

Illustration from a
Book of Common Prayer, 1815.

Prayer Book Spirituality

*A Devotional Companion to the
Book of Common Prayer
Compiled from
Classical Anglican Sources
Edited by
J. Robert Wright*

 CHURCH

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Again, it is for our profit many ways; for First, it begets and nourishes in us, dull flesh, a reverence and awe to God and his service, to offer it up thus in places set apart to that purpose, and so helps devotion. Besides, our prayers and public services are most readily accepted, in such holy separate places, 2 Chron. 7: 15. *Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer in this place.* This promise of acceptance of our prayer was there, indeed, made directly to the House which Solomon built, but belongs to any place so Dedicated and Consecrated unto God for his holy service and worship: For that is the reason that God gives of his gracious readiness to hear the prayer of that holy place; *For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there.* Now that it is dedicated and solemnly set apart by religious rites and prayers to my service, *Now have I chosen or accepted it for mine,* to be call'd by my name, St. Mt. 12: 13, *to be for a house of prayer, and therefore mine eyes and my heart shall be there.* Then, by the Rules of Logic, *a quatenus ad omne valet consequentia*; if because he hath so sanctified this place and accepted it for his, therefore his eyes and ears shall be open to the prayer of that place; by the like reason, whatsoever place shall be dedicated to him and accepted by him, shall have his eyes open, and his ear attentive to the prayer of it. And God Almighty promises as much, Ex. 20: 24. *In all places, where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.* In all places dedicated to me and my service, and so made mine, *called by my name* (Gen. 28: 22.) *I will come and bless thee.* And such are all Consecrated Churches and Chapels. And therefore holy Church wisely orders that the prayers and public services of God shall be offered up there, in *the accustomed place of the Church, Chapel, or Chancel.* . . .

(5) Thomas Comber
 Dean of Durham
*A Companion to the Temple,
 or A Help to Devotion in the Use of the Common Prayer*
 1672-76/1684

There are two principal ends of the Worship of God, *The Glory of him that is Worshipped, and the Benefit of the Worshippers.* . . . But whether we look on them single or conjoined, no part of *Divine Worship* doth so much express and advance God's glory, nor so directly tend to Man's good as *Public Prayer*; in which we make the most universal solemn acknowledgments of our Obligations unto, and Dependence upon, the Supreme Lord of all the World; and by which all the Servants of God in all times, places and circumstances, do with heart and voice, by common consent reveal their wants, and obtain supplies for them. So that we may call this the *Life and Soul of Religion*, the *Anima Mundi*, that universal Soul which quickens, unites and moves the whole Christian World. Nor is the case of a private Man more desperate, when he breathes no more in secret Prayer, than the condition of a Church is, where public Devotions cease. . . .

Objection 1. [Common, written prayer] *is said to be a Form, and therefore a hindrance to zealous praying by the spirit.*

Answer. Whoever makes this Objection, and affirms we cannot pray by the Spirit in the words of a Form, must beware his ignorance betray him not into a dangerous uncharitableness, and perhaps blasphemy. For the *Saints* of the *Old Testament* prayed by *Forms*, and so did *Christ* himself in the *New*, and he taught his *Apostles* a *Form* to pray by, and dare any say they prayed not by the Spirit? Have not all Churches, since the *Apostles* times to our days had their *Forms* of Prayer? And did

