentieth century is markedly unstable” and that “it has paid for the independence of its members the costly price of its very existence.”² For good reason, the primary concern in early 1900s America was a sharply rising divorce rate and many began to advocate for the first time that couples actively work on the health and quality of their marriages.³ While this may seem strangely late of a realization to the modern reader, we must remember that the notion of marrying primarily for love was still rather new at the time. This is not to say that plenty of couples before this were not deeply in love and even more of them hoped to develop it after marriage, but love was generally just not the primary motivation for entering into the marriage in the not-so-distant past.⁴

Indeed, as we have seen, many toward the end of the nineteenth century had considered the passion of romance to be an uncontrollable force and dangerous to social

1. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 1.

2. Willystine Goodsell, *A History of Marriage and the Family*, Rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 482.

3. Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 15-16.

4. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 5-20.

order.⁵ There was plenty of reason for society to be concerned with such things since the United States was discovered to have the highest divorce rate in the world in 1889.⁶ While there had been various provisions allowing for divorce petitions since the colonial days, by the start of the twentieth century most Americans could now divorce simply by mutual consent instead of needing to prove that their spouse had engaged in an offense such as infidelity or desertion.⁷ In response, states began to strictly limit divorces in the years which followed, reducing the grounds eligible for divorce and making the legal process longer and more involved.⁸ There was little that could stem the tide, however, and by 1924, one in seven marriages in the United States ended by divorce.⁹ This marked more than a seventy-fold increase since 1870 and a thirty-five-fold increase in just the last quarter-century.¹⁰

While the question of divorce law was primarily for courts and legislatures to decide in the United States – as opposed to places like England – this trend was certainly not lost on the Episcopal Church. In 1925, General Convention appointed a Joint Commission, tasked to “study the whole problem of Divorce, its conditions and causes, and report to the next General Convention.”¹¹ Their report, a summary of which ran several pages in the journal of the 1928 General Convention, shows evidence of deep

5. Ceello, *Making Marriage Work*, 18.

6. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 109.

7. Ceello, *Making Marriage Work*, 19.

8. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 109.

9. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 109.

10. Cott, *Public Vows*, 107.

11. Journal 1925, 122, 312.

reflection. They note that while marriages conducted in haste and divorce laws that vary from state to state are often blamed, neither would explain why the divorce rate was now increasing worldwide.¹² Discussion was also given to the slightly more permissive attitude to divorce taken by the Episcopal Church as compared to the Roman Catholic Church, but this also was downplayed since, as they concluded, “many people claim a church connection whose relation to the Church is purely nominal.”¹³ They also considered and eliminated financial difficulty as a major cause, even though it is one often held up.

The Joint Commission then provided their thoughts as to the real causes of the problem. The first was “sex tension between husband and wife,” citing one particular county court in Ohio that concluded 90 percent of divorces filed there were due to sexual difficulties.¹⁴ At first glance, this seems perhaps like an odd culprit. But it was reinforced by the Lambeth Conference held two years later in 1930. There were 308 bishops listed as being present at the meeting¹⁵ and they wrote the following in the resulting encyclical letter:

To the defense of Christ’s standard of marriage we summon the members of the Church, for on it depend all that makes the magic of the word, home. Indeed we must lift the whole subject of sex into a pure and clear atmosphere. God would have us think of sex as something sacred. Many influences in our day tend to concentrate attention on sex and not always upon its sacredness.... We must set it in the light of the eternal issues of right and wrong, and reveal the noble origin of

12. Journal 1928, 452.

13. Journal 1928, 452.

14. Journal 1928, 453.

15. *The Lambeth Conference, 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with Resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK, 1930), 1-5H.

sex in the creative activity of a Father who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.¹⁶

The suggestion made by the assembled bishops was that that Church needed to better prepare couples for marriage.¹⁷ Among the resolutions passed by the Conference was even one that called upon parents to engage in better sex education for their children.¹⁸ Another reiterated that the primary purpose of marriage as procreation and thus “intercourse between husband and wife as the consummation of marriage has a value of its own within that sacrament, and that thereby married love is enhanced and its character strengthened.”¹⁹ Notably, sex outside of marriage was still called “a grievous sin,” and the bishops called for restrictions on contraception to reduce its prevalence.²⁰

A second cause of divorce identified by the Joint Commission was “the great changes that have recently taken place in the idea of family life,” which they went on to explain meant that the family was no longer the normative source of economic production.²¹ Here we can read in the move toward industrialization and urbanization that was taking place at the time. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the economy of the United States had been largely based on family farms, and family members were expected to fill a variety of needs, as we have previously seen. By the dawn of the twentieth century, however, the predominant form of the American family was a working father and a

16. *Lambeth Conference, 1930*, 22.

17. *Lambeth Conference, 1930*, 22.

18. *Lambeth Conference, 1930*, 42-43.

19. *Lambeth Conference, 1930*, 43.

20. *Lambeth Conference, 1930*, 44.

21. *Journal 1928*, 453.

homemaking mother who lived apart from extended family and were more geographically mobile.

Also, during the first few decades of the 1900s, men and women began to interact more as equals, and women working outside the home became significantly more common.²² At the same time, some scholars have seen this time as the real beginning of a “sexual revolution” in American society. Especially in the so-called Roaring Twenties, men and women largely ceased occupying entirely separate social spheres and began to join many of the same organizations and enjoy the same pastimes.²³ It was also a time in which sexual experimentation before marriage became increasingly acceptable – at least for those in heterosexual relationships, since same-sex intimacy began to be more and more frowned upon.²⁴ Presumably, this social change greatly influenced the emphasis on sexual ethics in the Lambeth encyclical quoted above.

In addition, it was the beginning of a period in which women took on a new kind of public visibility through activism even though they were still not able to vote. As one example, Kathryn Sklar has written about the life of Florence Kelley, who lived at Hull House in Chicago in the 1890s and then moved to New York to lead the National Consumers’ League for the first third of the twentieth century.²⁵ As a beneficiary of the newfound possibility for well-to-do white women to attend elite universities in the late nineteenth century, she graduated from Cornell. In her autobiography, Kelley called going

22. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 197.

23. Kerber et al., *Women's America*, 393.

24. Kerber et al., *Women's America*, 393.

25. Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Florence Kelley and Women's Activism in the Progressive Era," in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, ed. Linda K. Kerber et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 350-360.

to college “an almost sacramental experience” and only became aware of the opportunity after finding a letter from the school offering women’s admission thrown in the garbage can of her father’s study.²⁶ After finishing her studies in 1882 and being unable to attend graduate school, she married and then left her physically abusive husband several years later. Kelley became an outspoken advocate for labor reform, trying to eliminate sweatshops and fight for better working conditions for women and children through minimum wages and laws limiting the number of hours worked in a day.²⁷

The Joint Commission also describes a fascinating survey sent to 800 Episcopal clergy and the same number of clergy in the Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist churches.²⁸ The first question asked how many divorces took place among regular churchgoers, and the number was remarkably low. Over 80 percent of the respondents could not think of a single such divorce taking place. From this, they concluded that “the problem is confined to those who are outside the pale and direct influence of the Church.” The second question asked how often clergy were consulted by their parishioners having marital problems. Again, the number was very low. The third asked about premarital counseling conducted by the clergy, which apparently was also not taking place. According to an article in *The Living Church* on the subject published a few years later, of the 270 clergy who responded to the survey, only 39 reported giving training prior to marriage, with 139 reporting none, and 92 reporting very little.²⁹ This led to the General

26. Florence Kelley, *Notes of Sixty Years: The Autobiography of Florence Kelley*, ed. Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), 45.

27. Sklar, "Florence Kelley," 357.

28. Journal 1928, 453-454.

29. C. Rankin Barnes, "The Church's New Social Approach to Marriage: The New Canon After a Year's Use -- A Review and an Analysis," *The Living Church*, May 27, 1933, 103.

Convention of 1931 passing a revised matrimonial canon that would require clergy to teach about marriage both publicly and privately, as well as instruct both members of the couple about “the nature of Holy Matrimony, its responsibilities, and the means of grace which God has provided through His Church.”³⁰ A similar requirement exists to this day.

With the benefit of hindsight, it has been suggested that marriage was not being destroyed at all during this time, but instead was evolving into a modern institution based less on patriarchy and sexual repression.³¹ In this new vision of family life, marriage had evolved from fulfilling largely economic needs to psychological and emotional ones. More was being asked of marriages than ever had been before. As Mintz and Kellogg put it, for the first time, “along with providing economic security and a stable environment for children, family life was now expected to provide romance, sexual fulfillment, companionship, and emotional satisfaction.”³² Long gone was the nineteenth century understanding of marriage primarily as a duty.³³ Thus, divorce arose as a natural result of partners’ expectations not being adequately fulfilled in social and legal environments in which marriages become easier to terminate – at least in terms of obtaining a final judicial decree. This was clear even at the time, as the Joint Commission noted, “when marriage ceases to furnish the expected happiness, many people feel they are justified in seeking that happiness elsewhere.”³⁴

30. Journal 1931, 770-771.

31. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 109-114.

32. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 108.

33. Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 16.

34. Journal 1928, 453.

The 1928 Book of Common Prayer

Despite the evolving nature of marriage in the early twentieth century, weddings in the Episcopal Church remained very much the same as those of generations past. The marriage rite in the 1892 BCP was almost identical to that in the first American book of 1789, a time when marriage was understood quite differently. The world, however, changed quickly and significantly. And it was not just in the area of domestic relations. As Sydnor wryly notes:

The members of the Convention of 1892 were no doubt certain they were providing a Book of Common Prayer which would serve the Church for a long time to come, as its predecessor had done. But their vision was upset by the unrubrical visions of a thirty-year-old engineer in Detroit named Henry Ford, who had just started his automobile manufacturing company, and a couple of young bicycle-making brothers named Wright, who at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, flew a contraption 120 feet. The year was 1903, and the world would never again be as it had been in 1892. The ripple effect touched all of life.³⁵

Against that position, some have argued that the 1892 BCP was considered unfinished work from the time of its completion.³⁶ The most in-depth study of that book, however, is that of Northup – and she concludes that “just about everyone” believed at the time that liturgical revision was over with for another century.³⁷ This understanding is exemplified in an address given by John Wallace Suter, who had written the biography of William Reed Huntington and who would soon come to spend decades working on prayer book revision himself. He also served as the custodian of the BCP for ten years.³⁸ Reflecting

35. Sydnor, *Prayer Book*, 89.

36. Moriarty, *Liturgical Revolution*, 18.

37. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 185.

38. Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum, eds., *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A User-Friendly Reference for Episcopalians* (New York: Church Publishing, 2000), 509.

back, Suter reports that “upon the completion of the Revision of 1892 it was a stalwart and devout Churchman of this diocese who uttered the exclamation: ‘Thank God this business is over. The Prayer Book will now remain untouched for 100 years!’...But he was wrong.”³⁹

Confounding this widespread desire for revision to be finished, Northup suggests that it was not long until this next generation of church leaders realized the issues their predecessors faced in the nineteenth century still lingered into the twentieth: service length, flexibility, antiquated language, and ritualism.⁴⁰ The soon-to-be official historiographer of the Episcopal Church, Edward Clowes Chorley, credits “two important dioceses” for first providing the impetus to reenter the revision process.⁴¹ At the 1912 convention of the Diocese of California, a local committee was appointed to gather opinions from across the country as to the formation of a new national commission to undertake this work. This resulted in a memorial to General Convention the following year suggesting it, so long as no changes to doctrine be considered.⁴² It was joined there by similar memorials from the Diocese of Pittsburgh and from Arizona, which was at the time a missionary district.⁴³ This Convention of 1913 responded by passing a resolution

39. John Wallace Suter, "Prayer Book Revision: An Address at the Alumni Service, June 14, 1928" (1928), accessed December 29, 2025, https://anglicanhistory.org/usa/misc/suter_revision1928.html. This was cited in reduced form in Lawrence Crumb, "The Making of the American Prayer Book of 1928," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 89, no. 2 (2020): 124.

40. Northup, *1892 Book of Common Prayer*, 185.

41. E. Clowes Chorley, *The New American Prayer Book: Its History and Contents* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 100-101.

42. Edward Lambe Parsons and Bayard Hale Jones, *The American Prayer Book: Its Origins and Principles* (1937: repr., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 59. This was also cited in Crumb, "Making of the American Prayer Book," 125.

