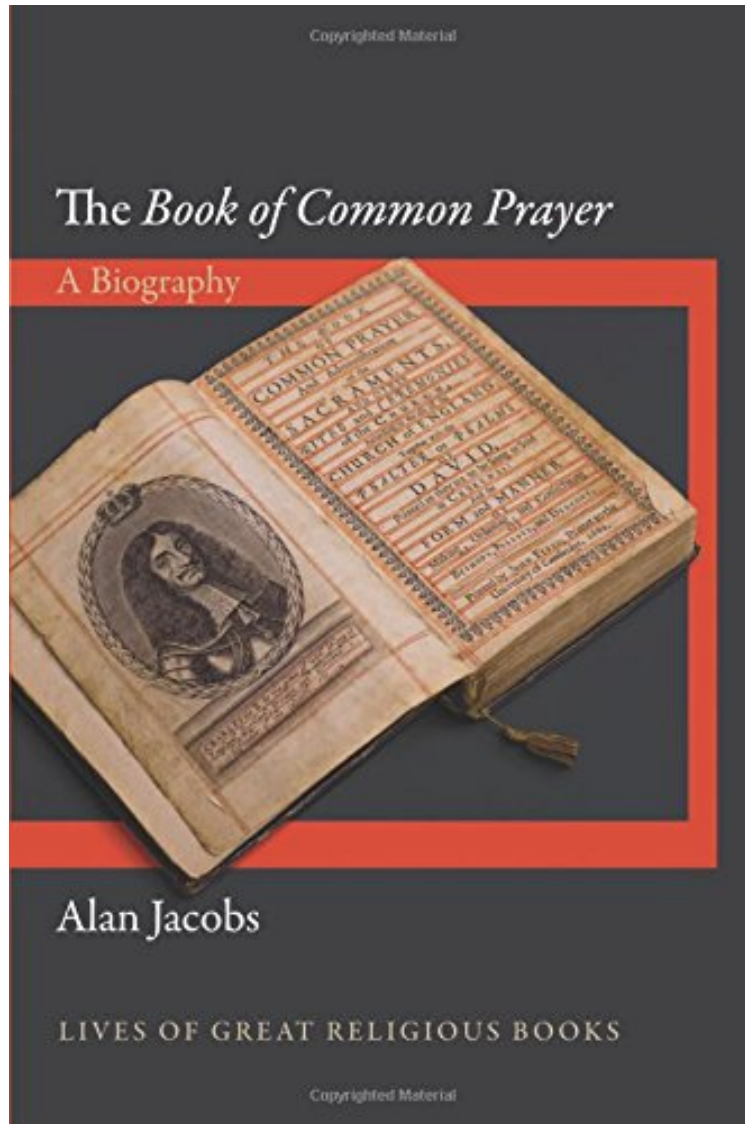


[Mobile pdf] The "Book of Common Prayer": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books)

The "Book of Common Prayer": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books)

Alan Jacobs

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Alan Jacobs : The "Book of Common Prayer": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The "Book of Common Prayer": A Biography (Lives of Great Religious Books):

25 of 27 people found the following review helpful. An Essential Primer on a Beloved PrimerBy AlexOnly those who care so little about religion or religious history that they count it all as nonsense will find anything to dislike about this

book. Alan Jacobs has outdone himself in both in the quality of his historical research and the more difficult trick of rendering complicated history in plain language and a merciful page count. His own practice of Anglicanism has apparently only increased his attention to contradiction, foiled plans, multiple visions, and historical change throughout the life of the Anglican Church's second-most-treasured book. One sometimes sees the shape of present religious struggles in his account of the Book of Common Prayer, but more often--and perhaps more fruitfully--he gives readers a lucid look at people whose hearts were far closer to the heart of religious belief and observance than the modern world often affords us. The choices they made, the worship they attempted to craft, and the battles they fought with each other need to be told with a keen attention to the structures and motivations of religious belief. In this, Jacobs has surpassed many modern historians who attempt to account for religious movements by all manner of reductive tactics, refusing stubbornly to grant religious belief and observance its own oeuvre, its own life. Jacobs's deceptively slim volume--a part of a larger series, it should be noted--is an uncommonly insightful work of religious history with much to teach our modern minds.