not the devoutest Men of all Ages compose and use such? Was ever *Extempore* Prayer heard of in public (till of late) unless on special occasions; and do we think no Church nor no Persons prayed by the Spirit, till now? To come nearer still: Have not *France* and *Geneva* their *Forms*? And did not learned *Calvin* (and the best reformed Divines) use a *Form* before their Sermons? And is not an unstudied Prayer a *Form* to the People, who are confined to pray in the Speaker's words? And will you say these all pray without the Spirit of God? But sure we hug the Phrase of *Praying by the Spirit*, not attending the Sense. For the meaning doubtless is, to be so assisted by the Holy Ghost, that (our Thoughts being composed, our Souls calmed, and our Hearts deeply affected with our Wants, and the Divine All-sufficiency) we can pray with a strong Faith, and a fervent Love: When we are so intent upon our Requests that we duly weigh them, and pursue every Petition with pressing Importunity, ardent Desires, and vigorous Affections, this is the *Spirit of Prayer*. And thus we may better **pray by the Spirit** in the words of a *Form*, than we can do, when our Mind is employed in inventing new expressions. For having a *Form* (which custom hath made familiar) we have all things set down to our *Hands* which we or others want; and we are at leisure to improve the good Motions of the Spirit; having no more to do but to join our Souls and Affections to every Petition, and follow them up to Heaven in most passionate and zealous wishes that God would grant them: Whereas in *Extempore Prayer* the Petitions expire into Air in a moment, for neither Minister nor People knew them before, nor can remember them afterwards; the one being busy in inventing, the others in expecting a pleasing novelty. And, methinks, it argues more of the Spirit of God, when we can attend the old Prayers with Zeal and Love, than when we need Variety and novel Expressions, to screw us up into a Devotion too much like Artifice, and seeming rather to be moved by the pleasure of the Fancy, than the actings of Desire. We may judge of the effects of God's Spirit rather by disposing our Hearts to join in a well-composed *Form*, than by filling our Heads with

new Prayers, or opening our Mouths in fluent Expressions; both which may be done without the help of the Spirit, but to be devout without it is most impossible. To which we shall only add, that many truly good Men, and sound Members of our Church, do daily use these Prayers with as much Spirit and Life, with as serious and sincere Devotion, as any in the World can do. And this they account a demonstration that the Spirit doth assist them in this *Form*. And so it may assist these mistaken Persons, *if they will* lay down their groundless prejudice, and strive to serve God thus as well as they can. So would the good Spirit assist their Prayers, and make up our differences, giving us one Mind and one Spirit, that with one Heart and one Mouth we might glorify one God.

Objection 2. But it is farther urged, *That these Prayers, though good in themselves, will grow flat and nauseous by daily use, and consequently become an impediment to Devotion.*

Answer. We come not to the House of God for Recreation, but for a supply of our wants; and therefore, this might be a better reason of an empty Theatre, than a thin Congregation. We come to God in Public, to petition for the relief of our own general Necessities, and those of the whole Church, *viz.* for Pardon of Sin, Peace of Conscience and succours of Divine Grace, and a Deliverance from Sin and Satan, Death and Hell: As also for Food and Raiment, Health and Strength, Protection and Success in all our concerns; and more generally for the Peace of the Kingdom, the Prosperity of the Church, the Propagation of the Gospel, and the success of its Ministers. Now these things are always needful, and always the same, to be prayed for every day alike. Wherefore (unless we be so *vain* as to fancy God is delighted with *Variety* and *Change* as well as we) what need is there to alter the Phrase every day, or what efficacy can a new model give to our old Requests? Particular wants and single Cases must be supplied by the Closet-devotions, for the Public (whether by *Form* or *Extempore*) can never reach all those which are so numerous and variable. Wherefore one *Form* may

fit all that ought to be asked in the Church; and why then should we desire a needless and infinite Variety and Alteration?

But having thus cleared the way to all indifferent and disinterested Persons, it is time to speak briefly of the Design of the following *Discourses*; which is to make it evident that our Excellent Prayers do deserve all possible Love and Esteem, and contain in them a rich Treasury of all that can make our Devotion lively and useful. And if we be assisted by God's Spirit, and come desirous to pray with Zeal and Sincerity, here is (without calling in any aid but that of *Heaven*) a curious *Order*, clear *Method*, significant *Phrases*, and strong *Arguments* to quicken our Affections, and enlarge our Souls in holy and fervent Wishes, Desires and Meditations, which is the Prayer of the Inward Man, the Life and Soul of this Duty. All which we teach Men to do by giving a natural and facile *Analysis* of the Method, and by making plain and practical *Observations* on the Parts, together with a literal *Paraphrase* of the Whole. By which none can imagine I should give a borrowed lustre to the Prayers, which they had not of their own: For I only prove they had it before, and I find all in them, that I observe from them; which I hope will be so plain, that all Men will see the inference, and be able in their own Devotions to find out much more. Now in this *Essay* I shall hope to serve three sorts of Persons.