43. George E. DeMille, *The Episcopal Church: A Brief History* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham, 1955), 77. This was also cited in Crumb, "Making of the American Prayer Book," 125. Presumably

on its final day calling for a joint commission “to consider and report to the next Convention such revision and enrichment of the Prayer Book as will adapt it to present conditions, if in their judgment such revision be necessary.”⁴⁴

Clearly they decided that it was. Appended to the Convention Journal of 1916 is but a brief summary of the Joint Commission’s work. In it, they state that their primary goal was to “make the Prayer Book more serviceable to the people” while also recognizing that “the sanction of long usage carries with it a strong presumption in favor of the existing form.”⁴⁵ In other words, they wanted to carefully thread the needle between retaining an historic liturgy and adapting to modern society. Beyond this brief report, the Joint Commission separately published a much longer Schedule, which was essentially analogous to the previous Book Annexed. This time, however, all liturgical resolutions that received a three-quarters vote of the membership were listed in Part I and those with a majority less than that were in Part II.⁴⁶ Proposals pertaining to marriage were found in each.

Two relatively small changes met the higher burden of consensus.⁴⁷ The first was to move the opening two rubrics – one requiring the minister to follow the laws of their respective civil jurisdiction and the other regarding publication of banns – to the end of the service. Although justifications were not provided, the latter can be explained by a

Pittsburgh was the other “important diocese” since its bishop would go on to chair the new joint commission.

44. Journal 1913, 82. Final passage is found on 155.

45. Journal 1916, 551.

46. *Report of the Joint Commission on the Book of Common Prayer Appointed by the General Convention of 1913* (Boston: B. D. Updike, 1916), ix.

47. *Report of the Joint Commission*, 110.

report from another joint commission that had been established to study legislative matters regarding marriage. They determined that there was little value in continuing the tradition of banns, since:

The custom, like that of affixing tax papers and other notices to the church door, belonged to a time when the population of a given district would be generally gathered in one Church, and at a particular service; thus under these conditions the announcement in church of an intended marriage, and the challenge to allege any impediment thereto, would ensure the greatest publicity. This would in no wise be now the result.⁴⁸

It seems the preferred response was to retain the practice (in the permissive “*when* the banns are published...” form used since 1789) but to suggest relegating them to a position of less prominence in the BCP. The second change was to instruct the husband and wife to kneel for the nuptial blessing, making that element more prominent and reflecting a theology of matrimony that would much later come to full expression in the 1979 BCP that the church’s role in marriage is witnessing and blessing it.

A barrage of more significant changes was found in Part II of the Schedule. In addition to reiterating both of the above proposals, there were nine other edits suggested.⁴⁹ The opening exhortation was once again targeted for rewriting, removing the perhaps outdated phrases “and in the face of this company” and “in the time of man’s innocence.” In addition, they proposed eliminating much of its theological content, including the language that was just added in 1892 about the union of Christ and Church and the first miracle at Cana, which would return it nearly to the form of 1789. Perhaps the most radical proposals, however, were in the direction of egalitarianism. This

48. Journal 1916, 502.

49. *Report of the Joint Commission*, 176-177.

resolution called for the declaration of consent spoken by the man and woman to become the same, so that the bride no longer would one-sidedly promise to obey and serve her husband. The bride's vows would similarly remove obedience. During the giving of the ring, the groom would no longer state he was endowing the bride with all of his worldly goods. Even the giving away of the bride (which was specified as being by her father or friend) would become optional.

This work was the opening salvo in a process that would take only slightly longer but be far more comprehensive than what had been done several decades earlier. As historiographer George DeMille put it looking back nearly thirty years after the 1928 BCP was finished:

The report which this commission presented to the General Convention of 1916 is of basic importance. Though not adopted in all its details, and though amended in many respects as the process of revision went on, it mapped out the way for the whole journey. The report made evident that this was to be a much more thoroughgoing revision than the somewhat half-hearted undertaking of 1892.⁵⁰

During the Convention, a smaller committee was formed to determine which parts of the report deserved expedited consideration.⁵¹ There is little recorded about the content of the discussions but several of the commission's resolutions were approved⁵² with the general intention of making the Daily Offices more flexible.⁵³ Others were sent back to committee for reworking, including both marriage revisions.⁵⁴ An interesting conversation was recorded regarding whether bishops could authorize trial use of the new

50. DeMille, *The Episcopal Church*, 79.

51. Journal 1916, 43, 64-65, 233.

52. Journal 1916, 280-282, 373-374, 376, 378-379.

53. DeMille, *The Episcopal Church*, 81.

54. Journal 1916, 60-61, 65, 237, 252.

materials, a question which would recur in the next prayer book process. The opinion was that the church's constitution did not allow for such general permission.⁵⁵ They also decided that the work of the commission should be continued for another triennium and authorized the addition of new members if needed.⁵⁶ Another resolution requested the commission have its next report ready at least six months prior to the General Convention of 1919.⁵⁷

In that second report from the 1913 commission three years later, there was no longer a differentiation in the Schedule reflecting the level of consensus. Instead, they claim that "the great majority of the recommendations are unanimously approved...or have a substantial unanimity."⁵⁸ The proposed resolution regarding matrimony was even more extensive than that of the previous report, incorporating nearly all of the prior recommendations from Part II as well as three new ones. The first was a relatively minor revision of the charge to the couple, proclaiming that an unlawful marriage "is not such as the Church alloweth."⁵⁹ The second replaced the prior call for the doxology to be added to the Lord's Prayer with a rubric that the Lord's Prayer should be omitted if the second part of the office is used.⁶⁰ This forecast the third and most radical change: the optional addition after the blessing of a psalm, the Lord's Prayer, a series of additional

55. Journal 1916, 347-348.

56. Journal 1916, 160, 174.

57. Journal 1916, 173, 368.

58. *Second Report of the Joint Commission on the Book of Common Prayer Appointed by the General Convention of 1913* (New York: MacMillan, 1919), xii.

59. *Second Report of the Joint Commission*, 138.

60. *Second Report of the Joint Commission*, 139-140.

prayers over the couple, and another final blessing.⁶¹ This would have represented a full return to the general structure and sentiment of the English 1662 BCP, and the prayers themselves were even shorter reworkings of those prayers.

This General Convention in 1919 did pass a small number of minor liturgical changes, as detailed in Appendix XXV to the Convention journal, sending them on to the next Convention for ratification; none pertained to marriage.⁶² Based upon the title of that appendix, Lawrence Crumb has concluded that there was “an expectation that the new book would receive its final form at the next convention.”⁶³ A much longer list – but certainly not everything in the Schedule – passed the House of Deputies but failed or was not considered in the House of Bishops.⁶⁴ DeMille suggests that this Convention was instead too busy dealing with a proposed concordat with the Congregational Church to put much energy into liturgical reform.⁶⁵ The cause blamed at the time, however, was something entirely different, as this editorial in *The Living Church* during the lead-up to Convention suggests:

Prayer Book revision is among the most important of the subjects that will arise, and we have the perplexity that to do it well requires a great deal more time than can be given to it at the approaching Convention. If the war could have been foreseen, no one would have suggested taking these particular years for the work. But it has been commenced and it can neither be finished up hastily nor be wholly deferred. The process of revision must occupy a greater number of years than it

61. *Second Report of the Joint Commission*, 140-143.

62. Journal 1919, 610-611.

63. Crumb, "Making of the American Prayer Book," 132.

64. Journal 1919, 611-616.

65. DeMille, *The Episcopal Church*, 82.

would have demanded if war had not intervened, but it is much more important that it be done thoroughly than it be finished quickly.⁶⁶

Regardless, the Joint Commission was once again reauthorized for another triennium.⁶⁷

As DeMille notes, that the next three Conventions were all heavily devoted to the process of liturgical reform.⁶⁸ In fact, the House of Bishops even met for a week prior to the 1922 General Convention began just to consider the Joint Commission's Third Report.⁶⁹ In it, they intentionally presented again the bulk of the recommendations that were not acted upon in 1919, taking into consideration the reactions they had received to date.⁷⁰ The Matrimony section was identical to the previous work, with one significant exception: it now called for the optional blessing of the ring that the groom gave to the bride, with the petition that she who wore it would live in peace and God's favor.⁷¹ The Journal of 1922 helpfully contains a supplementary section on liturgical revision broken down by service, so it is easy to follow the action taken concerning the marriage rite.⁷² After days of back-and-forth action between the houses, the vast majority of the Third Report's matrimonial changes were passed, leaving behind the "their marriage is not such as the Church alloweth" in the charge to the couple. Several were edited by Convention, including the blessing of the ring, which would now be indirectly a blessing upon both

66. "Welcome to General Convention," *The Living Church*, Oct. 11, 1919, 832. This was also briefly cited in Crumb, "Making of the American Prayer Book," 130.

67. Journal 1919, 208-209, 438.

68. DeMille, *The Episcopal Church*, 82.

69. Parsons and Jones, *American Prayer Book*, 60-61.

70. *Third Report of the Joint Commission on the Book of Common Prayer Appointed by the General Convention of 1913* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), xii.

71. *Third Report of the Joint Commission*, 129.

72. Journal 1922, 454-458.

“*he who gives it, and she who wears it,*”⁷³ and a moderate re-writing of the optional new conclusion to the service so that the blessing would be upon the union and not the couple.

While the Joint Commission was reauthorized in 1922, they were explicitly instructed to not bring any new proposals regarding work that had already been voted upon, unless “obviously necessary or advisable” and with unanimous approval.⁷⁴ Thus, in the Joint Commission’s Fourth Report of 1925, they proposed only small tweaks to those portions and then re-presented the items of the Third Report that were not acted upon in 1922 with only minor edits.⁷⁵ As to marriage in the first portion, the only recommendation was to change the language at the blessing of the ring as follows: “Bless this Ring, O gracious Lord, and grant that these thy servants may faithfully keep their solemn pledge, and about evermore in love and holiness....”⁷⁶ Both houses of Convention ratified the previous revisions⁷⁷ and also approved this new change on top of them.⁷⁸ In addition, they approved for a second reading the addition of a collect, epistle, and gospel for the marriage service.⁷⁹ It is not clear who wrote the collect but the two scripture passages were the same as those used in the Roman Missal, plus or minus a few

73. Journal 1922, 455. Emphasis added.

74. Journal 1922, 401.

75. *Fourth Report of the Joint Commission on the Book of Common Prayer Appointed by the General Convention of 1913* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 12.

76. *Fourth Report of the Joint Commission*, 25.

77. Journal 1925, 361-363.

78. Journal 1925, 449.

79. Journal 1925, 359-360, 416.

verses.⁸⁰ The intention was clearly to provide for Eucharist, or as Chorley opines, what was known before the Reformation as a Nuptial Mass...an ancient Catholic practice.”⁸¹

In their fifth and final report in 1928, the Joint Commission for the first time presented no new material for Convention’s consideration, noting instead that while the work of revision had not been perfect, the vast majority of people were eager for the new book to be finished.⁸² The amendment from the previous Convention regarding the language of the blessing of the ring was not ratified,⁸³ and thus it remained “he who gives it and she who wears it.” When Convention closed in 1928, the Episcopal Church had completed the task of prayer book revision once again, replacing the 1892 BCP after less than a generation of use.

Its successor in 1928 bore major changes throughout, reflecting themes such as social justice and modern medicine, as well as beginning a shift toward a more modern English usage.⁸⁴ It also saw significant changes to the wedding service, despite the language sounding very similar. In fact, Michael Moriarty has suggested that many people missed the new emphases and modernity of the 1928 BCP because it was still couched in Cranmerian language.⁸⁵ Or, as Boone Porter puts it in a more positive light, “Archbishop Cranmer produced a liturgy characterized by a phraseology and

80. Massey Hamilton Shepherd, *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 267-268.

81. Chorley, *New American Prayer Book*, 127.

82. *Fifth Report of the Joint Commission on the Revision and Enrichment of the Book of Common Prayer Appointed by the General Convention of 1913* (n.p., 1928), 1-3.

83. *Journal* 1928, 339, 341.