17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Interesting story even for a low church baptist

By Adam Shields I grew up low church baptist and have only come to see the value of the Book of Common Prayer fairly recently. So this was a great book to bring some history to my understanding. Alan Jacobs is an excellent writer and his history of the book is both of solid history and readable. To me, what is most interesting about story of the BCP, is how it was intended as a tool of unity but from the very beginning that was thwarted. Cranmer, who compiled the BCP thought that a single prayer book with a single service was important both theologically and politically to the unity of the Church in England. This was not a simple expedient or politically motivated conscription of Christianity but a different world view on how church and state should relate. But from the beginning the minutia of the BCP and its practice were used to factionalize the church. As one very small example, John Knox insisted that communion should be taken while sitting (instead of kneeling) because he wanted to distance the church from the Catholic view of transubstantiation. Others wanted kneeling to show honor and devotion during the Eucharist. But as theological and cultural movements between high and low church Anglicans and Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals and other groups, the prayer book became like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Unchanging not so much because it was perfect, but unchanging because no one can agree on how to change it. And now it is venerated in part because it was unchanged.

Outside the UK, most other Anglican churches have adapted their own Books of Common Prayer (and most have updated theirs several times), but in in the UK it is still the 1662 version that is the authorized one. So now there are a number of options for the Anglican world to choose their Books of Common Prayer. This is a fascinating and important history. The Book of Common Prayer has molded English speaking Christianity in ways that most probably do not realize. The common marriage ceremony "Dearly Beloved" and funeral "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust" are part of the cultural language of the English speaking world, but also from the Book of Common Prayer. I read the kindle version, but I have heard a number of comments about the beauty of the actual printed book.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Three reviews in one

By Will Barto I feel like I should write three reviews for this work. The first half of the book (four chapters) was delightful. Learned, witty, informative, all the things that I have come to expect from the author. It was one of the best narrative descriptions of the circumstances and details of the creation of the Book of Common Prayer that I have ever read (and I have read several). I would give this part of the book four stars at least. But the rest of the book seemed like it was written by a different author. Less informative, more controversialist (in that the conflict seemed to drive the narrative rather than the Prayer Book itself). This is to be expected to a certain extent, but the author's bias in his analysis seemed apparent (e.g., people who liked the Prayer Book were labeled throughout this portion as "traditionalists" while no such moniker was affixed to those who sought to modernize or deconstruct the Prayer Book). It also seemed like that there was a bit of snark and mockery in the text of this part of the book that diminished the integrity of the analysis, in my opinion. Two stars, at best. The author lost the bubble.

I listened to this book on a compact disc, and I cannot really recommend it. The narrator used a particularly affected and "posh" British accent to read portions of the Prayer Book or other "traditionalist" documents, and sometimes slipped in and out of this voice in mid-sentence. Interestingly, he did not use the voice (or did not use it quite as much) when reading other English commentators or critics of the Prayer Book. He particularly seemed to enjoy voicing the texts in the latter portion of the book that mocked traditional adherence to the Prayer Book. His reading voice, when not behaving as noted above, was quite pleasant and readily understandable; I am not sure why he chose to go so "over the top" with portions of his reading. Unfortunately, even when in his "normal" voice, he routinely mispronounced the word "episcopacy," placing the accent on the third rather than the second syllable. Sad. Two stars.

Tepidly recommended with the reservations noted above. If you happen to be a pesky "traditionalist," don't expect the latter part of the book to present a reasoned argument in favor of common prayer, and you won't be disappointed.

While many of us are familiar with such famous words as, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here. . ." or "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," we may not know that they originated with The Book of Common Prayer, which first appeared in 1549. Like the words of the King James Bible and Shakespeare, the language of this prayer book has saturated English culture and letters. Here Alan Jacobs tells its story. Jacobs shows how The Book of Common

Prayer--from its beginnings as a means of social and political control in the England of Henry VIII to its worldwide presence today--became a venerable work whose cadences express the heart of religious life for many. The book's chief maker, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, created it as the authoritative manual of Christian worship throughout England. But as Jacobs recounts, the book has had a variable and dramatic career in the complicated history of English church politics, and has been the focus of celebrations, protests, and even jail terms. As time passed, new forms of the book were made to suit the many English-speaking nations: first in Scotland, then in the new United States, and eventually wherever the British Empire extended its arm. Over time, Cranmer's book was adapted for different preferences and purposes. Jacobs vividly demonstrates how one book became many--and how it has shaped the devotional lives of men and women across the globe.

