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Writer: William Whittingham, John Knox et al.

Recipient: John Calvin

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Other Versions: *Corpus Reformatorum* 15. 337-344; *Troubles xxviii-xxxiii*

Description in Latin of the Book of Common Prayer sent to John Calvin

[65] A brief description of the great English book, written in Latin, a copy of which was sent to Mr Calvin.¹

Description of the English liturgy.

First, morning prayers are offered.² The minister, wearing the white vestment which they call a surplice, begins them with some short statement – as for example, ‘If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves’ and so on, or something of that sort – and he undertakes an exhortation. This is followed by confession which the people utter in a clear voice, following the minister. To this is added an absolution. When that

has been done, he recites the Lord’s prayer. And afterwards,

‘O Lord, open my lips.’

‘And my mouth shall declare your praise.’

¹ A version is found in the letter of 11 December [1554] from John Knox and William Whittingham to John Calvin, edited from the autograph as Calvin, *Epistola* 2059 in *Corpus Reformatorum* 15. 337-344. An English version of the description is printed under the title ‘A description off the Liturgie/ or booke off service that is used in Englande’ in *A Brieff discours off the troubles begonne at Franckford in Germany Anno Domini 1554 ...* (1574 [reprinted Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, 1972]), pp. XXVIII-XXXIII. In the following notes G = the Goodman notebook; E = *Ep.* 2059; and T = *Troubles begonne at Franckford*.

² The Latin text (in both G and E) has *se offerunt*. T has ‘morninge praier offreth itself’. The reflexive sounds rather odd in English; does this suggest that T is a translation?

‘O God, come to my aid’ and so on.

‘Come, let us exult’ and so on.³

And next, three psalms together with a ‘Glory be to the Father’.⁴ There follows a reading which contains a whole chapter of the Old Testament. After it, ‘We praise you, o God’ or ‘Bless’ and so on.⁵ Then another

reading, from the New Testament, unless the celebration of a feast happens to have fixed readings. And in cathedral churches⁶ the readings are delivered in plain-song. Then afterwards the ‘Blessed’⁷ is added. Here the book admonishes them to preserve this order through the whole year. Finally, ‘I believe in God’⁸ is uttered by the minister, the people now standing up on their feet. Then, when all

have fallen to their knees,

‘The Lord be with you’, he says.

Response: ‘And with your spirit.’

‘Lord, have mercy.’

‘Christ, have mercy.’

‘Lord, have mercy.’

‘Our Father’ and so on, uttered out loud by the whole congregation.

Then the minister stands up and says,

‘Lord, show us your mercy.’

Response: ‘And grant us your salvation.’

‘O Lord, save the king.’

‘On the day we call upon you.’

‘May your priests be clothed in righteousness.’

‘And may your holy people rejoice.’

‘O Lord, save your people.’

‘And bless your heritage.’

‘Grant us peace in our days’ and so on.

At last, as a conclusion there are three collects. The first is that of the day. The second is for peace – that is, ‘God the author of peace’ and so on. The last is a petition for the receipt of grace.⁹

³ That is, the canticle ‘Venite’.

⁴ E is almost identical (*Atque mox tres psalmi, una cum: Gloria patri etc.*). But the ‘Glory be’ has somehow got lost in T: ‘By and by also there folowe 3. Psalmes together at thende off every one.’

⁵ That is, the ‘Te Deum’ or the canticle ‘Benedicite’.

⁶ Literally, ‘cathedral temples’.

⁷ That is, the canticle ‘Benedictus’.

⁸ That is, the Apostles’ Creed (‘Credo in Deum’) rather than the Nicene Creed (‘Credo in unum Deum’).

⁹ E adds a whole paragraph here on the papistical and superstitious character of the rite.

And evening prayers are conducted with almost the same order, except that the ‘Magnificat’ follows the first reading, and the ‘Nunc Dimittis’ the second. And in place of ‘God the author of peace’ what is used is ‘God from whom’ and so on. Furthermore, a caution is provided by the author that all ministers should apply themselves daily at both morning and evening prayers, unless they happen to be hindered by the study of theology or some most necessary business. In addition to these things, on

[66] Sunday, Tuesday, and also Thursday, a certain Gregorian litany is in use, which begins like this.