84. Moriarty, *Liturgical Revolution*, 18-21.

85. Moriarty, *Liturgical Revolution*, 20-21.

arrangements which were stimulating, challenging, and inspiring. Such features remained in subsequent Prayer Books down to 1928.”⁸⁶

Reflecting the societal movement in the direction of egalitarianism, the wife no longer had to make the one-sided promise to obey her husband during the vows. The wedding ring (which could now be optionally blessed) was still only given by the man to the woman but no longer included the archaic “with all my worldly goods I thee endow” statement by the groom which had been in all of the previous books. Massey Shepherd saw here an important shift in the purpose of the ring from being reminiscent of a material dowry to now a spiritual benediction.⁸⁷ One commentary on the 1928 BCP shortly after its completion suggested that the only remaining “archaism surviving in our rite from the days when women were property” was the giving-away of the bride, although the authors go on to suggest that “its significance has been wholly converted from the transfer of obedience to that of loving care.”⁸⁸ While this perhaps seems like a problematic justification in hindsight given that the actual language had not changed at all, Shepherd appeared convinced by it as well.⁸⁹

Perhaps in light of the perceived instability of family life in the early twentieth century, the 1928 BCP also included new prayers for the birth and nurture of children, as well as that the couple may “love, honour, and cherish each other, and so live together in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven

86. H. Boone Porter, "What Can 1928 Teach Us?," *The Anglican*, April, 1999, 14. Quoted in Crumb, "Making of the American Prayer Book," 141-142.

87. Shepherd, *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, 302-303.

88. Parsons and Jones, *American Prayer Book*, 252.

89. Shepherd, *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, 301-302.

of blessing and of peace.”⁹⁰ At the same time, there was a nod back to its old English roots in the return of the psalms, versicles, and prayers as well as readings for a nuptial Eucharist.⁹¹ This was the marriage service in place when the liturgical movement struck the Church later in the twentieth century.

The Marriage Pendulum of the Mid-20th Century

Although it’s impossible to pinpoint exactly when the liturgical movement began to take great hold of the Episcopal Church, a reasonable surrogate could be when the public talk of revision started in earnest with the release of *Prayer Book Studies I* in 1950. At that time, the United States was just stepping into what many have called the “Golden Age” of marriage. Coming out of the intense financial and emotional stress of the Great Depression and then World War II, American marriage changed significantly in the 1950s. The divorce rate peaked after the war and dropped by more than half between 1947 and 1958.⁹² The fertility rate rose 50 percent from 1940 to 1957 with more families having more children – the rate of third children doubled and the rate of fourth children tripled during that time.⁹³ Mintz and Kellogg sum up the time succinctly, showing how it was a unique period of history:

Young adults of the 1950s married in unprecedented numbers. They married earlier than other twentieth-century Americans, and they had more children and

90. Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church: Together with The Psalter or Psalms of David* (New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1928), 303.

91. In Sarum, the Nuptial Eucharist was that of the Holy Trinity. (See Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 172 n.73.) In the 1549 and 1662 BCP, the Nuptial Eucharist used the propers of the day. (See Shepherd, *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, 267-268.)

92. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 224.

93. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 179.

bore them faster. At the same time, the rate of increase in divorce rates was slower than it had been for earlier or later American families. The high marriage and birthrates and relatively stable divorce rate of the 1950s were all sharply out of line with long-term demographic trends.⁹⁴

Astonishingly, by 1959, nearly half of American women were married by the age of nineteen and a whopping 70 percent were married by the age of twenty-four.⁹⁵ A survey conducted in 1957 revealed that about 80 percent of Americans believed it was “sick,” “neurotic,” or “immoral” to choose to remain single.⁹⁶ Marriage had certainly hit a cultural high-water mark in the United States.

Gender equality can be seen to have moved in the opposite direction, however. During World War II, nearly half of American women were employed due to the removal by military service of sixteen million men from the workforce.⁹⁷ Combined with these men returning and the significant increase in wages through the 1940s and 1950s, many families were now able to achieve a comfortable life on a single salary – a goal that had been in place since at least the 1920s but was previously only obtainable for those in higher socioeconomic classes.⁹⁸ The resulting cultural ideal gave the 1950s wife a role which has been described as “hostess and consort...essential for the smooth running of the household and for the promotion of her husband’s career”.⁹⁹ This was perhaps best

94. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 178.

95. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 225.

96. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 230.

97. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 161.

98. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 228.

99. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 187.

exemplified by a piece written by Dorothy Carnegie, the second wife of writer Dale Carnegie in the January 1954 issue of *Coronet* magazine:

If you have a job or career of your own, would you be willing to give it up if it would advance your husband's interests? If not, you are more interested in promoting yourself than promoting your husband. Helping a man attain success is a full-time career in itself. You can't hope to do it unless it is important enough to claim all your attention.¹⁰⁰

It ran under the byline of "Mrs. Dale Carnegie" and never made mention of her given name.

The Episcopal Church was certainly not immune to such lines of thought. Barbara Stroup, who was married to the rector of Grace Church in Hinsdale, Illinois at the time, expressed a similar sentiment in a 1957 piece published in *The Living Church*:

Her [a priest's wife's] first duty, of course, is to be a wife to her husband in the true Christian sense and to create a Christian marriage, as should be the duty of a wife no matter what her husband's occupation....Should the wife of a priest take office in any organization or activity in the parish? Definitely not....And so the responsibility of being the wife of a priest is great, but it is rewarding. It is often a lonely life, but it is wonderful. It is in itself a vocation.¹⁰¹

She does go on to admit, however, that it would be acceptable for a wife to play the organ in a small mission church if she possesses that talent to do so – but only until a real organist is hired.¹⁰²

100. Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), 127.

101. Barbara Stroup, "Reverend and Mrs.," *The Living Church*, Jan. 20, 1957, 7-8.

102. A relatively straight line can probably be drawn from this sort of thinking to modern-day evangelical complementarian theology, which developed a few decades later as a reaction to the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s that opposed this reduction of gender equality. An excellent history of complementarianism can be found in Allison Elizabeth Murray, "Building Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: White American Evangelical Complementarian Theology, 1970-2010" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2021).

This also meant that education for women was largely devalued, as seen in a 1952 advertisement for a department store called Gimbel's. It asked the question, "What's college?" and then answered it with "That's where girls who are above cooking and sewing go to meet a man so they can spend their lives cooking and sewing."¹⁰³ This was no mere provocative overreach by a marketing firm, either. A very similar sentiment can be found in a June 1946 article in *Ladies' Home Journal* entitled "Are You Too Educated to Be a Mother?" that suggested college-aged women weren't having enough children to keep the nation prosperous and were "guilty of squandering their genetic inheritance."¹⁰⁴

There was a fear among women of becoming old and unmarriageable along with a belief that women needed marriage more than men, for whom the bachelor life was becoming romanticized – as evidenced by the founding of *Playboy* magazine in 1953.¹⁰⁵ Women were told by magazine articles such as the 1954 *Ladies' Home Journal* series entitled "How to Be Marriageable" that the two keys to finding a man were improving themselves and lowering their expectations.¹⁰⁶ In another piece six years earlier, a male psychologist opined:

Women, single or married, are less secure than men...have led more sheltered lives, [and] have had fewer opportunities to acquire independence. Consciously or not, women seek security in marriage. A man thinks of marriage first as a partnership, and of his wife as a companion. But to a woman, a husband means a home and children and the inner security she craves.¹⁰⁷

103. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 181.

104. Walker, *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, 114-115.

105. Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 77.

106. Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 77-78.

107. Walker, *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, 123.

At the time of publication, its author, Clifford Adams, was not only a professor at Pennsylvania State College (soon to be a University) but also as director of their marriage counseling clinic.¹⁰⁸

Women clearly bore most of the societal responsibility for the physical and psychological health of their families and marriages, while men carried the financial burden. These factors unfortunately led many more wives to elect marital stability over satisfaction and choosing to accept husbands who were violent, alcoholic, or unfaithful.¹⁰⁹ The seeds of discontent had been sown and between a quarter and a third of the marriages entered into in the 1950s would later end in divorce, with many more people staying in marriages in which they were not happy.¹¹⁰ The divorce rate, although not rising as quickly, was still higher than what was considered a crisis in the 1920s, yet most sociologists raised no alarm because things seemed so tranquil.¹¹¹ This period can be called a “Golden Age” only in the most ironic sense. It was also a time in which the idealized portrait painted by women’s magazines lived in contrast to the rise of the cold war, consciousness about racial segregation, and growing concern over sexual behavior thanks to the work of Alfred Kinsey.¹¹²

If urbanization had driven the changes to American marriages and family life in the 1920s, it was suburbanization underlying the changes of the 1950s. The post-war economic boom resulted in the creation of more housing and more families able to afford

108. Walker, *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, 121.

109. Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 75-76.

110. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 194.

111. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 233.

112. Walker, *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, 17.

it.¹¹³ In his 1960 Economic Report to Congress, President Eisenhower was able to claim that real wages, after adjusting for inflation, had risen almost twenty percent since 1946 across the nation, car ownership had increased from fifty-four percent to seventy-four percent since 1948, and that fifteen million new houses and apartments had been built, eliminating the shortage that existed at the end of the war.¹¹⁴ The migration out of urban centers “reinforced the family orientation of post-war society,” with most households consisting of young nuclear families or newlywed couples.¹¹⁵ Career-driven fathers were often working more hours than ever, with a longer commute, resulting in most of the household duties and parenting being done by a stay-at-home mother. One humorist wrote that the role of the housewife in the suburbs was “merely motherhood on wheels,” and they delivered their children first “obstetrically...and by car forever after.”¹¹⁶

All of this began to change in the 1960s, and change came rapidly. As Coontz tells it, “It took more than 150 years to establish the love-based, male breadwinner marriage as the dominant model in North America and Western Europe. It took less than twenty-five years to dismantle it.”¹¹⁷ Census statistics show a reversal of the trends from the 1920s as birthrates plummeted and divorce rates began to soar, leading to a sharp increase in the number of single-parent households – usually led by the mother.¹¹⁸ The rate of married women working outside the home increased from about 25 percent in 1950 to 60 percent

113. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 182.

114. “Eisenhower Tells People of Gains in ‘Well-Being,’” *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 1960.

115. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 184.

116. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 184.

117. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 247.

118. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 203-204.

by the 1980s.¹¹⁹ The number of unmarried cohabitating couples quadrupled between 1960 and the 1980s, and the number of American women postponing sex until marriage decreased from about half to less than one in five.¹²⁰

These trends were part of a broader social upheaval in the United States. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of civil rights activism and challenge to social norms in multiple areas of life. The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, outlawing discrimination based on race, religion, or gender – at least on paper. Laws prohibiting interracial marriage remained only in the South by 1965 and the U.S. Supreme Court overturned those in 1967 by calling marriage “one of the basic civil rights of man, fundamental to our very existence and survival.”¹²¹ Interreligious marriage, while increasing throughout the twentieth century, began to find widespread acceptance.¹²² Around the same time, the Court finally granted parental rights to mothers of children born out of wedlock and ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee to equal protection under the law must be applied to the children of unmarried parents.¹²³ This sea change removed marriage’s role as the only lawful way to have children and to provide for their financial well-being.¹²⁴

119. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 204.

120. Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 204.

121. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 256. The Supreme Court overturned a Virginia state conviction.

122. Erika B. Seamon, *Interfaith Marriage in America: The Transformation of Religion and Christianity*, *Christianities of the World*, ed. Dale Irvin and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 71-91.

123. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*.

124. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 257.

By 1979, three-quarters of the American population now thought that single parenthood was morally acceptable.¹²⁵

But not everyone was as interested in having children by this time. The broad commercial availability of hormonal contraception in 1960 was both a sign of the changing sexual mores as well as a driver of family change. By 1970, fully sixty percent of adult women (married or otherwise) were using forms of contraception they controlled.¹²⁶ Shortly thereafter, with *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, access to abortion became the law of the land. Not only did all of this progress usher in a certain sexual freedom, but it also allowed women to devote themselves more fully to their work and allowed (or forced) childless couples to focus on the quality of their relationship without children competing for their time and energy.¹²⁷

Perhaps nothing demonstrates the revised ethos and turmoil of this era like the sit-in staged by one hundred “militant feminists” at the offices of the *Ladies Home Journal* in March 1970.¹²⁸ The day-long protest was only resolved after the editors agreed to create a supplement about women’s liberation in an upcoming issue. Articles suggested by the protestors included “Prostitution and the Law,” “Can Marriage Survive Women’s Liberation?” and “How to have an orgasm.”¹²⁹ When the special supplement was issued five months later, it contained a piece called “Should this marriage be saved?” which

125. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 258.

126. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 254.

127. Coontz, *Marriage, a History*, 254-255.

128. Grace Lichtenstein, “Feminists Demand ‘Liberation’ in Ladies’ Home Journal Sit-In,” *New York Times*, Mar. 19, 1970.

