

‘A TREASURE OF CHRISTIAN DEVOTION’: THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER AND DOMESTIC PIETY IN GEORGIAN ENGLAND

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Introduction

Georgian England saw the golden age of The Book of Common Prayer. In the words of Jeremy Gregory, this was a period during which the Prayer Book ‘shaped English religious and social life in ways which it had not done before and has not done since’.¹ Far more than simply a book of services, its familiar words marked key moments in people’s lives as they brought their children to be baptised, exchanged their marriage vows, or buried their dead. The Prayer Book was the touchstone of the Church’s doctrine and, in its Catechism, provided instruction in the Christian faith. It offered spiritual counsel for the sick, the penitent and the dying, and through its prayers and rubrics reminded the whole community of their duties to God and one other. In addition, as Jonathan Clark seminal work *English Society 1660-1832* highlighted, the close relationship between the monarchy, the aristocracy and the Church of England meant that the political establishment was an Anglican establishment in which fidelity to the Prayer Book was presented as a mark of political as well as religious loyalty.²

In exploring this period, historians have, unsurprisingly, been drawn to examining the Prayer Book’s defining role in public worship and to exploring the lively debates that surrounded eighteenth-century proposals for its revision.³ By contrast, far less attention has been given to the role of the Prayer Book in domestic devotion. A number of historians, including Norman Sykes, Charles Smyth, William Jacob, Jeremy Gregory, and William Gibson, have highlighted its use for family prayers. John Walsh, Remy Bethmont and Stephen Taylor have noted that other eighteenth-century devotional works drew on Prayer Book material.⁴ Yet, despite these welcome

¹ Jeremy Gregory, ‘The Prayer Book and the Parish Church: from the Restoration to the Oxford Movement’, in C. Hefling and C. Shattuck (eds), *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, Oxford 2006, pp.93-105, (93)

² Jonathan Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Regime*, Cambridge 1985.

³ For example: Bryan Spinks, *The Rise and Fall of the Incomparable Liturgy. The Book of Common Prayer, 1559-1906*, London 2017; Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2018; Alan Jacobs, *The Book of Common Prayer a Biography*, Princeton 2013; R. Jasper, *The Development of the Anglican liturgy, 1662-1980*, London 1989; F. C. Mather, ‘Georgian Churchmanship Reconsidered: Some Variations in Anglican Public Worship 1714-1830’ in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), pp.255-283; B. Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason: Worship and Sacraments in England and Scotland 1662 - c.1800*, Farnham 2008; Nigel Yates, *Buildings, Faith and Worship. The Liturgical Arrangement of Anglican Churches 1600-1900*, Oxford 1991; Andrew Braddock, *The Role of the Book of Common Prayer in the Formation of Modern Anglican Church Identity. A Study in English Parochial Worship 1750-1850*, Lewiston 2010, pp.49-76

⁴ J. Walsh and S. Taylor, ‘The Church and Anglicanism in the ‘Long’ Eighteenth Century’, in J. Walsh, C. Haydon and S. Taylor (eds), *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1833 From Toleration to Tractarianism*, Cambridge 1993, pp.1-64 (25); Charles Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order: A Study of the Origins of the Evangelical Revival in Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge 1940; Jeremy Gregory, “‘For All

references, we lack a more detailed account of the different ways in which the Prayer Book shaped Georgian domestic devotion.

That the domestic role of the Prayer Book remains under-explored reflects, in part, the broader challenges facing historians wishing to examine the world of private and household prayer. As Alec Ryrie and Jessica Martin have noted, compared to public worship, the experience and practice of personal prayer remains far more hidden from the historian. The evidence is often indirect and, they note, reliant ‘on what people set down about a phenomenon always partially separate from record’.⁵ More accessible are the ways in which the Prayer Book was used and commended in the many guides and manuals produced to assist and encourage domestic piety. Along with the evidence to be found in diaries, letters and spiritual journals, they allow us to explore how Georgian Anglicans were being encouraged to use the Prayer Book as a source for household and personal prayers, and the ways in which it acted as a key reference point for other devotional literature. Taken together, they reveal the important and varied roles that *The Book of Common Prayer* played in Georgian domestic devotion.