1. *The Ignorant*, who may be instructed hereby to *pray with understanding*. Not that we suppose these Offices so obscure as to need a Comment (for nothing can be more plainly expressed, nor is it possible to invent words more universally understood) but many that understand the *Sense* of the Words, have not Art enough to discern the *Order*, *Method* and *Connection* of the Prayers, nor skill to find out the *Arguments* that press every Request; or the Places of Scripture which furnish these Devotions with significant Phrases, nor Judgment to describe what disposition of Soul doth suit the several parts of them. And if we consider, that the greatest number are such, we shall

think it seasonable to help them with a plain and easy *Explication*. Besides, there are many (in other things) knowing Persons, who rather for want of Consideration than Judgment, never took notice of the natural dependences of these Prayers, nor the true and full import of the Expressions, nor of the Graces to be exercised in the several Parts, because they only attended the words, but took no care to expatiate into holy Meditations. And if the former need a *Master*, these want a *Monitor*, lest they offend in a worse kind: For **Negligence** is worse than simple **Ignorance**. But, I hope, though all that is here be obvious, yet something will be found which either was not known or not observed before, and those things also such as may elevate the Affections, and make the Prayers more pleasing and more profitable.

2. *The Devout Servants of God*, and *Obedient Sons of the Church*, whose care it is to pray daily in Public, and whose Desire and Endeavour is to do it well. . . . It hath been my Care to suggest not always the most Critical, but the most Practical Sense, which most directly tended to help Devotion, for these Men's sake; who no doubt have in their own Hearts made many of these Observations before, and I hope they will like them no worse, for I shall like them better, in hopes the same Spirit directed me and them. But I hope that what I have done will (besides its present assistance) suggest a way to all devout Souls for making pathetic and pious Enlargements, more and better than are to be found here; that so our daily Offices may be full of Life and Pleasure; and every day court us with new Delights. And I must affirm, I have rather opened the top than searched the bottom of this rich Mine. But sure I am we had need to quicken our Devotion all we can, not only for our own good, but that our flames might thaw the Hearts and lighten the Eyes of the rest of the Congregation; which scarce ever mind either Words or Sense, but are either sleepy or tired, to the dishonour of *God*, the discomfort of the *Minister* and the ruin of their *own* Souls. How happy should we be, if by my Endeavours and your Examples, we awaken such into a Sense

of their Duty; that these excellent Prayers might everywhere be said with an excellent Spirit, for the benefit of particulars, and the good of the whole Church?

3. *The mistaken Dissenters:* Who hereby may be convinced (and perhaps persuaded) that we can pray by this Form with as much *Zeal* and more *Knowledge*, with as much *Spirit* and more *Truth*, than by any other kind of Prayer. And then it must appear, that this *Venerable Liturgy* hath been falsly represented by such, who would not have it seen truly, lest it should be loved really. But if they are so much their own Masters, as that they dare to read the Prayers seriously, and view this Book with as much *Charity* as it was written with, I shall hope either for their *Company* at Prayers, or at least to escape their *Censures* for going thither. For unless they be foolishly obstinate they must either love them, or cannot hate them. If they would love them, and pray with us, we shall be *Friends*; and if only the second be obtained, we shall be *quiet*, and even that is desirable. That these are the designs which began and encouraged this Undertaking, the *Author's* own Conscience doth testify; and he hopes even those who approve not the Means, must confess the End of this *Work* is good. And if it be successful in any of these kinds, he will not repent his pains. If in one, he is not the first that hath failed of accomplishing good intentions. However he will have satisfaction in the Peace of a good Conscience and may say with that noble *Roman* [Brutus], *If the Success answers his Sincerity, it must be a cause of universal Joy; if not, he can rejoice in his cordial Intentions to do good.* For the Censures of furious Zealots, or the scoffing of profane *Ishmaels*, he doth not value them, being only unwilling to offend Authority, or true Piety. Wherefore he doth humbly submit these Pages to the Judicious Correction of the *Reverend Fathers of the Church*, desiring nothing may be said which dissents from the Doctrine and Discipline now established; for if it do, it is without the *Author's* Knowledge and against his Judgment. And now 'tis time to conclude this *Preface* with a twofold Request.