From Booklist When his Anglican priest stopped using the Book of Common Prayer in the 1960s, poet W. H. Auden suspected the priest had gone stark raving mad. Unfolding the story of how a sixteenth-century manual for devotions became a standard for religious sanity, Jacobs transports readers back to the England of Henry VIII, when Archbishop Thomas Cranmer formulated the Book to unite a religiously fractured country. Readers probe the theological reasons why the first edition, published in 1549, dismayed both traditionalists and evangelicals with its liturgical and doctrinal compromises between Catholic and Reformation orthodoxies. But those readers also watch as the majesty of Cranmer's prose wins over generations of worshippers, spiritually nourished by its regal cadences and fiercely resistant to those who would revise it. Indeed, the repeated attempts to revise the Book--some successful--occasion tense drama, succinctly recounted here. Likewise chronicled are the international conflicts occasioned as the Book metamorphoses as the global empire Britain builds--then shrinks. This fascinating history, a strong entry in the Lives of Great Religious Books series, exposes the surprisingly taut life of a church-pew volume."--Bryce Christensen "Mr. Jacobs has an obvious affinity for the prayer book, and doesn't seem to care much for recent attempts to 'modernize' worship. But his account is bereft of sentimental regret, and he is aware of the difficulties intrinsic to restricting religious expression to a set of prescribed texts. If only every archbishop had been so wise."--Barton Swaim, Wall Street Journal "[Readers] watch as the majesty of Cranmer's prose wins over generations of worshippers, spiritually nourished by its regal cadences and fiercely resistant to those who would revise it. Indeed, the repeated attempts to revise the Book--some successful--occasion tense drama, succinctly recounted here. Likewise chronicled are the international conflicts occasioned as the Book metamorphoses as the global empire Britain builds--then shrinks. This fascinating history, a strong entry in the Lives of Great Religious Books series, exposes the surprisingly taut life of a church-pew volume."--Bryce Christensen, Booklist Alan Jacobs offers a handy introduction to the cultural and social effects that the presence and promotion of this book provided for centuries of English-speaking worshipers."--John L. Murphy, New York Journal of Books "[A] gem. With his usual elegance and wit, Jacobs describes Cranmer's political and religious aims, follows debates over the BCP between traditionalists who thought it too Protestant and Puritans who thought it too Catholic, and along the way explains the literary and liturgical qualities of the prayer book."--Peter J. Leithart, First Things "A fascinating, fast-paced account of the 464 years of 'life' that the Book of Common Prayer has both enjoyed and suffered. . . . General readers will enjoy the peregrinations of the Book of Common Prayer itself and will profit from Jacobs's cultural and religious insights and commentary. Anglophiles and students of ritual, literature, and religion will also gain appreciation of the paradoxical nature of human language and actions."--Carolyn Craft, Library Journal "Alan Jacobs' well-written book shows how embedded in history and everyday life the prayer book is."--Owen Richardson, Sydney Morning Herald "Manage[s] to condense a vast amount of material into [a] handy-sized compendium."--Gareth J. Medway, Magonia Blog "It turns out that the story of the Anglican prayer book is a great yarn: a tale of theological dispute and refined prose style against a backdrop of the mafia-like power struggles of England's royal families. Jacobs is a tactful historian, who doesn't assume that his readers know much about English history or religious doctrine. But I imagine that even a reader who knew a great deal would enjoy the snap of Jacobs's telling, as when he describes an early disavowal of transubstantiation as 'palpably crabby.' If you've ever wondered why the Church of England has failed to substantially revise its prayer book since 1662, or what the jokes in Victorian novels about church candlesticks are really about, this is the history for you."--Caleb Crain, Millions "In the English-speaking world, [The Book of Common Prayer] has had this unique kind of universal appeal for some time now. But it got there by a circuitous route, and Alan Jacobs gives us a very deft accounting of that wending trail. . . . He writes about a book that has established many of the cadences of the modern English language for us, and he does so as someone who understands and loves those cadences. This is a good book, about a worthy subject, and is well written."--Douglas Wilson, Books Culture "Jacobs' treatment of the afterlife of one of the most important works in the English language--perhaps the only afterlife there is--is elegant and authoritative."--Willy Maley, Times Higher Education "Reading the history of the The Book of Common Prayer is to come face to face again with the great work of the Protestant Reformers, but it also shows the work (great or otherwise, depending on the current reader's traditional leanings) of later Reformers who revised the book. Alan Jacobs does a great job in showing the times and personages that have influenced subsequent revisions of the book or who have battled the book's influence."--Carole McDonnell, Compulsive Reader "Within a mere 200 pages, one could not wish for a more engaging introduction to the history of