‘Father from heaven, God, have mercy on us.’
‘Son, redeemer of the world, God’ and so on

with only the invocation of the saints omitted. Otherwise, it expressly includes a certain exorcism ‘through the mystery of your incarnation; through your holy birth and circumcision; through your baptism, fasting, and temptation; through your

agony and bloody sweat’. It similarly includes ‘from sudden and unforeseen death’. At the end of each clause the people meanwhile reply, ‘Spare us, o Lord’ or ‘Free us, o Lord’ or ‘We ask you, hear us.’

‘Lamb of God’ – repeated three times.

‘Lord, have mercy’ and so on.

‘Our Father’.

‘Lord, do not deal with us according to our sins’ and so on.

Much that belongs to this

way of thinking is joined on to these things – which I omit so as not to seem to scatter papistical dregs.¹⁰

The scheme for the Lord’s supper is like this. The minimum number suitable for the celebration of the supper is three, yet when plague is raging or some pestilence is running riot, it is permitted to the minister on his own so that he might share the gifts with the sick.¹¹ And so first the minister ought to make himself ready in this fashion. Dressed in a linen vestment – as in the other rites – he stands at the north end of the table. Then,

¹⁰ In place of ‘so as not to seem to scatter papistical dregs’, E has the more prosaic ‘for the sake of brevity’. T is closer to G, but reads ‘least we shulde seeme to syfte all those drosses which remaine still amonge us’.

¹¹ T takes this to mean ‘and yet it is permitted ... the Minister alone maie communicate withe the sicke man in his house’.

after there has been as usual an ‘Our Father’, he recites the collect. There follow in order the Ten Commandments, yet¹² in such a way that the community¹³ replies to each, ‘Lord, have mercy’ and ‘Direct our hearts to the keeping of this law’. After the Commandments have been repeated, there is a collect, which they call the collect of the day, and another one, for the king. Next, the epistle and Gospel – as, namely, the calendar itself assigns them to that particular day.

And there is at this point a certain annotation, that each feast day has its own collect, epistle, and Gospel – which fill seventy-three huge folios, while the rest of the book is not even fifty. For all the feasts are just as much in use as they are among the Pope-worshippers, with only a few being disregarded.¹⁴ Then he goes on to the ‘I believe in God’, and after that to the sermon – if there actually is one. Afterwards the parish man¹⁵

indicates the feasts and fasts, if any happen to fall.¹⁶ Here the book adverts that no one should defraud the parish man of his right, especially on those feasts which are dedicated for oblations. There follows a prayer for the condition of the Church militant, not without a long hotchpotch of other things, until, after there has been some confession of sins, it comes to the

‘Lift up your hearts,’

the community replying,

‘We lift them up to the Lord.’

‘Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.’

Response:

‘It is fitting’ and so on.

‘It is truly fitting and right’ and so on, as far as the phrase ‘eternal God’.

¹² The force of the ‘yet’ (*tamen*) is made clear in the slightly fuller version in E: ‘But then in place of the ‘Kyrie eleyson’ are put the Ten Commandments, yet in such a way that to each commandment the community replies, ‘Lord, have mercy upon us, and direct our hearts to the keeping of this law.’ T agrees with G.

¹³ ‘Community’ isn’t a particularly good translation of *populus*, but above I used ‘people’ for *plebs* and ‘congregation’ for *audientia*. Presumably here there is no difference between *populus* and *plebs*, though of course in earlier usage *plebs* is the common ordo, as opposed to the ordo of the clergy, while *populus* is the people of God as a whole – as a social and ecclesial reality.

¹⁴ E is (according to the editors) edited from the autograph, but its text is garbled here: something must have dropped out. It contains the phrase *ad dextram et sinistram (Christi) contendimus*, which I suspect is part of an attack on moving from the Epistle side of the church to the Gospel side for the lections.

¹⁵ *Parochus* here of course means the parish priest (as T in fact renders it), but I don’t want to import the word ‘priest’ into the translation, since both *sacerdos* and *sacrificus* are used later in the text and are in the context loaded words.

¹⁶ During the coming week, as T makes explicit (‘iff there be ayne that weeke’).

Here is added the preface according to the feast. Afterwards it adds, 'Therefore with angels and archangels' and so on, and thus it ends with 'Holy, holy, holy' as far as 'Glory in the highest'.