First, To my Brethren of the *Clergy*, that they will read these

Prayers so *frequently*, that such as have leisure may never want opportunity thus to serve God; and so *fervently*, that those who do attend them, may be brought into a high esteem of them. It was a great end of God's instituting the Priest's Office, and a principal motive to our pious Ancestors in their liberal Provisions for it; That there might be an Order of Men on purpose, to *Pray daily* for all Mankind, especially for such as could not daily attend *Divine Service*: So that if we neglect this *daily Sacrifice*, we neither answer the Designs of God, nor of our Benefactors: And as we are not excused by, so we ought not to be discouraged at the People's slowness in coming to *daily Prayers*, for their Presence is indeed a Comfort to us, and an Advantage to themselves, but their Absence doth not hinder the Success, nor should it obstruct the Performance of our *Prayers*. The Promise of *Jesus* is made to *two or three*; and since our Petitions are directed to God, we need not regard who is absent, so long as he is present to whom we speak: For he accepts our Requests, not by the *Number*, but the *Sincerity* of those that make them. Let our Congregation therefore be great or small, it is our Duty to read these Prayers daily: And every day to do it with such *Fervency* and *Reverence*, as may declare that our Affections keep pace with our words, while we are presenting so excellent Requests to so infinite a Majesty, upon so weighty Occasions. And also we must recite them with such *Gravity* and *Deliberation*, as may afford sufficient time both for ourselves and our People to consider every Petition, and Press it with devout Affections, and a holy Importunity, which is the *Life of Prayer*. And if any use these comprehensive Forms without such pious enlargements, it is not for want of matter in the Offices (as I have demonstrated) but for want of Devotion and Zeal in their own Hearts. 'Tis only such as have no true sense of Piety who say the *Liturgy* without Affection; and I am very confident the rude and hasty repeating thereof hath contributed more to the making *Common Prayer* odious and contemptible, than the Arguments or the Aspersions of its most malicious Enemies; whereas if we our selves would show that we are sincerely

affected and concerned while we pray by it, we may expect it will be acceptable to God, and of high esteem among all People. So that I wish it may not be said of any of us, as once of *Eli's* Sons, *Their Sin was very great, for they made Men abhor the offering of the Lord* [1 Sam. 2: 17].

Secondly, I shall make it my earnest Request to all the *People* of this Church, not to judge of these Prayers by the Character that *Ignorance* and *Atheism*, *Prejudice* and *evil Interests* fasten on them; but to consider them very well, and then they will find the *Liturgy* to be plainer and more methodical in itself, more comprehensive and more suitable to a public Congregation, than the best *Extempore* Effusion, which makes more noise and show, but is emptier, and of far less weight in the esteem of God and all *Judicious Men*. Let none therefore think it a needless and unprofitable waste of time to go to the House of God only to hear *Common Prayer*; for Prayer is the proper Duty of that place, which is called *the House of Prayer*; and it is a Duty that is of all others the highest and hardest, and yet the most profitable, if it be devoutly and well performed. So that I cannot but pity and lament the *Stupidity* of those, who either sleep or sit by heedless and unconcerned, while so great and so advantageous a Scene of Duty lies before them. And I must (for their own sakes) beseech all that are present at these Devotions; *First*, to compose their Bodies into those most reverent Postures which the Church hath suited to every part of Duty, *Kneeling* at the *Confession*, *Absolution* and *Prayers*; *Standing* at the *Gloria Patri*, *Hymns* and *Creeds*, and *Bowing* at the *Holy Name of Jesus*; for a general uniformity in these things doth declare, that there is in us a due sense of the Divine Presence, a humble obedience to our Governors, and a sweet harmony between our Bodies and Souls in the Worship we pay to the Creator of both. *Secondly*, To make their Responses with a loud and audible voice.