129. Grace Lichtenstein, “Feminists Demand ‘Liberation.’”

stood in stark contrast to the long-standing recurring column “*Can this marriage be saved?*”¹³⁰ The culture once again valued autonomy over obedience – as we saw, the bride’s vow to obey her husband had been removed in 1928 – and it was in that context the Episcopal Church released the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, complete with a markedly different marriage liturgy. Its story, however, begins at least several decades prior.

The Liturgical Movement and the 1979 BCP

In the early 1940s, the impact of the liturgical movement began to spread through the Episcopal Church. This would eventually lead to worship that was more participatory, ecumenical, Scripture-focused, centered on frequent Eucharist, and in the vernacular – which naturally prompted a different conversation in the Anglican Communion than the Roman Catholic Church which was used to the use of Latin.¹³¹ It even changed what it means to be part of a church and the role of the people within it. Yet its beginnings were slow and somewhat contentious.

Before the close of General Convention in 1928, the Church created a Standing Liturgical Commission (SLC) as it discharged the Joint Commission on the Revision and Enrichment of the Book of Common Prayer, which had completed its task. This group was tasked with “all matters relating to the Book of Common Prayer, with the idea of developing and conserving for some future use, the Liturgical experience and scholarship

130. Celello, *Making Marriage Work*, 105-106. Emphasis added.

131. John R. K. Fenwick and Bryan D. Spinks, *Worship in Transition: The Liturgical Movement in the Twentieth Century* (New York: T&T Clark, 1995), 5-10.

of the Church.”¹³² This was the final item listed in the Supplementary Journal that covered all resolutions in the revision process, imparting the notion that Convention understood then that the process of liturgical change would not ever be truly complete. It was a new way of thinking for the Episcopal Church and would be enshrined in the canons when the SLC was made permanent in 1940.¹³³ In that enactment, its always-reforming mission was made even more explicit, now being responsible to “collect and collate material bearing upon future revisions of the Book of Common Prayer.”¹³⁴ It is worth noting that same year was when John Suter, Jr. replaced his father as the secretary of the SLC, after the latter’s decades-long service.¹³⁵

In their report to General Convention in 1940, the SLC expressed the belief that despite the fact that many were not using the BCP as written (which they called “lawlessness”), it was not yet time to reopen the revision process.¹³⁶ They presciently noted that when the time did come, the so-called “principle of uniformity” in worship was likely to be eliminated.¹³⁷ Unsurprisingly, the liturgical crime wave apparently continued to increase, and in both 1943 and 1946, the SLC requested permission and funding from the General Convention to begin work on liturgical reform, only to be

132. Journal 1928, 352.

133. Moriarty, *Liturgical Revolution*, 30-31.

134. Journal 1940, 195.

135. Journal 1940, 471.

136. Journal 1940, 472-473.

137. Journal 1940, 472. This was not exactly a novel proposition within the Anglican Communion at the time, however. The Lambeth Conference of 1920 issued resolutions stating that “liturgical uniformity should not be regarded as a necessity,” and that diocesan bishops had the “inherent right” to shape liturgy for their own dioceses. The emphasis became unity over uniformity. See *The Lambeth Conferences (1867-1930): The Reports of the 1920 and 1930 Conferences, with Selected Resolutions from the Conferences of 1867, 1878, 1888, 1897 and 1908* (London: SPCK, 1948), 45.

denied both times.¹³⁸ Then, at its next meeting in San Francisco in 1949, on the 400th anniversary of the first English BCP, Convention finally approved the idea, despite the fact that a majority of the dioceses surveyed by the SLC over the next three years disapproved of the project.¹³⁹ It granted the SLC's proposal to create and publish a series of studies, intended to share ideas, gather feedback, and eventually provide the data for a new prayer book.¹⁴⁰ Convention also appropriated the modest sum of \$2,000 as a guarantee against financial loss to the publisher, the Church Hymnal Corporation, in addition to the \$1,200 regularly earmarked for the SLC for the next three years.¹⁴¹ By the next meeting of General Convention in Boston in 1952, the SLC was able to report that the first three studies had been published and sold approximately 4,000 copies, so they were able to return the \$2,000.¹⁴² They also noted that completion of the series would take at least three more years, and possibly six.¹⁴³

That prediction ended up being quite accurate. Between 1950 and 1959, there were fourteen volumes of *Prayer Book Studies* (PBS) published. The marriage rite was addressed in PBS X, issued in 1958. Its introduction bore the same warning as the other volumes: that “the liturgical forms presented in these *Studies* are not – and under our Constitution, cannot be – sanctioned for public use. They are submitted for free

138. Moriarty, *Liturgical Revolution*, 32-33.

139. Journal 1952, 375. Only thirteen dioceses responded to the survey, and ten were opposed.

140. Journal 1949, 270, 434-435.

141. Journal 1949, 270, 434-435.

142. Journal 1952, 374.

143. Journal 1952, 375.

discussion.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, while the PBS volumes of this era usually included draft liturgies, they could not actually be used. They were instead designed to illustrate the ideas presented in the study and as a starting point for conversation. The SLC also intended to learn from the perceived errors in the previous rounds of revision, including that General Convention had to do so much of the work during legislative sessions:

The Standing Liturgical Commission is not, however, proposing any immediate revision. On the contrary, we believe that there ought to be a period of study and discussion, to acquaint the Church at large with the principles and issues involved, in order that the eventual action may be taken intelligently, and if possible without consuming so much of the time of our supreme legislative synod.¹⁴⁵

Regardless of whether they could be utilized, the liturgical forms certainly showed the direction that the SLC was suggesting the Church move.

The PBS X volume contained far more than a draft liturgy, however. It begins with a short history of marriage back to pre-Reformation England, suggesting that the 1549 English BCP contained a wedding liturgy in continuity with the medieval Sarum rite, with “a few features borrowed from the York Manual.”¹⁴⁶ That service was retained by future English books, and the SLC breaks into it four components: (1) an introduction, to caution that marriage should only be entered into reverently and carefully, (2) the mutual consents of the betrothal and the espousal, (3) a processional Psalm, and (4) prayers and a benediction. They explain that the betrothal began as a separate engagement ritual and survived as a declaration of the parties’ free will to enter into

144. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X: The Solemnization of Matrimony," in *Prayer Book Studies Volume Three: Initial Pastoral Offices, Issues X-XV*, ed. Derek Olsen (New York: Seabury Books, 2026), 4.

145. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 3.

146. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 6.

marriage, while the espousal was the actual entering of the marriage, which now flowed directly from the betrothal. They see that the former is phrased in the future tense while the latter uses present verbs.

More recently, Thomas Cooper has challenged this tidy division of betrothal and espousal, suggesting that it has been a common misreading of the liturgical history enabled by an ambiguity inherent to the English language: “Some recent commentators, believing them to be in the future tense, have popularized the notion that these questions are a relic of a separate betrothal ceremony which Cranmer unfortunately conflated with solemnization.”¹⁴⁷ He reminds us that in the Latin of the Sarum Rite, the “Will you have this woman/man...” question was phrased in the present tense¹⁴⁸ and that, indeed, the Latin version that Cranmer had made of his service did likewise, as did translations of the 1662 BCP into various languages. As Cooper humorously describes:

Formally to ask a couple at the chancel step whether they intend in the future to be married is pointless and might reasonably invite the response “What else do you think we’ve come for?” if not something ruder.... If the question is in the future tense it asks the couple to make impossibly categorical predictions about the future. I can promise to be faithful to another person and can have firm grounds for believing that I shall with God’s help fulfil my promise; what I cannot do is predict that I shall so fulfil it.¹⁴⁹

Regardless of tense, what matters theologically is the importance of consent being expressed in the liturgy and how it communicates that the ministers of this rite are the couple themselves.

147. Thomas Cooper, “Wilt Thou Have This Woman? - Asking God’s Blessing on Consenting Adults,” in *Anglican Marriage Rites: A Symposium*, ed. Kenneth W. Stevenson, Joint Liturgical Studies (Norwich: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2011), 27.

148. The question “*Vis habere hanc mulierem/hunc virum...?*” was answered “*Volo.*” See Collins, *Manuale Sarisburiensis*, 47.

149. Cooper, 42.

Returning to PBS X, the SLC then refers to a peculiarity of the American marriage service within the Anglican Communion that we encountered above. Ever since 1789, the Episcopal Church's BCP has uniquely allowed for the wedding to be held in a suitable house instead of in the church. This had been an accommodation to the lack of church buildings in the early post-colonial days. It was also provided as the simple explanation for why the American BCP did not have a processional Psalm: it simply didn't usually need one. Based on this, they suggest a slightly revised four-part structure in their draft liturgy: Introduction, Marriage, Benediction, and Communion.¹⁵⁰ Changes to each of the first three elements are then described.

The Introduction would retain the rubric granting permission for non-church weddings but now add that it was only "if urgent cause require."¹⁵¹ The SLC was clear that they believed all weddings should take place in the church when possible, but that in rural areas or for people facing illness or physical disability, it was not always feasible. This displays another hallmark of the liturgical movement – pastoral sensitivity was being incorporated more into the liturgy. As one of the Episcopal Church's pioneers of the movement, William Palmer Ladd, put it, "Modification in forms of worship should, it goes without saying, be made with due regard to devotional and intellectual habits."¹⁵² He did not believe that liturgy should be imposed on the people through fiat but instead reflect how people actually chose to worship. Although not mentioned by the SLC, no

150. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 7.

151. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 7.

152. William Palmer Ladd, *Prayer Book Interleaves: Some Reflections on How the Book of Common Prayer Might be Made More Influential in our English-Speaking World* (New York: Seabury Press, 1957).

doubt the large number of weddings being conducted in the 1950s would require some amount of pragmatic flexibility regarding their location.

Another proposed modification perhaps seems minor but would soon come to change the entire emotional context of the service in later work. In the then-current 1928 BCP, the couple was required to disclose any known impediments to the marriage under fear that they would “answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed.”¹⁵³ The SLC wanted to soften that language just slightly, changing “dreadful” to “dread” since the former term was likely to be misunderstood in society at the time. Unchanged, however, was similar language in the 1928 rite, such as the minister’s statement in the introduction that marriage is only to be entered into “in the fear of God” – a phrase that might easily be misunderstood by the casual wedding attendee.

In the Marriage portion of the service, two additional and larger changes were made to conform with popular practice, reflecting the trend previously mentioned of many taking flexibility into their own hands at the time. The first was to make optional the giving away of the bride. As the SLC wrote, “this survival of medieval custom has become meaningless.”¹⁵⁴ It is indeed somewhat ironic given the situation of gender roles in the 1950s described above but certainly reflects the ultimate completion in the previous decades of a movement away from marriage as an economic arrangement between families.

153. Episcopal Church, *1928 BCP*, 300.

154. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 8.

The second was another nod toward egalitarian marriage. In the previous and authorized liturgy, as had been the pattern for centuries, only the groom gave a wedding ring to the bride and not *vice versa*. The SLC draft, however, allowed for rings to be exchanged in both directions, although it was required by the groom and optional by the bride. In addition to “becoming increasingly customary,” they felt that the ring had completely lost its historical connection to the giving of a dowry.¹⁵⁵ It was now “a symbol of something far deeper and more spiritual.”¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, the SLC did not reflect that fact by modifying the language used by the priest to bless the rings, which is arguably not a blessing of the rings at all and is instead a blessing of the couple. They did, at least, correct the odd placement of that blessing, which in the 1928 BCP was actually printed after the ring was given.

The Benediction section saw very little substantive change except for one addition that was dropped from all later consideration and is wished for by many still today. The SLC proposed a simple dismissal and blessing of the congregation at the end of the service when there was not going to be a nuptial Eucharist. In keeping with the ethos of the liturgical movement, it was still preferred to include a Eucharist, however, and this would be “a constituent part of a Church wedding in its fullness and perfection.”¹⁵⁷ The SLC continued a set of wedding propers consisting of a collect, epistle, and gospel to facilitate this, but now intended it to be printed for the first time as part of the service instead of in a different section of the book in order to make its use normative. Also,

155. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 9.

156. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 9.

157. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies X," 9.

although a proper preface had been part of the Eucharist throughout the history of the BCP, as well as in the SLC's proposed revision five years earlier in PBS IV, none was provided here for the nuptial Eucharist. All told, Derek Olsen seems to have fairly characterized the PBS X wedding liturgy as "a now-typical gentle revision of the 1928 rite, primarily concerned with altering rubrics and words that have changed meaning."¹⁵⁸

Following the completion of the fourteen volumes of the first PBS series in 1959, the next volume was released in 1961. Rather than suggesting changes to any one particular service, PBS XV was the SLC's call on General Convention to amend the Church constitution to allow for the authorization of trial use liturgies. Resolutions for that purpose had been offered at General Conventions in 1952, 1955, and 1958, but they were all defeated.¹⁵⁹ It was finally approved on successive readings in 1961 and 1964¹⁶⁰, setting the stage for the SLC's work to be more broadly used in congregations. This was made explicit by the General Convention of 1967 – two years following the end of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council – which called for the SLC to begin the work of drafting a revised BCP through individual services that would be authorized for trial use and circulated throughout the Church.¹⁶¹

158. Derek Olsen, ed., *Prayer Book Studies Volume Three: Initial Pastoral Offices, Issues X-XV* (New York: Seabury Books, 2026), viii.

159. The Standing Liturgical Commission, "Prayer Book Studies XV: The Problem and Method of Prayer Book Revision," 215.

160. Journal 1961, 349-352, and Journal 1964, 260-262.

161. Moriarty, *Liturgical Revolution*, 110-111. But note that Moriarty appears to incorrectly provide the years of the Constitutional amendment as 1964 and 1967 on page 109. An otherwise good history of trial use in the Episcopal Church that unfortunately makes the same error can be found in Matthew S. C. Olver, "Article X, Trial Use, and the History of Liturgical Authorization in the Episcopal Church," *Anglican Theological Review* 105, no. 2 (2023). Support for my dating can be found in the Convention journals, the archived Constitutions, and also Ruth A. Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation: Re-Visioning Baptism in the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 1997), 126. Meyers found

For marriage, this was implemented in PBS 24,¹⁶² which was released in 1970 and authorized for trial use later that year by the General Convention at its meeting in Houston.¹⁶³ By this time, the Church recognized that marriage had changed as a cultural institution. For example, several years earlier, a report from the Committee to Study the Proper Place of Women in the Ministry of the Church observed that “many women choose careers and never marry, others combine marriage and careers,” and that “the Church recognizes that the latter is an entirely legitimate vocation, both in the secular world and in the Church itself.”¹⁶⁴ In PBS 24, the SLC also acknowledged that marriage was becoming more of a civil matter and less one controlled by the church:

Marriage is a solemn contract between a man and a woman, concluded and ratified in public because it concerns the entire community. The qualifications for marriage are today primarily a matter for the civil authorities although the Church maintains its additional criteria for marriage in the Canon Law. Yet the role of the clergyman as a civil magistrate continues to be recognized.¹⁶⁵

And, although they were not enacted at the time, resolutions were proposed in 1970 to eliminate altogether the giving in marriage during the service and relax the then-required waiting period of one year between the finalization of a divorce and remarriage.¹⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly, then, PBS 24 was a much more radical revision than the previous one in PBS X. In keeping with a broader emphasis on the vernacular within the liturgical

that the original source of this error is likely a 1981 book chapter written by Urban Holmes; see Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation*, 131 n.50.

162. In the second PBS series, the numbering switched from Roman to Arabic numerals.

163. *Journal* 1970, 348-349.

164. *Journal* 1970, 535.

165. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Pastoral Offices: Prayer Book Studies 24* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1970), 3-4.

166. *Journal* 1970, 69, 81.

movement, the proposed service used more modern language. Gone were words like “thee” and antiquated verb endings in the proposed rite. To put it mildly, this change was not without controversy since the language of prayer was so integral to people’s experience of worship. However, as more modern authors have humorously noted, many at the time forgot that Thomas Cranmer did not only use “thou” to address God; he also used it to speak to his wife and horse.¹⁶⁷ History has shown that it was only a matter of time.

This change in language also contributed to an entirely different tone. The whole service now felt less legalistic and more joyous. The title was changed from “The Solemnization of Matrimony,” which had existed since 1789 (and, further back, since 1662), to “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.” It seems the word *Celebration* is perhaps being used in two ways: both the technical sense of celebrating a sacrament as well as the common sense of rejoicing for the couple.¹⁶⁸ Instead of being warned about the “dread(ful) day of judgment” like in previous services, the couple was now simply charged to confess any marital impediment “in the Name of God”.¹⁶⁹ Entirely gone was the rubric specifying where the service could take place. The welcome recited by the officiant was rewritten to remove the “fear of God” and list the purposes of marriage as joy, help, comfort, and the procreation of children when God wills it.¹⁷⁰ Several years later, the SLC would note that they were intentionally placed in that order to correct

167. Fenwick and Spinks, *Worship in Transition*, 149.

168. For an excellent discussion about how marriage might be seen as an Augustinian *sacramentum* (or “sacred obligation”) without calling it a sacrament, see Strout, *Shepherding Souls*, 99-100.

169. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 26.

170. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 24.

misunderstandings about church teaching and to deny primacy to the purpose of procreation.¹⁷¹ In a new set of prayers that were intended to be the intercessions at the nuptial Eucharist, the suffrage praying for children was marked as optional.¹⁷² Reflecting the biblical scholarship described above, the draft service also finally ceased claiming Pauline authorship for the letter to the Hebrews.

In the prefatory material of PBS 24, the SLC also sets forth their lofty view of marriage as something far more wide-reaching than the “honourable estate” described in the 1928 BCP, and it is well worth quoting at length – noting also that it places the focus on the new family formed by the couple themselves and does not require procreation:

Marriage is a solemn commitment by two persons to follow a new way of life, and therefore, marriage between two Christians is a renewed commitment by them to ground their new life together in the life of Christ. Considered as a formal bond between two persons, marriage is their life-long undertaking to love one another in all the circumstances and vicissitudes of human life and to remain faithful to one another; as the creation of a new family, marriage is a commitment to show forth the meaning of love to the larger community in which the new family makes its home, and to bring up a new generation of Christians in the knowledge and love of God.¹⁷³

Here we can see what John Fenwick and Bryan Spinks have called a strand of the liturgical movement: a focus on the church as a new community that stands against the individualism of society.¹⁷⁴ This community was given a real part to play in the service

171. Charles S. Price, *Introducing the Proposed Book: A Study of the Significance of the Proposed Book of Common Prayer for the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Episcopal Church* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1976), 89-90.

172. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 33.

173. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 4.

174. Fenwick and Spinks, *Worship in Transition*, 5.

for the first time in PBS 24. A new question after the declaration of consent asked them to promise to “support and uphold this marriage in the years ahead.”¹⁷⁵

Other impacts of the liturgical movement can be discerned in the proposed rite. For the first time, Scripture readings were incorporated into the service. Before that, they were only required if the wedding continued into a Eucharist. Now, at least one passage would be required regardless. The SLC provided their reasoning for this shift as: “In addition to enriching the Marriage Service itself with a biblical frame of reference, the introductory section of the rite constitutes a full Ministry of the Word for the celebration of the nuptial Eucharist.”¹⁷⁶ What was old had become new once more. This also had the effect of separating the declaration of consent from the vows, a shift in which Stevenson sees “the importance of intentionality.”¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, this Eucharist, while still optional, should be the “climactic action” of all of the pastoral offices, including marriage.¹⁷⁸

PBS 24 also retained some of the changes made in PBS X that reflected updated gender norms. The giving away of the bride remained optional and, while not entirely clear, the draft seemed to maintain the precept of requiring at least one wedding ring but allowing for two. The purpose of the ring or rings, however, saw some clarification. As described above, rings were only questionably blessed in previous liturgies. Now, while they were still only a means of blessing the couple, the SLC added a statement by the

175. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 27.

176. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 6.

177. Kenneth W. Stevenson, "Introduction," in *Anglican Marriage Rites: A Symposium*, ed. Kenneth W. Stevenson, Joint Liturgical Studies (Norwich, UK: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2011), 8.

178. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 7.

giver that they would be “a symbol of my vow,”¹⁷⁹ clarifying that they are not a theologically necessary part of the service. This would hopefully counter the misperception present since at least medieval times that the marriage was sacramentally enacted by the giving of a ring and not the recitation of vows in front of witnesses.¹⁸⁰ It was perhaps a bit muddled, however, by the revised pronouncement that declared the couple married because they “have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of a ring (rings).”¹⁸¹

Given the pace of revision, there was little time between the release of PBS 24 and the Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer that would go on to become the new BCP following its approvals in 1976 and 1979. Thus, while there were not many large changes made to the marriage service between 1970 and 1979, a fair number of smaller tweaks were made to the draft liturgy of PBS 24 for presumably theological emphasis. The final version saw a minor editing of the introductory address, returning the opening words from “Good people” to the long-established “Dearly beloved” and making the purpose of the gathering to “witness and bless” the couple’s joining together instead of “witness and proclaim” it. Marriage was also explicitly referred to for the first time as a covenant instead of “an honourable estate.” The rings would now be truly (although optionally) blessed for the first time since the Reformation. The congregational prayers

179. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies 24*, 29.

180. See both Duffy, 66, and Kimberly Bracken Long, “The Sacramentality of Marriage in the Western Church: An Overview,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Sacraments and Sacramentality*, ed. Martha Moore-Keish and James W Farwell (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 267.

181. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies 24*, 29. Emphasis omitted.

were also moved to be an integral part of the service instead of a component of the optional Eucharist to follow.

In addition, there was an important wholesale rewrite of the marriage canon in 1973. Following significant debate, General Convention approved the remarriage of divorced persons upon application to the bishop, among other changes.¹⁸² Ned Cole, then the Bishop of Central New York, summarized that the new canon would provide for “a more pastoral, more prompt and more human” approach to marriage.¹⁸³ The perceived importance of the interaction of theology and sociology is also seen clearly in the introductory commentary written by Charles Price on behalf of the SLC:

The...form for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage appears at a time when the institution of marriage in our society is undergoing many changes – changes resulting from the increased ease and frequency of divorce, from the felt failures of the nuclear family, and from the consequent desire to see the new family established by marriage in the context of society as a whole. The new marriage service intends to recognize the cultural changes which are taking place, provided that they do not contradict the Christian understanding of marriage as a life-long and monogamous union.¹⁸⁴

Another reflection of this was the removal of the language for the giving-away portion of the service into a new set of Additional Directions. There, provision was also made for the first time for both bride and groom to be presented. Presumably for similar reasons, the 1979 BCP introduced a novelty into the declaration of consent by having the bride go first, with the groom speaking first at both the vows and rings. The collect that introduced the scripture readings was also given a much-needed refreshing by Charles Guilbert,

182. Journal 1973, 319-325.

183. “Episcopal Canon on Divorce Eased,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1973.

184. Price, *Introducing the Proposed Book: A Study of the Significance of the Proposed Book of Common Prayer for the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Episcopal Church*, 89.

based on the 1549 BCP's adaptation of the Sarum ring blessing,¹⁸⁵ that in its final version also served to remove the PBS 24 description of God as “creator and sustainer of all *men.*”¹⁸⁶

The form of the matrimonial service remained very much unchanged, although it saw a return of the normative nuptial Eucharist and the language was thoroughly updated in idiom. The largest additions to the 1979 BCP were actually two new supplemental marriage rites. One provides for the ecclesiastical blessing of a civil marriage, perhaps optimistically reflecting the membership decline seen by the Episcopal Church and other mainline Protestant denominations from the mid-1960s into the 1980s.¹⁸⁷ The other is a minimalistic Order for Marriage, which laid out the essential components of the service but allowed for flexibility in the wording of everything except the vows. Price notes that the major goal of this was to incorporate “various ethnic or marriage customs” into the service.¹⁸⁸ Although it took several decades, the final version of the marriage service did what seemed almost impossible: reflect modern trends while maintaining traditional theology and liturgy. That tradition, however, was about to be challenged.

185. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, 434-435.

186. The Standing Liturgical Commission, *Prayer Book Studies* 24, 27.

187. Holmes, *Brief History*, 166-175.

188. Price, *Introducing the Proposed Book: A Study of the Significance of the Proposed Book of Common Prayer for the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Episcopal Church*, 93.