[67] Now the sacrificer¹⁷ again genuflects, proclaiming our unworthiness in the name of the community. And, proclaiming in turn the mercy of God, he asks that our bodies be cleansed by the body of Christ and our souls be washed clean by his blood. Here he stands up again and embarks on still another new prayer constructed¹⁸ for this purpose, in which are also contained

the words of institution. When all these things have been performed, he communicates first, and next, when he is about to give the bread, he says to another, who has prostrated himself, 'Take, eat, and, remembering Christ who suffered for you, feed your heart through faith and give thanks.' Then, when he is about to offer the cup, he says similarly – and so on. And towards the end, 'Our Father' – as before, with all following the minister out loud. Finally, the climax¹⁹ has

a giving of thanks with a 'Glory to God in the highest' – as with the papists. But if it happens that no one goes to communion, only a few little things²⁰ are omitted, but the others are done after the order described above.

In baptism, the godparents are asked in the name of the infant whether they renounce Satan and his works and the desires of the world. At that point they say, 'I renounce.' Then, whether they believe the articles of the faith. When consent to them has been given, he says – directing the remark to each sponsor – 'Do you wish to be baptized into this faith?' 'I do indeed wish,' they say. After reciting a few brief remarks, he takes the child

and dips²¹ it – but carefully and sensibly, as the writer says. He also makes the sign of the cross on the child's forehead, for this purpose -- in order to admonish him when he is grown up boldly to confess the faith. Afterwards, when he is about to dismiss the godparents, he enjoins them to bring the child to the bishop to be confirmed as soon as he has learnt the articles of the faith, the Lord's prayer, and the decalogue.²² Though there are, the writer says, many reasons that

¹⁷ *Sacrificus*.

¹⁸ T has the weaker 'appointed for this purpos'.

¹⁹ For G's *catastrophe*, E reads the much blander *conclusio*. I presume the point of the ten-bob word is to underline the fact that the 'Gloria in excelsis' comes after communion, rather than near the beginning as in the Roman Mass or the English Prayer Book of 1549.

²⁰ For 'only a few little things' (*tantum paucula*), E reads *verba institutionis*. I presume both Latin versions have in mind a dry Mass. T, curiously, says, 'yff it happen that there be no sermon / onely a fewe thinges are omitted'. I think this must imply that T is translated from Latin and somehow managed to read *contionem* instead of *communione*.

²¹ From Tertullian on, *inting(u)o* was used more or less synonymously with *baptizo* – that is, without any emphasis on the literal meaning 'dip/plunge in' – though of course for Tertullian and co. immersion rather than infusion was the paradigm. *Troubles* here has 'dippeth' (p. XXXII).

²² E here adds, 'There is no point in writing about private baptism and private Supper, though they are discussed by our author.' T, as usual, agrees with G.

ought to lead us to confirm children, this is to be sure by far the most weighty of all – in order that through the imposition of hands they might receive strength and support against all the temptations of sin and the assaults of the world and the devil, because of the fact that those who have reached that age are assailed partly by the weakness of the flesh and partly by the allurements of the world and the deceits of Satan. But lest by chance some

error should reside in this confirmation, they clip on some set-piece²³ of a catechism. But the articles of the faith, the Lord's prayer, and the decalogue – that is, two folios, more or less – bring it to an end.

To this is appended the scheme for marriage. Omitting its other petty ceremonies – who could endure even these absurdities? For the groom deposits a ring in some book. The minister at once grabs it and delivers it into the hand of the same man

[68] and bids him to put it on the fourth finger of his bride's left hand. Then the groom uses this form of words. 'With this ring,' he says, 'I marry you; with my body I honour you; and with my goods I endow you, in the name of the Father' and so on. Shortly afterwards, as they are prostrate before the Lord's table, he says,

'Lord have mercy.'
'Christ have mercy' and so on.

'Our Father' and so on.

'Lord, save your manservant and your maid-servant' and so on.

And thus, when he has run through a few things, it is necessary that they be led to the Lord's supper.

The visitation of the sick is like this.

Response: 'Peace be to this house.'
'And to all who dwell in it.'
'Lord, have mercy.'
'Christ, have mercy' and so on.
'Our Father.'

Response: 'Lord, save your servant.'
'Who hopes in you.'
'Send help from your holy place.'

²³ Literally, 'they sew on (like a patch) a certain rhapsody' – that is, a chunk of an epic poem suitable for recitation at one go.