The Church of England not only allows this primitive Privilege to her Sons, but commands it; and surely none will forbear to answer out of Laziness, that consider the Honour and Benefit

thereof; nor ought any to be silent out of modesty or shame, it being no shame that Men should hear us Pray in *the House of Prayer*, for we came on purpose to Pray, and the only shame is, to be mute and silent. *Thirdly*, Let me entreat them to Ponder the Divine All-sufficiency, and their own great Necessities, before they begin; and to keep their Heart close to every Petition as they go along, and they will find them all so fit to be asked, and so likely to be obtained; so agreeable to their own wants, and to the necessities of all Mankind; that it will be pleasant to ask them, and delightful to expect a gracious answer to them. And if they daily come, and constantly use the *Common Prayer* in this manner, they will neither be tired with the Length, nor wearied with the frequent Repetition thereof; for it will appear to be the most noble and comfortable exercise that Religion doth afford; it will increase their Graces, multiply their blessings, and fit them for the never-ceasing Service of the *Heavenly Choir*. *May the God of Peace therefore reconcile us to these Prayers, and to one another, giving us pious and zealous Priests, devout and well-disposed People, that we may have full Churches; frequent Prayers, and fervent Charity; than which nothing will more conduce to the public Happiness of this Nation, and the Salvation of all our Souls; the Good Lord grant it therefore, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

(6) Daniel Brevint

Dean of Lincoln

The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice

1673

The Sacrament instituted by Christ at the Eve of his Passion, which St. Paul calls the *Lord's Supper*, is without Controversy one of the greatest Mysteries of Godliness and the most solemn

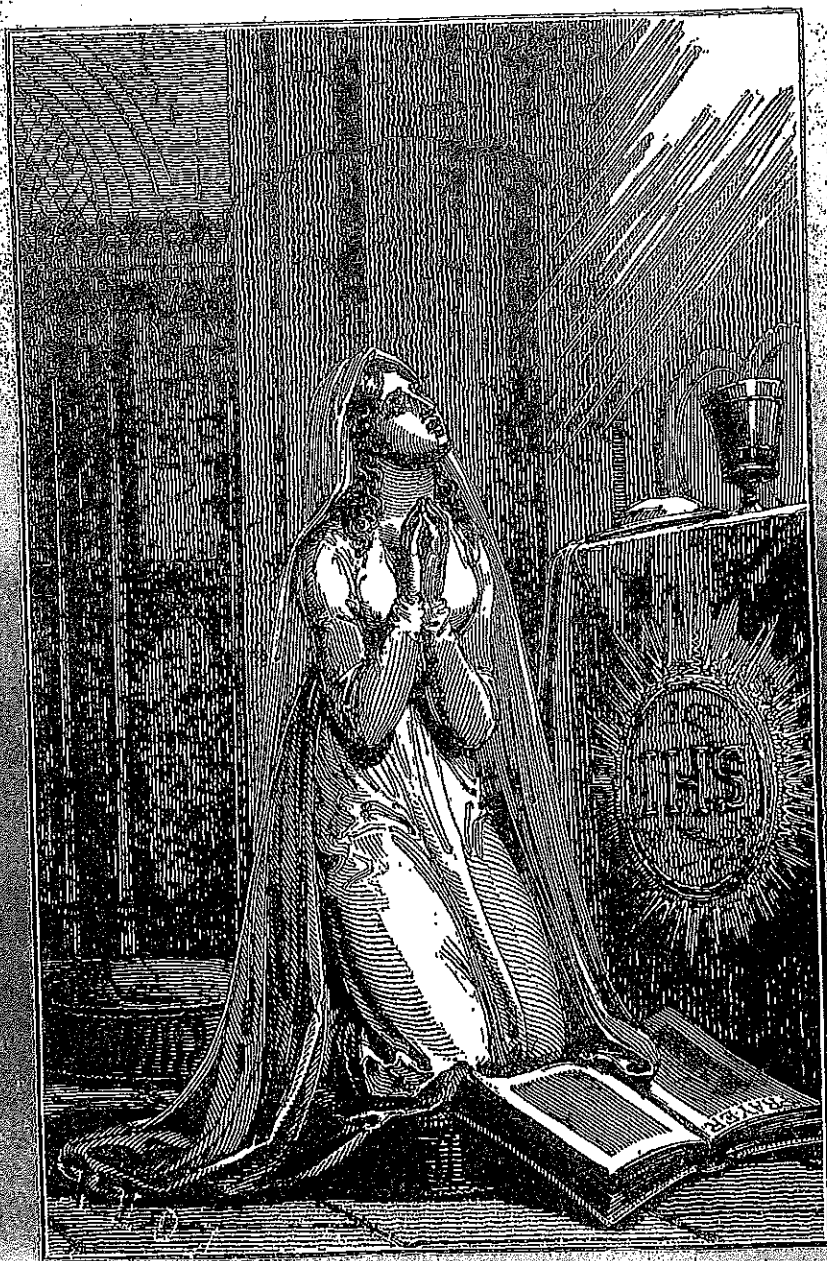


Illustration from
*The New Week's Preparation for a Worthy
Receiving of the Lord's Supper*, 1821.