The Prayer Book as a Source for Domestic Devotion

The development of Georgian domestic devotion emerged from what Ian Green has described as an ‘Indian summer of sales of devotional works’ lasting from the 1680s to the 1720s.⁶ Encompassing both household prayers and the personal devotion of the ‘closet’, this literature not only included prayer manuals, but also guides to spiritual self-examination and reflection, works of catechesis, Biblical commentaries, prayers written for individual needs and occasions, and published sermons. Within this diverse market for devotional literature, the Prayer Book was often turned to as source for domestic devotion. The legitimacy of this approach was sanctioned by both the Prayer Book and historical experience. The introductory material to the Prayer Book ‘concerning the service of the Church’ noted that the obligations laid upon the clergy required them to say Morning or Evening Prayer either ‘openly’ in church or, if a congregation could not be assembled, it was to be said ‘privately’ by the clergy with their own families.

This domestic use of the Prayer Book provided a model for other Anglican households to follow. After the banning of the Prayer Book for public worship in

Sorts and Conditions of Men”: the Social Life of the BCP during the Long Eighteenth Century’, *Social History* 39, 2009, pp.29-54; William Gibson, *A Social History of the Domestic Chaplain 1530-1840*, London 1997, pp.70-1; Remy Bethmont, ‘Promoting Anglican Liturgical Spirituality: Thomas Comber’s *Companions* to the Book of Common Prayer’ in *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* XX11-1 (2017); William Jacob, ‘Common Prayer in the Eighteenth Century’ in Stephen Platten and Christopher Woods (eds), *Comfortable Words: Polity and Piety and the Book of Common Prayer*, London 2012, pp.84-97, 84

⁵J. Martin and A. Ryrie, ‘Introduction. Private and Domestic Devotion’, in J. Martin and A. Ryrie (eds), *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain*, London 2016, p.1

⁶ Ian Green, ‘Varieties of Domestic Devotion in Early Modern English Protestantism’ in Martin and Ryrie (eds), *Private and Domestic Devotion*, p.31

1645, Prayer-Book loyalists, like the diarist John Evelyn, had continued to use it in the privacy of their own homes. Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and the authorisation of a revised Prayer Book in 1662, there was a renewed emphasis on the value of The Book of Common Prayer in domestic devotion as well as public worship.⁷ Humphrey Prideaux, Dean of Norwich from 1689 to 1724, observed that the High Church party were in the vanguard of those promoting the liturgy's value as a guide to family prayers. As the 'prevalence of Puritanism' had seen the Prayer Book 'extravagantly run down', Prideaux suggested, so 'on the change of the times, and the Restoration of the Church, it was as extravagantly cried up by those of the High-Church Party, as if no other form of prayer was to be used in families any more than in the Churches...'.⁸

Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man*, first published in 1657 and reissued throughout the eighteenth century, gave expression to such High Church sentiments. It advised those leading family prayers to make their selection 'out of some good Book; if it be the Service-Book of the Church, he makes a good choice'.⁹ Similarly, Thomas Comber's *A Companion to the Temple and Closet*, first published in 1672, presented the Prayer Book as a vehicle for private meditation as much as public worship. William Howell's *The common-prayer-book the best companion in the house and closet, as well as the temple*, first published in 1685, also argued that, in The Book of Common Prayer, the Church of England had 'most profitably and plentifully administered to the private as well as publick Devotions of her Children'.¹⁰ These works underlined that domestic prayer and public worship were part of a single devotional landscape in which the Prayer Book was central.

Although the guidance offered by seventeenth-century writers like Allestree, Comber and Howells continued to influence the early Georgian church, the role of the Prayer Book within domestic piety was also subject to debate. Benjamin Jenks, whose own collection of family prayers first appeared in 1697, and had reached a twentieth edition by 1780, argued that there should be freedom in the pattern of prayer used in domestic devotion, including the use of extemporary prayer.¹¹ Humphrey Prideaux believed that, by the first decades of the eighteenth century, there was a growing

⁷ Bethmont, 'Promoting Anglican Liturgical Spirituality', p.5; Ian Green, 'New for Old? Clerical and Lay Attitudes to Domestic Prayer in Early Modern England', *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 10/2 (2008), pp.195-222 (195)

⁸ Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order*, pp.29-30

⁹ Richard Allestree, *The Whole Duty of Man, Laid Down in a Plain and Familiar Way for the Use of All, but Especially the Meanest Reader*, London 1695, p.44

¹⁰ Bethmont, 'Promoting Anglican Liturgical Spirituality', p.4; William Howell, *The Common-Prayer-Book the Best Companion in the House and Closet, as well as the Temple*, 20th edn, London 1753, Preface.