Response:

‘And for ever protect him’

and so on as in the rest of the prefaces that have triggers and responses.²⁴

A funeral is met by the priest²⁵ at the entrance to the cemetery. He sings or in a low voice says ‘I am the resurrection and the life’ – John 11. ‘I know that my redeemer lives.’ ‘We brought nothing into this world.’ ‘The Lord gave’ and so on. When it comes to the grave, there is heard, ‘Man born of woman’ – Job 9. When the earth is thrown in, ‘We commit,’ he says, ‘earth to earth, dust to dust’ and so on. ‘I heard a voice from heaven, saying’ and so on. Next, ‘Lord have mercy’ and so on.

The purification of those who have newly given birth – which they call thanksgiving – in almost all respects we have in common not only with the papists but also with the Jews, since indeed it is commanded to offer a coin in place of a lamb or a turtle-dove.²⁶

Other things²⁷ not so much shame itself as a certain pity compels us to leave unsaid. In the meantime we take nothing away from those men, worthy of honour, who – partly obstructed by the times, partly overwhelmed, as if by waves, by the stubbornness and number of their adversaries, to whom nothing apart from their own dregs ever gives

²⁴ Literally, ‘interrogations and responses’ or, as T says, ‘questions and answers’ (p. XXXIII). But no questions have been asked here. In medieval Latin, *interrogatio* can mean ‘exaction, demand’ (so Latham). I think the meaning is that here, as in other liturgical dialogues which introduce (hence ‘prefaces’) sacraments or sacramentals, the minister has half-lines which are meant to cue and be completed by corresponding half-line responses.

²⁵ *Sacerdos*.

²⁶ How does the argument work? There is plainly a reference to the purification after childbirth described in Lev 12. It is there specified that a woman is to bring to the priest a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtle-dove for a sin offering (Lev 12:6), but there is no reference to commuting the sacrificial offerings into a money payment. The argument, I think, is that the money payment required by the English book is (theologically) equivalent to the offerings required by Leviticus. So *jubetur* (G and E) means ‘it is commanded (by the English book)’, not ‘it is commanded (by the Old Testament)’ and when T says, ‘The purification of women in childbed / whiche they call gevinge off thankes / is not only in all things withe us almoste common withe the Papistes but also with the Jewes / bycause they are commaunded in stede off a lambe or dove to offre monie’ (pp. XXXIII-XXXIII), the referent of ‘they’ is ‘women in childbed’, not – as it might seem at first blush – ‘the Jewes’. The argument is given a distinctive spin in E:

When we condemn the purification, which is called by our people giving of thanks, they suppose that we Calvinize, and they do not see that when they defend it, they Judaize. For apart from the fact that they agree in all respects with the most heretical Papists, it is also commanded to offer a coin in place of a lamb or a turtle-dove.

It looks as if a pre-existing argument has been adapted to fit the context of a letter to Calvin.

²⁷ This final paragraph (‘Other things ... finely developed’) is found in virtually identical form in G and T, but there is nothing corresponding to it in E. T has in the margin beside this paragraph ‘Knox and Whittingham ashamed to open some things’. So the compiler of *Troubles* (or at least the editor of 1574) thought that his text of ‘A description off the Liturgie’ was that contained in the letter sent by Knox and Whittingham to Calvin. But in that he was mistaken, for E is edited from the autograph -- in Whittingham’s hand, according to *C.R.* 15. 344, note 11. That might say something about the authorship of *Troubles*.

pleasure -- continually strove in their mind, as far as they were able, toward that which was more perfect and more finely developed.²⁸

²⁸ In general in this document G and T are very, very close, while E goes its own way. Indeed, the variants are so extensive that a full collation would be impracticable as well as pointless: it would really take a synoptic table to set the divergences out clearly. But G/T on the one hand and E on the other are obviously not independent summaries of the English book. That is apparent from what I might call editorial comment shared by the two recensions, such as the complaint about proper readings filling '73 huge folios' while the rest of the book scarcely runs to 50 or the argument about the Judaizing character of the service for the Churching of Women. A pre-existing 'Description' must have been, on the one hand, revised for inclusion in the letter to Calvin and then, on the other hand, further edited to produce the common ancestor of G and T. That further editing is implied by some elements present in E which are not found in G/T, such as the specification that the *paucula* to be omitted in a dry Mass are the words of institution or the reference, between baptism and confirmation, to private baptism and private Mass.