Chapter Four: Developments Since 1979

The Changing Nature of Modern Marriage

The later decades of the twentieth century continued the cultural shift in the nature of marriage in America. A group of sociologists analyzed two nationwide surveys, one conducted in 1980 and the other in 2000, which used identical sampling methods and thus allowed more valid comparison.¹ From this, they were able to identify a number of trends.² First, marriage was postponed until later in life, and the age of first marriage rose by almost three years on average. The proportion of couples cohabitating before marriage rose sharply from 16 percent to 41 percent in just those two decades. That rise continued, and by 2013, there were an estimated eight million cohabitating couples in the United States.³ In fact, it became so common that demographers have almost universally modified their surveys to include it as a form of relationship.⁴

The vast majority of couples considered living together as a normative intensification of the dating process, part of a larger societal shift that the Johns Hopkins sociologist Andrew Cherlin has termed the *deinstitutionalization* of marriage. By this, he means “a weakening of the social norms that define people’s behavior in a social institution such as marriage.”⁵ He draws on the work of Kathleen Kiernan, who wrote on

1. Amato et al., *Alone Together*, 3.

2. Amato et al., *Alone Together*, 205-208.

3. Tatiana Boncompagni, "All the Conventional Cohabitation, but No Nuptials," *New York Times*, July 3, 2014.

4. Wendy D. Manning et al., "Measuring Cohabitation in U.S. National Surveys," *Demography* 56 (2019).

5. Andrew J. Cherlin, "The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004): 848.

the situation in Western Europe, that there are four phases to the evolving acceptance of cohabitation: first, as a deviant phenomenon; second, as a test for marriage; third, as an alternative to marriage; and fourth, as something indistinguishable from marriage.⁶ One 2002 study found that only about 15 percent of American couples who lived together were “trial cohabitators,” testing out living together to determine if they should marry (which would be stage two), and only about 10 percent used it as an alternative to marriage (which reflected stage three).⁷ If that is the framework, then the contemporary United States is well on its way to fully normalizing cohabitation. Of young women in another nationally representative survey, fully 68 percent expected to live with their spouse prior to marriage.⁸

It should be noted that Cherlin’s work has been the subject of significant scholarly debate.⁹ He himself has concluded more recently that some parts of his deinstitutionalization concept did not stand up to scrutiny, although he stands by the notion that “marriage has become much less dominant as a context for family life,” and finds the extent of cohabitation to be strong evidence.¹⁰ Interestingly, those in lower

6. Kathleen Kiernan, "Cohabitation in Western Europe: Trends, Issues, and Implications," in *Just Living Together: Implications of Cohabitation on Families, Children, and Social Policy*, ed. Alan Booth, Ann C. Crouter, and Nancy S. Landale, The Pennsylvania State University Family Studies Symposia Series (Mahwah, NJ: Routledge, 2002), 5.

7. Cited in Sharon Sassler and Amanda Jayne Miller, "Assessing the Deinstitutionalization of Marriage Thesis: Changes in the Meaning of Cohabitation Over the Relationship Life Course," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 85 (2023): 372.

8. Wendy D. Manning, Pamela J. Smock, and Marshal Neal Fetto, "Cohabitation and Marital Expectations Among Single Millennials in the U.S.," *Population Research and Policy Review* 38 (2019): 327.

9. Sassler and Miller, "Assessing the Deinstitutionalization," 371-372.

10. Andrew J. Cherlin, "Degrees of Change: An Assessment of the Deinstitutionalization of Marriage Thesis," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82 (2020): 68-69.

economic classes tend to marry less following cohabitation, and interviews suggest that perhaps there was a financial motivation for some of these couples that incentivized cohabitation but not marriage.¹¹ Cherlin sees almost two entirely different systems at play here: a college-educated group of Americans for whom marriage is often still central and a non-college-educated group that more often utilizes alternatives such as cohabitation and single parenthood.¹² Perhaps the simplest conclusion is that of Sharon Sassler and Amanda Jayne Miller several years ago: “In the early 21st century, cohabitation is part of the developmental change reshaping marriage among the middle-class, but plays a more transformational role among the less advantaged, where the institution’s hold has weakened.”¹³ Regardless, it is safe to see in the early twenty-first century at least some amount of what one group of researchers calls a “decoupling” of cohabitation from marriage.¹⁴

The sociologists described other economic changes between 1980 and 2000 as well.¹⁵ More wives were employed, increasing from 57 percent to 75 percent, and they generally worked jobs that demanded longer hours and more travel. This was a mixed blessing as more married people began to feel that their job or their spouse’s job was interfering with family life and their social isolation increased – but family incomes also went up by about one-fourth after adjusting for inflation. Driven by the increase of women working, marriages became somewhat more egalitarian overall. By the year 2000,

11. Sassler and Miller, "Assessing the Deinstitutionalization," 377.

12. Cherlin, "Degrees of Change," 69-70.

13. Sassler and Miller, "Assessing the Deinstitutionalization," 370.

14. Manning, Smock, and Fetro, "Cohabitation and Marital Expectations," 327-328.

15. Amato et al., *Alone Together*, 205-208.

women earned about one-third of the family's income and men performed about one-third of the household work. Both of these numbers were significant increases over the situation in 1980: gains of about 50 percent and 30 percent, respectively. Overall, marriages at the end of the twentieth century tended to be less happy but also filled with less conflict, mostly due to decreased spousal interaction.¹⁶

To this point, marriage has been described, both liturgically and sociologically, as between a man and a woman. That also changed greatly during this period, although, as usual, the seeds of change go back further. The sexual revolution of the 1960s brought with it the gay liberation movement, which forced the Episcopal Church to grapple with questions about the propriety of non-heterosexual relationships.¹⁷ According to a review by Ruth Meyers, General Convention first called for a study on homosexuality (among other topics related to human sexuality) in 1967, but none was forthcoming until 1976.¹⁸ That report led to a resolution the same year acknowledging that "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church."¹⁹ A companion resolution expressed "that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection."²⁰ This was reaffirmed in 1985, with a call for the individual dioceses to "find an effective way to

16. Amato et al., *Alone Together*, 215-219.

17. Hein and Shattuck, *The Episcopalians*, 143. I have chosen the term "non-heterosexual" throughout in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible and since terms such as "LGBTQ" are anachronistic during this period.

18. Ruth A. Meyers, "'I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing': Liturgy and Theology for Blessing Same-Sex Couples in The Episcopal Church (USA)," *Studia Liturgica*, 44 (2014): 203.

19. Journal 1976, C108-109.

20. Journal 1976, C109.

foster a better understanding of homosexual persons, to dispel myths and prejudices about homosexuality, to provide pastoral support, and to give life to” their claim upon the love and concern of the Church.²¹

While this was progressive for its time, as Meyers notes, Convention remained silent about the issue of same-sex marriage until 1991.²² While condemning it, the gathering in Phoenix did acknowledge the burgeoning acceptance of non-heterosexual relationships in society, although it was in the context of who could be ordained since same-sex marriage was not yet on the horizon. The Committee on Social and Urban Affairs noted in their report that they had received nearly 15,000 petitions opposing the ordination of “avowed practicing homosexuals” and the blessing of same-sex unions.²³ After lengthy debate and a number of proposed amendments, Convention passed the following language, in part, as resolution A104:

The teaching of the Episcopal Church is that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong monogamous “union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind”...as set forth in the *Book of Common Prayer*; and be it further resolved, that this Church continue to work to reconcile the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many members of this body.²⁴

The resolution also called on the House of Bishops to prepare a pastoral teaching on the issues before the next Convention.

That pastoral document was indeed created in 1994 with what Meyers calls “considerable effort,” but the bishops could only agree to continue their dialogue.²⁵ The

21. Journal 1985, 207.

22. Meyers, "Liturgy and Theology," 203.

23. Journal 1991, 746.

24. Journal 1991, 746.

25. Meyers, "Liturgy and Theology," 203.

1994 General Convention finally called for a report in the next triennium on the “theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex,” and appropriated all of \$8,600 for the work.²⁶ An amendment from Bishop Theodore Eastman of Maryland made it explicit that no actual rites could actually be developed without further authorization by Convention.²⁷ In 1997, the Committee on Social and Urban Affairs attempted to repeal that prohibition through resolution C003 that called upon the SLC to disseminate same-sex blessing liturgies for discussion throughout the Church. Instead, the resolution was substituted by the House of Bishops to reaffirm “the sacredness of Christian marriage between one man and one woman” and asked the SLC to instead study the issue further.²⁸ Meyers observes that despite its illicit nature, many clergy had already begun blessing same-sex relationships by the early 1990s, often even with the support of their bishop, which is part of why the issue kept recurring at General Convention during this period.²⁹

The next official action of the Church on the subject was in 2000. That Convention acknowledged the continuing increased acceptance of non-heterosexual relationships. Its resolution recognized that “while the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved,” there were couples in the Church both living in marriage and living in “other life-long committed relationships.”³⁰ It further called for fidelity, monogamy, and “holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of

26. Journal 1994, 819.

27. Journal 1994, 265-266

28. Journal 1997, 203-204, 781.

29. Meyers, "Liturgy and Theology," 204.

30. Journal 2000, 287-288.

God.”³¹ This was a groundbreaking acceptance of non-marital and non-heterosexual relationships, and the theology underlying the resolution would later be appropriated in the rites that were developed.³²

The evolving acceptance of non-heterosexual relationships became a point of contention within the broader Anglican Communion as well. At the Lambeth Conference of 1998, the gathered bishops issued a resolution that upheld marriage as between a man and a woman and rejected homosexuality “as incompatible with Scripture.”³³ At the same time, they advised against blessing same-sex relationships and the ordination of “those involved in same gender unions.”³⁴ Both of these things quickly came to pass, however, and Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, appointed a Lambeth Commission in 2003 at the request of the primates, to study the Episcopal Church’s consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson and a diocese of the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) authorizing a liturgical blessing for same-sex unions.³⁵ In its product the next year, entitled *The Windsor Report*, there was much discussion of the unity of the church and its sources of authority, but quite a bit less on the particular issue of non-heterosexual relationships. They reiterated the previous statements of the Lambeth Conference and called for mutual discernment. As Ellen Wondra summarizes, the Commission issued a number of “invitations”: that both the Episcopal Church and ACC issue statements

31. Journal 2000, 288.

32. Meyers, "Liturgy and Theology," 204.

33. *The Lambeth Conference: Resolutions Archive from 1998* (1998), 9, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/76650/1998.pdf>.

34. *Resolutions Archive from 1998*, 9.

35. The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report 2004* (2004), 8, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/68225/windsor2004full.pdf>.

regretting their actions, that conservative groups do so similarly for interfering outside their jurisdictions, and to place a moratorium on similar actions in the future.³⁶ None of that was going to happen – at least in the United States.³⁷

There was also a curious condemnation in *The Windsor Report* of the Episcopal Church's decision in 2003 to "allow experimentation with public Rites of Blessing for same sex unions."³⁸ As Ian Douglas has written, the Church had actually done no such thing.³⁹ While there was initially a resolution on the floor that simply called for the approval of a same-sex relationship blessing, it was substituted by the House of Bishops with a much lengthier affirmation. One of its many points was that "local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions."⁴⁰ Paul Marshall, the bishop who wrote that language, called it nothing less than a "willful misrepresentation" by the Lambeth Commission.⁴¹

Around the same time as the battle was being waged within the Anglican Communion, legal challenges began to mount in the secular courts as the issue received

36. Ellen K. Wondra, "'The Highest Degree of Communion Possible': Initial Reflections on the Windsor Report 2004," *Anglican Theological Review* 87, no. 2 (2005): 194.

37. The Episcopal Church responded to the invitation by providing a lengthy biblical and theological justification for the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of those who are in one. See *To Set Our Hope on Christ: A Response to the Invitation of Windsor Report ¶135* (2005). The Anglican Church of Canada's response, which does include both regret and a partial moratorium, can be found at <https://archive.anglican.ca/gs2007/rr/reports/report-17.pdf>.

38. The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *Windsor Report*, 18.

39. Ian T. Douglas, "An American Reflects on the Windsor Report," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 176.

40. *Journal* 2003, 615.

41. Quoted in Douglas, "An American Reflects," 177.

more attention throughout the country. In the late 1990s, many states had passed laws restricting marriage to the union between a man and a woman. In 2005, a Gallup poll found the American public opposed same-sex marriage by a margin of 59 to 37 percent, and by 2007, forty-four states had marriage bans in place.⁴² But the picture changed rapidly in the early decades of the twenty-first century with several state and federal court decisions.