CHAPTER TWO

On Prayer from a Book

(13) **Richard Hooker**

*Master of the Temple, Rector of Bishopsbourne (Kent),
chief apologist for Anglicanism under Queen Elizabeth I
Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, book V
(1597)*

But of all helps for due performance of this service the greatest is that very set and standing order itself, which framed with common advice, hath both for matter and form prescribed whatsoever is herein publicly done. No doubt from God it hath proceeded, and by us it must be acknowledged a work of his singular care and providence, that the Church hath evermore held a prescript form of common prayer, although not in all things everywhere the same, yet for the most part retaining still the same analogy. So that if the liturgies of all ancient churches throughout the world be compared amongst themselves, it may be easily perceived they had all one original mould, and that the public prayers of the people of God in churches thor-

oughly settled did never use to be voluntary dictates proceeding from any man's extemporal wit.

To him which considereth the grievous and scandalous inconveniences whereunto they make themselves daily subject, with whom any blind and secret corner is judged a fit house of common prayer; the manifold confusions which they fall into where every man's private spirit and gift (as they term it) is the only Bishop that ordaineth him to this ministry; the irksome deformities whereby through endless and senseless effusions of indigested prayers they oftentimes disgrace in most insufferable manner the worthiest part of Christian duty towards God, who herein are subject to no certain order, but pray both what and how they list: to him I say which weigheth duly all these things the reasons cannot be obscure, why God doth in public prayer so much respect the solemnity of places where, the authority and calling of persons by whom, and the precise appointment even with what words or sentences his name should be called on amongst his people.

(14) **Herbert Thorndike,**
*Rector of Barley (Herts.), Fellow of Trinity College,
Cambridge, Prebendary of Westminster
The Service of God at Religious Assemblies*
1642

That this perpetual practice of the Church of prescript forms of service is not against the principles of the reformation, or the judgment of chief reformers, a few words shall serve to conclude. In particular in this of England, for which I plead; that the principal of the clergy should be employed to advise the whole kingdom assembled to enact a form of service, to the

purpose that those which could make no prayers of their own head might use it as cork to help them to swim with—not for any of these considerations expressed afore, especially the practice of it once enacted having been without interruption ever since—is a thing so far from common reason to conceive that it is hard to believe that those which speak it believe themselves in it. In Luther's reformation the question is not made, though there is no reason to be showed why their example should not be drawn into consequence here. As for the other, according to Calvin, so far as my lot hath been to know the practice of it, I confess it is a thing which hath made me much marvel to see them so punctual in practicing their form prescribed, that scarce anything came from the ministers themselves but that very short prayer afore the sermon, wherein they recommend themselves and their performance to the blessing of God, as you saw the fashion was in the ancient Church.

(15) **Anonymous**
(John Gauden, later Bishop of Exeter, and/or King Charles I)
Eikon Basilike
1648

For the manner of using set and prescribed forms, there is no doubt but that wholesome words, being known and fitted to men's understandings, are soonest received into their hearts, and aptest to excite and carry along with them judicious and fervent affections.

Nor do I see any reason why Christians should be weary of a well-composed Liturgy (as I hold this to be) more than of all other things, wherein the constancy abates nothing of the excellency and usefulness.

(109) **John Henry Hobart**

*Bishop of New York, founder of The General Theological Seminary
A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts
of the Protestant Episcopal Church*

1804

Q. *When a sermon is delivered, with what dispositions ought we to hear it?*

A. However frail and unworthy the ministering servants of the sanctuary may be, yet, as they bear the commission of God and are appointed by him to promulgate the terms of salvation, we should listen to their instructions with humble and earnest attention; and our prayers should be directed to God that he would impress the truths which they may deliver on our hearts, to our conviction, our consolation, and our growth in holiness and virtue.

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