¹¹ Benjamin Jenks, *Prayers and Offices of Devotions for Families, and for Particular Persons, upon Most Occasions*, 29th edn, London 1816, p.xviii.

feeling that much of the material in the Prayer Book was ‘proper only to be read by men in orders’ and that lay-led devotions should be drawn from other sources.¹²

Popular books of household prayers, such as Edmund Gibson’s *Family Devotion*, first issued in 1705 for his Lambeth parishioners, assumed that material specially written to aid domestic devotion was more appropriate than over-reliance on *The Book of Common Prayer*. In the introduction to *Family Devotion*, Gibson underlined this point by emphasising that, unlike the Church’s public worship, which was governed by the customs and laws of the nation, the pattern used for domestic prayer, whether offered by a household or individual, was a matter of private and personal choice.¹³ For some spiritual writers, including those influenced by the Non-Jurors, the production of devotional manuals was an opportunity not only to address perceived weaknesses in the Prayer Book, such as its repetitious use of material, but also to draw on the spiritual riches to be found in other, more ancient liturgical texts.¹⁴ These varied expectations helped to fuel what John Walsh and Stephen Taylor have described as the ‘astonishing market for devotional literature’ that existed throughout the eighteenth century, and within which the Prayer Book was but one source amongst many that Georgian Anglicans had available to them.¹⁵

Nonetheless, within this varied devotional landscape, the Prayer Book continued to occupy a distinctive place, one that can be traced throughout the eighteenth century and across different church parties. At the beginning of the period, Susanna Hopton, with her strong Non-Juring sympathies, and the Whig-supporting Elizabeth Burnett, both drew on the Prayer Book in their private devotions.¹⁶ At mid-century, sermons on the value of the Prayer Book, such as that preached by the Orthodox churchman Henry Stebbing in 1760, and manuals of family prayer such as that produced by the Latitudinarian Benjamin Hoadly, restated the Georgian appreciation for the liturgy as a source of both public worship and domestic prayer. Stebbing observed that the Prayer Book was ‘a treasure of Christian devotion, both publick and private. And those who are true Christians and soberly devout have always esteemed and used it as such.’¹⁷ Hoadly followed this approach, deliberately including Prayer Book material in his own collection of family prayers ‘that they may be ready for such as

¹² Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England*, Oxford 2000, p.273; Smyth, *Simeon and Church Order*, pp.29-30.

¹³ Edmund Gibson, *Family Devotion, or an Earnest Exhortation to Morning and Evening Prayer in Families*, 22nd edn, London 1754, pp.12-13.

¹⁴ Spinks, *The Incomparable Liturgy*, p.105

¹⁵ J. Walsh and S. Taylor, ‘The Church and Anglicanism in the ‘Long’ Eighteenth Century’, in Walsh, Haydon and Taylor (eds), *The Church of England c. 1689 - c. 1833*, pp.1-64 (25)

¹⁶ Robert Andrews, ‘Women of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century High Church Tradition: A Biographical and Historiographical Exploration of a Forgotten Phenomenon in Anglican History’, *Anglican and Episcopal History* 84, no. 1 (2015), pp.49–64; Jacob, ‘Common Prayer in the Eighteenth Century’, p.84

¹⁷ Henry Stebbing, *A Sermon Preached at the Parish Church of St. Mary-le-Bow, on St. Mark’s Day, 1760*, London 1760, p.19

may like them better for the Services of their Families'.¹⁸ Towards the end of the century, Evangelicals like Thomas Biddulph and Charles Simeon, and High Church figures including Sarah Trimmer and George Pretyman Tomline, continued this tradition, commending the use of the Prayer Book for both household devotions and public worship as part of a wider response to renewed attacks on the Church and its liturgy from political radicals and religious dissenters.¹⁹ Consequently, loyalty to the Prayer Book as a guide to both public worship and domestic devotion, continued to act as a unifying force within late-Georgian Anglicanism.²⁰