The first state to allow gay marriage was Massachusetts, through a legal challenge decided in 2003.⁴³ In 2008, California's Supreme Court declared gay marriage to be legal, but the voters quickly overturned it by ballot proposition and then the United States Supreme Court reversed that ban. On the same day in 2013 when that decision was released, the Defense of Marriage Act was also declared unconstitutional, requiring the federal government to recognize same-sex marriages from states that allowed them. By the end of 2014, the courts had ruled against marriage bans in thirty-five states and upheld them in four others. This set the stage for a ground-breaking decision the next year.⁴⁴ With such a split across the country, the Supreme Court decided to hear several cases consolidated together into *Obergefell v. Hodges*. One of the attorneys for the petitioners argued in front of the Court that discrimination based on sexual orientation violates the Fourteenth Amendment the same way discrimination based on sex or race

42. Leslie J. Gabel-Brett and Kevin M. Cathcart, "Introduction: Love Unites Us," in *Love Unites Us: Winning the Freedom to Marry in America*, ed. Kevin M. Cathcart and Leslie J. Gabel-Brett (New York: New Press, 2016), 10.

43. Gabel-Brett and Cathcart, "Love Unites Us," 10.

44. Gabel-Brett and Cathcart, "Love Unites Us," 11.

does.⁴⁵ Five of the nine justices agreed, and on June 26, 2015, same-sex marriage became the law of the land.

I Will Bless You: Rites for Same-Sex Couples

The Episcopal Church had also evolved in its evaluation of same-sex relationships during this time. In 2009, General Convention began debate in the House of Bishops over the issue of liturgies for blessing same-sex unions. After a series of amendments, amended amendments, postponements, and substitutions, they eventually passed resolution C056 by a vote of 104 to 30 (with two abstentions).⁴⁶ The final version acknowledged that the changing legal framework required a “renewed pastoral response” and an “open process for the consideration of theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same gender relationships”.⁴⁷ It further called upon the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM; the successor to the SLC that also had music rolled into its mandate in 1997⁴⁸) to begin developing and collecting resources for that purpose. The resolution passed the House of Deputies with roughly 70 percent of dioceses voting for it in each order.⁴⁹

The SCLM completed that work with the publication of a volume on the topic in 2012. They note that, at the time, same-sex marriage was legal in six states (plus the

45. Mary L. Bonauto, "10:02 on Tuesday Morning: Arguing *Obergefell* Before the U.S. Supreme Court," in *Love Unites Us: Winning the Freedom to Marry in America*, ed. Kevin M. Cathcart and Leslie J. Gabel-Brett (New York: New Press, 2016), 88.

46. Journal 2009, 202-303.

47. Journal 2009, 780.

48. Journal 1997, 186-187, 636-638.

49. Journal 2009, 780.

District of Columbia), banned in thirty-nine, and twelve allowed for some sort of civil union or domestic partnership.⁵⁰ Although stating that they did not intend to address the question of whether the Church should bless same-sex unions, they provide a lengthy theological rationale for doing so. They also concluded, based on legal expert opinions, that the First Amendment allowed for the Church to bless same-sex relationships regardless of state laws to the contrary, as long as the service did not purport to be a wedding.⁵¹

To that end, they proposed a new liturgy called “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” (WBLC) which the General Convention authorized in 2012 for provisional use with permission of the bishop after amending the original resolution that called for trial use and making a number of changes to wording of the liturgy itself.⁵² One of the more wide-ranging changes from the floor was replacing the term “same-gender” with “same-sex” throughout the book.⁵³ The result was a service that looked at least somewhat like the marriage rite of the 1979 BCP although with very careful language. This was intentional. As Meyers, who was the chair of the SCLM at the time as well as chair of this project, recalls:

Admittedly, a liturgical resource for blessing a couple would not require the inclusion of a form of consent, vows, and the exchange of rings....But as the commission did its work, both our theological reflection and our conversations around the church indicated that these elements provide a critical foundation for

50. Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *I Will Bless You, and You Will be a Blessing*, Liturgical Resources 1 (New York: Church Publishing, 2012), 3.

51. Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *I Will Bless You*, 61. There followed a rather convoluted analysis which suggested that clergy could officiate at a civil marriage in states which allowed same-sex marriage without violating the marriage canon as long as the BCP wedding liturgy was not used. Since it did not affect the liturgical resources provided, the discussion is moot for these purposes.

52. Journal 2012, 190-193, 565-566.

53. Journal 2012, 190-193, 565-566.

the blessing. The consent and the vows make public the couples' intention to live together in a lifelong, monogamous relationship in accord with the characteristics enumerated in the General Convention resolution in 2000.⁵⁴

Although the structure of WBLC was rather unlike that of a traditional wedding service, it would seemingly inculcate a similar sort of perception, as it allowed for the entrance of one or both partners and an optional giving-away, which was now called a presentation. It was similarly intended to be a complete Ministry of the Word for a subsequent Eucharist. The language of both the prayers and the vows was at least reminiscent of that in the BCP, and rings could be blessed and given – although they were given as a symbol of their love and not of their vows.

Yet parts of the service were noticeably different. It opened with a dialogue familiar to the Sunday Eucharist and not to a traditional wedding. Entirely missing was the theological grounding of the extant wedding liturgy that set forth the purposes of marriage and its establishment by God. Instead, this seemed purely a testament to love and fidelity along with the Church's blessing of the relationship. Absent also were charges to the couple and the congregation to confess any known impediment to proceeding. According to Meyers, this was because they were not considered a necessary part of the service and eliminating them reduced the opportunity for dissent or even protest activity.⁵⁵ The prayers for the couple, which optionally incorporated the areas required for standard Prayers of the People, were also elegantly moved to a spot before the exchange of vows, immediately after asking those present to commit to pray for the couple. The overall goal was to create a service that more closely followed the shape of

54. Meyers, "Liturgy and Theology," 208.

55. Ruth Meyers, personal interview, February 19, 2026.

the baptismal liturgy but retained the historic elements of a wedding such as consent, vows, rings, pronouncement, and blessing⁵⁶ – all of which it certainly accomplished. A survey conducted by the SCLM in the following triennium found that of fifty-five bishops responding, thirty-eight authorized the use of WBLC and twelve had not (along with five who did not answer).⁵⁷

This next triennium also ushered in the sweeping changes to the legal status of same-sex marriage explored above. As Meyers, who continued to chair the SCLM, noted shortly afterwards, this led to a “perception that the church was attempting to provide ‘separate but equal’ treatment that was actually unequal” by providing a blessing but not a marriage service.⁵⁸ This prompted the Commission to come back in 2015 with four complete liturgies for Convention’s consideration along with gender-neutral versions of *The Blessing of a Civil Marriage* and *An Order for Marriage*. One of them, entitled “The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony,” was a gender-neutral reworking of the 1928 BCP rite⁵⁹ and was struck from the authorizing resolution by the House of Bishops.⁶⁰ Another, which was reauthorized, was a slight reworking of WBLC that brought no changes to its structure but did see the opening address modified to include some of its more traditional aspects such as “Dearly beloved” and the instruction to enter into marriage not “lightly or

56. Ruth A. Meyers, "I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing': New Marriage Rites for The Episcopal Church," *Liturgy* 34, no. 3 (2019): 45.

57. *Reports to the 78th General Convention: Otherwise Known as The Blue Book*, 394, https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/gc_reports/books/bb_2015.pdf.

58. Meyers, "New Marriage Rites," 45.

59. *Reports to the 78th General Convention*, 395.

60. *Journal* 2015, 269.

thoughtlessly, but responsibly and with reverence.”⁶¹ Similarly, the rings were to be given with the same familiar language as that of the 1979 BCP.

The other two of the four proposals were new rites that General Convention authorized for trial use for the first time in 2015, again requiring permission from the diocesan bishop.⁶² However, even over attempts to weaken its force in the House of Bishops, the resolution also mandated that bishops “make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies.”⁶³ One of them was an adaptation of WBLC entitled “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” (WBM) that used the word *marriage* instead of more generically calling it a *commitment*. Yet WBM retained almost all of the language and structure of WBLC, so it was again clearly something different than the BCP matrimonial service. Meyers writes that this was intentional so that:

The rite begins not with “dearly beloved,” the exhortation so familiar from portrayals of Anglican weddings in film and television, but rather with an opening acclamation taken from the Eucharistic liturgy, emphasizing that this is a liturgical celebration of the community of faith.⁶⁴

It also made provision for those who had previously made a lifelong commitment to now enter into marriage since it was more broadly available to same-sex couples. The way this was accomplished in WBM, it required only a change to the language of the opening address and the blessing of the rings.

61. Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *I Will Bless You, and You Will be a Blessing*, Rev. ed., Liturgical Resources 1 (New York: Church Publishing, 2015).

62. Journal 2015, 780-781.

63. Journal 2015, 269-270.

64. Meyers, "New Marriage Rites," 46.

The fourth service provided by the SLCM in 2015 was called “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2” (CBM2) to differentiate it from the similarly named rite in the 1979 BCP. It was essentially a gender-neutral rendering of the service that had been in use for the previous forty years. This one was intended for the many same-sex couples who preferred an adapted version of that BCP rite instead of something entirely new, although it would be entirely suitable for any couple. Doing this had the added effect, as Meyers puts it, of a “strong symbolic resonance that signified that their marriage was the same as the marriage of a different-sex couple.”⁶⁵ Although WBM had provided a new proper preface for the nuptial Eucharist, CBM2 instead called for using the preface of the liturgical season in order to keep the service as close to the BCP as possible.⁶⁶ This was updated in 2018 with a newly composed preface that bears little resemblance to that of the BCP and speaks of the love inherent within the persons of the Trinity as opposed to the love of Christ for the Church.⁶⁷ In so doing, marriage is grounded in a mutual interconnection that is free of gender roles and subordination. Meyers believes that it was especially important to eliminate the *bride* and *bridegroom* language from the 1979 service.⁶⁸ That General Convention removed the requirement for the bishop’s permission to use them and also extended trial use of these rites until such time as the BCP was

65. Meyers, "New Marriage Rites," 50. Meyers expanded on this during my interview of her that she heard from many same-sex couples that they had waited so long for this that they wanted to be married with the structure of the traditional BCP rite.

66. Meyers, personal interview.

67. Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *Marriage Rites for the Whole Church*, Liturgical Resources 2 (New York: Church Publishing, 2018), 27.

68. Meyers, personal interview.

revised, with another resolution creating a task force to propose a method for that revision and “memorializing” the 1979 BCP.⁶⁹

The next gathering of General Convention, delayed a year by the COVID-19 pandemic, was also significantly abbreviated from its planned duration. During the lead-up to 2022, the SCLM was largely taken up with revisions to the *Book of Occasional Services* and *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. It no longer had a subcommittee charged with same-sex marriage rites, as it had done from their first meeting in 2010.⁷⁰ All of this led to very little work on the matrimonial liturgies. There was one significant liturgical resolution, however, and that was the first reading of an amendment to the Church constitution that would allow for the full approval (as opposed to trial use) of liturgies to supplement, but not alter, the BCP with the vote of a single General Convention instead of requiring two consecutive ones, taking another step in the evolution of the process that had been in place for over two hundred years.⁷¹

Back on the regular three-year schedule, Convention met again in 2024 and ratified this change to the Constitution.⁷² In addition, the marriage rites were now part of the conversation once again. The SCLM brought forth a proposal to both authorize and officially include into the BCP the gender-neutral CBM2 service along with its corresponding Blessing of a Civil Marriage and Order for Marriage as additional

69. Journal 2018, 306-309, 315-317, 480-481, 659-660, 1004-1008.

70. *Reports to the 77th General Convention: Otherwise Known as The Blue Book*, 166-167, https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/gc_reports/books/bb_2012.pdf.

71. Journal 2022, 926-928.

72. Journal 2024, 431-432, 685-687.

alternatives.⁷³ It passed overwhelmingly – at least in the House of Deputies where the vote tallies are reported – although in a modified form after being substituted entirely in the House of Bishops with a resolution that describes the insertion into the BCP as trial use and not the first reading of a permanent change.⁷⁴ It also reauthorized WBM, with a view toward approving it for trial use at the following General Convention in 2027.⁷⁵ The dizzying array of matrimonial options was only slightly reduced but at least appears to be nearing stability.

73. *Reports to the 81st General Convention: Otherwise Known as The Blue Book*, SCLM 28, https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/gc_reports/books/bb_2024.pdf. For the first time, the pagination begins anew with each section of the Reports.

74. Journal 2024, 564-565, 762-763. It also states that it is pursuant to Article X.b of the Constitution, which is likely a typographical error for Article X, Section 4.b. Meyers believes that due to the language of Article X, trial use here implied that it was also a first reading of an alteration (personal interview).