the Prayer Book. It is beautifully written and produced, and would make a perfect gift. . . . This is a triumph of compression and lucidity."--David Martin, Church Times "The Book of Common Prayer has undergone numerous revisions and adaptations since it was first published in 1549. Jacobs traces the life of this influential book from English Reformation to the modern era. . . . Jacobs skillfully describes the challenges associated with the Reformation, Puritanism, the Restoration, and the Victorian era, when rubrics and the role of government were important issues. . . . Readers will appreciate the author's analysis and insights."--Choice "This book is a worthwhile introduction for anyone interested in how Anglican services have taken their present form. It demonstrates that unity in diversity across the provinces of the Anglican Communion stems, in no small way, from the book of 1662 built on Cranmer's earlier work. While references to Ireland are sparse, the joy of this biography is that it explains our Anglican heritage of worship in very accessible language."--Robert Marshall, Church "Professor Jacobs has followed carefully all that happened regarding the book and its changes. He is sensitive to the opinions of those on both sides of each controversy and his book is both informative and interesting. Be sure to read the final Notes section, lots of good info there, too."--Lois Sibley, *ing Religious Books* "[Jacob] has certainly given contemporary Anglicans and early modern historians a quick overview of a compelling 'biography' of one of the most significant books of classical and contemporary English literature."--Timothy Maschke, *Sixteenth Century Journal* "Alan Jacobs has produced a highly commendable read for those interested in the origins and evolving history of the Book of Common Prayer."--Jonathan Rose, Reader "A powerful overview of the Anglo-Catholic approach to Anglican liturgy and the history of its prayer books."--Ashley Null, *The Gospel Coalition* "A superb resource."--Sylvia A. Sweeney, *Anglican and Episcopal History* "From the Back Cover" "A beautifully lucid introduction to the origins and use of one of the most significant religious texts in the English-speaking world. Alan Jacobs helps us to understand not only the book but also the Christian sensibility of the whole Anglican tradition and the culture it nourished."--Dr. Rowan Williams, Magdalene College, University of Cambridge "The Book of Common Prayer, often thought of as a source of Anglican stability, has led an interesting life of many changes. Jacobs tracks them all like a shrewd detective."--Garry Wills, author of *What the Gospels Meant* "From pious aspiration to ruthless politics, and from bonfires of hated communion rails to the Star Wars prayer, the history of the Book of Common Prayer, in Alan Jacobs' hands, is both an education and a bright panorama. I can hardly remember another read so swift yet at the same time so helpful."--Sarah Ruden, author of *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* "Few texts have had as much influence on the language, culture, and religious life of English-speaking nations as the Book of Common Prayer. Alan Jacobs masterfully distills its history with a poetic touch that is at once scholarly, reverential, and highly engaging. There is no better introduction or guide to the Book of Common Prayer than this one."--Carlos Eire, author of *A Very Brief History of Eternity* "Alan Jacobs traces the life of the Book of Common Prayer as it has grown and changed over its four-hundred-year history, responding to social and historical conditions and to its own inner convictions and complexities. Many books have been written about the Book of Common Prayer, but this one is uniquely compact, illuminating, and moving."--Edward Mendelson, Columbia University "This book is a pleasure to read. Alan Jacobs's writing is informed, lucid, accessible, and witty. I know of no other work that is comparable."--R.W.L. Moberly, Durham University