75. Journal 2024, 567, 834-835.

Conclusion

In roughly 400 years, we have seen a drastic reimagining of marriage in the United States. What began as the literal means of physical survival for colonial settlers has become now primarily a locus of emotional support that brings with it financial and legal consequences. Although love has always been part of marriage, it has meant different things in different times – far more than its multivalency of meaning today might suggest. Over the course of this story, we have seen back-and-forth changes to gender roles, a broadening acceptance of non-heterosexual marriage, and at least the partial decoupling of cohabitation from marriage. It is safe to say that the institution as it is known today bears little resemblance to that experienced by John and Abigail Adams, let alone Thomas Cranmer and his Reformation-era contemporaries. A remarkable amount – but certainly not all – of this change came after the mid-part of the twentieth century, as the relationship between church, society, and the institution of marriage began to be most radically redefined.

Yet despite the broad social change, the matrimonial liturgy has changed far less. Structurally, it is almost identical to the traditional English prayer books from whence it originated, as can be seen in Appendix One. This seems to prove Taft's hypothesis, introduced above, that structures tend to persist. Even though a new arrangement was proposed more than a decade ago that entirely cohered with the principles of the liturgical movement, it remains a supplemental rite and not the normative one, although anecdotal evidence suggests that there is significant regional variation and that WBM does find frequent use in some parts of the country. Changes to the BCP service's language and teaching have been made, but slowly and deliberately, often after being the subject of

much debate. The modifications have also, almost without exception, tracked the evolving societal understanding of marriage. In other words, each revision of the matrimonial liturgy has emerged from a particular moment in not just the church's history but also the culture in which it sits. As people talk and think differently, it is only natural to expect to find that expressed in their worship.

This has had the fascinating overall effect of conserving many of the ritual aspects of marriage while almost entirely reinventing its meaning, as Conor McCarthy narrates:

A couple getting married in the twenty-first century may do so in a ceremony of consent not dissimilar to that of a fourteenth-century couple.... It is more than likely that each of the two couples will cohabit, have sexual intercourse, share property, perhaps raise children. But it is ideology which defines the cultural meaning carried by these various actions. How the two couples conceive of marriage as a social institution is likely to differ enormously. The actions performed are superficially similar, but their cultural context, and hence their meaning (both to the individuals concerned and their broader society), are very different.¹

The difference between liturgical continuity and resistance to change is entirely in the eye of the beholder, however.

While the creeping pace of progress may strike some as too bureaucratic or at least overly cautious, it really is not, for two main reasons. First, marriage is clearly important to our lives and thus, by extension, to the Church – something Walter Kasper recognized decades ago when he wrote that “there is no other sphere in which faith and life are so intimately in contact with each other as in marriage.”² It is thus not something to tinker with unadvisedly or lightly. Second, liturgical reform must always hold a tension

1. McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England*, 4. Although writing primarily about England, his point is no less valid in our context here.

2. Walter Kasper, *Theology of Christian Marriage*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 1.

between ancient and modern, between its historic roots and the contemporary culture into which it speaks. As the Scottish liturgiologist William Perry (not to be confused with the American William Stevens Perry mentioned above) once wrote, a good liturgist “makes no fetish of the liturgies of the past; but he would be something of a barbarian if he were to ignore those great forms of worship which, like the greatest churches and the finest sculpture, are ancient, not modern.”³

One thing that cannot be ignored in the history of marriage is that the church’s control over it is now severely eroded to the point where asking questions about the relevance of the connection in the modern era feels appropriate for perhaps the first time. For example, one survey suggested that only 41 percent of American weddings took place in houses of worship by 2009 – a share that decreased to 22 percent by 2017.⁴ From personal experience, however, couples today often do still truly desire a spiritual component to their wedding. Others may seek a picturesque venue or simply wish to appease relatives, and I believe that it is important to welcome them instead of minimizing their motives. As James White points out, the Christian rites of passage are perhaps even more important for what he calls “marginal Christians” for whom they serve as the only point of contact with the church and a possible means of

3. William Perry, *The Scottish Liturgy: Its Value and History*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Chronicle Press, 1922), 34. He unfortunately went on to claim there was a “golden age” of liturgy from the fourth to twelfth centuries.

4. “Fewer Couples Marry in Churches,” *Columbus Dispatch*, July 14, 2018. A similar decrease was reported in the United Kingdom, reportedly going from 53 percent in 1990 to an identical 22 percent in 2017 (“Church Weddings Drop Off Steeply As Couples Wait Longer to Marry,” *The Times*, April 15, 2020.)

evangelization.⁵ A wedding homily may just be the only one many of the attendees hear all year.

I would be remiss if I did not offer several thoughts to the SCLM and the wider Church for discussions about the direction that future revisions might take – ironically, most of which are nothing new. First, all the way back in 1958, PBS X proposed a lovely way to conclude a non-Eucharistic wedding that consisted of a closing prayer and a congregational blessing. It was never seen again but pastoral experience suggests that this would be helpful to have since the current method of concluding with an exchange of Peace makes no sense to the all-too-typical gathering of wedding attendees who are not Episcopalians and often not churchgoers at all. The other option would, of course, be to require Communion at all weddings, but this would seem to only further distance the church from popular culture. Doubling the length of the service and making it less approachable for the casual attendee – since Communion feels like a larger commitment than just attending a wedding – does not serve that aim. One must, of course, balance this fact against the theological problem of reducing the church’s involvement in a lifelong commitment to a short ceremony, although adequately witnessing and blessing a union need not take an inordinate amount of time. Hopefully good premarital counseling will save the day in this regard.

Second, one of the structural changes brought by WBLC and continued in WBM was that the congregational prayers for the couple would follow directly from their public commitment to do so. This was both elegantly written and theologically appropriate, as

5. James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, ed. L. Edward Phillips, 4th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2023), 293.

well as followed the sequence of baptisms and ordinations. It also gave the presenters a new role. Instead of “giving away” one or both members of the couple, they were provided speaking roles that would allow for parents to verbalize their support for this new family structure. It could allow, as well, for significant persons other than parents to be honored and would remove any lingering questions once and for all about human beings as property to be bequeathed. These possibilities should all be retained at least as options in future revisions, although the practice of praying for the newly married couple immediately following the vows (as in CBM and CBM2) also makes good theological and pastoral sense.

Third, I have come to the conclusion from preparing for numerous weddings that we need to excise entirely the 1979 BCP prayer that immediately precedes the readings. It contains the opening address “O gracious and everliving God, you have created us male and female in your image....”⁶ There are a number of ways this can be heard in the pews as a theology of gender, so that it runs the risks of insult as well as miscommunicating the Church’s teaching. The version from CBM2 (that begins “O gracious and everliving God, you have created *humankind* in your image....”) is equally clear and loses none of its beauty. As Ruth Meyers quite rightly cautions, we must avoid “constructing a worldview that fails to uphold the dignity of every human being” with our liturgical language.⁷ Instead, we need to ensure that the Church conveys to the world around it what it truly – and currently – believes. While license can, of course, be taken to utilize the Order of Marriage and simply change that one prayer or replace it with the CBM2 service, in my

6. 1979 BCP, 425.

7. Ruth Meyers and Katherine Sonderegger, "Jubilate: A Conversation about Prayer Book Revision and the Language of our Prayer," *Anglican Theological Review* 103, no. 1 (2021): 10.

experience, couples often want the “normal” version – which is usually the one that stares back at them when they open the BCP and not something printed out from a website. This overly gendered prayer should be the exception in our liturgical praxis, not the norm. Until the day when CBM2 is actually printed into a revised BCP, it’s incumbent upon clergy to teach couples about the liturgical options. Perhaps we might also do well to remember that the wedding is not entirely about the couple getting married.

Finally, it is probably time for the Church to recognize the propriety of cohabitation. A liturgy that both celebrates a couple’s public commitment to each other as well as blesses them in the life ahead – whether it leads to marriage or not – could be both meaningful and evangelistic. It would bathe them in the love and support of their community as opposed to perpetuating the notion that what they are doing is taboo or sinful. It is also nothing less than meeting people where they are since a Pew survey conducted in 2019 found that 59 percent of adults ages 18-44 had lived unmarried with a partner (slightly more than had ever been married) and that an overwhelming 85 percent of American adults found cohabitation acceptable – including 76 percent of non-evangelical Protestants.⁸ Cohabitation is also not a phenomenon restricted to younger Americans and over four million unmarried older adults also live together.⁹ This latter group may be especially desirous of marriage but unable to enter into it for financial reasons, such as the impact upon retirement benefits like Social Security payments.

8. Juliana Horowitz, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, *Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.* (Pew Research Center, 2019), 22-23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep63351>. Sixteen percent of the 85 percent found it acceptable only if the couple was planning to marry, leaving a majority approving of it regardless.

9. Christopher A. Julian, *Older Adult Cohabiting and Married Couples* (National Center for Family & Marriage Research, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.25035/ncfmr/fp-25-08>.

Unfortunately, to address this need, we would have to revisit our ethics of sexuality in a way that is likely to stir up far more controversy than many currently wish to endure. Given the recent history of the Anglican Communion in issues of human sexuality and marriage, it is also unlikely to reach anything approaching a consensus.

Appendix 1: The General Structure of the Matrimonial Liturgy

The general structure of the main portion of the matrimonial liturgy from the English 1662 BCP through the American books has remained remarkably consistent as follows:

1. Opening Exhortation or Address
2. Charge to the Congregation and Couple to Declare Impediments
3. Declaration of Consent
4. Giving of the Bride (optional in 1979)
5. Exchange of Vows
6. Exchange of Ring(s), with an optional blessing from 1928
7. Prayers (including the Lord's Prayer in all but 1662)
8. Declaration of Marriage
9. Blessing

In 1662, there followed a series of psalm, prayers, blessings, and a sermon.

In 1979, readings and an optional homily were inserted before the vows. Additionally, the prayers and declaration of marriage were reversed in sequence.

Appendix 2: Historical Comparison of Several Liturgical Components

Opening Exhortation

1662 BCP: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes of which Matrimony was ordained. First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continency, might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

1789 BCP: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore it is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

1892 BCP: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of St. Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore it is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

1928 BCP: Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.

1979 BCP: Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

CBM2: Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of *N.* and *N.* in Holy Matrimony. The joining of two people in a life of mutual fidelity signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and so it is worthy of being honored among all people. The union of two people in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and when it is God's will, for the gift of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

WBM: Dear friends in Christ (or Dearly beloved), in the name of God and the Church we have come together today with *N. N.* and *N. N.*, to witness the vows they make, committing themselves to one another in marriage [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of *X*]. Forsaking all others, they will bind themselves to one another in a covenant of mutual fidelity and steadfast love, remaining true to one another in heart, body, and mind, as long as they both shall live. The lifelong commitment of marriage is not to be entered into lightly or thoughtlessly, but responsibly and with reverence.

Declaration of Consent

1662, 1789, 1892 BCP:

(Groom) Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

(Bride) Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

1928 BCP:

(Groom) Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

(Bride) Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?

1979 BCP:

(Bride) Will you have this man to be your husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

(Groom) Will you have this woman to be your wife; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

CBM2: Will you have this woman/man/person to be your wife/husband/spouse; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her/him, comfort her/him, honor and keep her/him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

WBM: *N.*, do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to *N.*? Will you live together in faithfulness and holiness of life as long as you both shall live?

Vows

1662, 1789, 1892 BCP:

(Groom) I *N.* take thee *N.* to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

(Bride) I *N.* take thee *N.* to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey¹⁰, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.

1928 BCP:

(Groom) I *N.* take thee *N.* to my wedded Wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.

(Bride) I *N.* take thee *N.* to my wedded Husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.

1979 BCP:

(Groom) In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

(Bride) In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

CBM2: In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my wife/husband/spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

WBM: In the name of God, I, *N.*, give myself to you, *N.* and take you to myself. I will support and care for you [by the grace of God]: in times of sickness, in times of health. I will hold and cherish you [in the love of Christ]: in times of plenty, in times of want. I will honor and love you [with the Spirit's help]: in times of anguish, in times of joy, forsaking all others, as long as we both shall live. This is my solemn vow.

10. Very minor changes were made that do not affect the substance. For example, 1789 and 1892 actually read "to love, cherish, and obey" instead of "to love, cherish, and to obey."

Blessing of the Ring

1928 BCP: Bless, O Lord, this Ring, that he who gives it and she who wears it may abide in thy peace, and continue in thy favour, unto their life's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1979 BCP: Bless, O Lord, this ring [or *these rings*] to be a sign of the vows by which this man and this woman have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CBM2: Bless, O Lord, this these rings to be signs of the vows by which *N.* and *N.* have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WBM: Bless, O God, these rings as signs of the enduring covenant *N.* and *N.* have made with each other, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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