The Use of the Prayer Book in Domestic Devotion

Commendation for the domestic role of the Prayer Book left open the question of how it was to be used, whether for household or private prayers. Three approaches can be discerned. The first was simply to take the pattern of public worship provided in the Prayer Book and transpose it into a domestic setting. This received its most complete expression in aristocratic households where Prayer-Book services were led by a chaplain in the family's own private chapel. In the early eighteenth century, the clergyman and writer Sir George Wheler recommended that in such cases morning and evening prayer should be said daily with Holy Communion being celebrated at noon.²¹ Clerical households might also use the Prayer Book in this way. Charles Wheatly's guide to the Prayer Book, regularly re-issued throughout the Georgian period, emphasised that clerical families were to read morning and evening prayer at home if no congregation could be found for daily public worship. This followed the rubrics of the Prayer Book itself, which stated that 'all Priests and Deacons are to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer either privately or openly, not being let by sickness, or some other urgent cause'.²²

A second, and probably more common practice, was to adapt the Prayer Book for domestic use. Unlike its role in public worship, which was frequently applauded by Anglicans for embodying ideals of order and uniformity, in the domestic realm, where the Prayer Book was free from the constraints of the Act of Uniformity, it could be used with a high degree of creativity and variation. William Howells' *Best Companion* was typical of this approach. Aimed at those of the 'meanest capacity' it went through twenty-one editions between 1686 and 1758. In it, Howells offered

¹⁸ Benjamin Hoadly, *A Plain Account of the Nature and End of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, 5th edn, London 1751, p.180.

¹⁹ George Pretyman Tomline, *Elements of Christian Theology*, 14th edn, London 1843, 2 Vols, Vol. 2 p.26; Sarah Trimmer, *A Companion to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England Containing a Comment on the Service for Sundays, Including the Collects, Epistles and Gospels*, London 1791, p.61; Thomas Biddulph, *Short Prayers for Every morning and Evening in the Week* 2nd edn, Bristol 1801.

²⁰ Braddock, *The Role of the Book of Common Prayer*, pp.49-76.

²¹ William Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge 1996, p.100

²² Charles Wheatly, *A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*, Oxford 1819, p.80.

patterns of household and personal prayer designed for a wide variety of occasions, all of which used Prayer Book material. They included forms of prayer for use in the morning, at noon and at night, prayers to be said on fast days, prayers for the sick, and prayers for those 'troubled in mind or conscience'. Although each form of prayer was based on material to be found in the liturgy, it was edited into sequences of devotion very different from their original context in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Howells' prayers for use at noon, for example, began with a series of seven collects drawn from across the Christian year. These were followed by two longer prayers, the first of which was derived from the Baptism service and the second from the service of Holy Communion. The sequence ended with four more collects, the Lord's Prayer, and then an adaptation of the blessing so that it became a prayer for a family rather than a benediction pronounced by a priest.²³

Other domestic prayer manuals followed this pattern. Robert Nelson's family prayers freely drew on the Prayer Book, blending together collects, confessions and thanksgivings to create new forms of prayer which remained full of resonances and turns of phrase familiar to anyone who used *The Book of Common Prayer* itself.²⁴ In the later part of the Georgian period, authors including Robert Raikes, Thomas Stevenson, Joseph Potts and Thomas Backhouse, continued this tradition. Raikes' morning and evening prayers, published in 1788, and Stevenson's *Manual of Family Devotion* of 1825, both provided prayers largely selected from the Prayer Book but presented according to their compilers' own schemes.²⁵ Similarly, *Family Devotions*, by Thomas Backhouse, drew freely from Prayer Book texts, including parts of the Communion liturgy usually said by the priest alone, while Archdeacon Thomas Potts provided a series of devotions for personal use 'selected chiefly from the Book of Common Prayer, to be used before and after the Holy Communion'.²⁶ Other authors encouraged families and individuals to make their own selection from the Prayer Book. *Morning and Evening Prayer for Families and Private Persons*, re-issued by a variety of printers and booksellers throughout the eighteenth century, included a thematic list of Prayer Book collects that recommended particular prayers for individual needs and occasions.²⁷

²³ Howell, *The Best Companion*, preface; Green, 'Varieties of Domestic Devotion', p.20.

²⁴ R. Nelson, *An Earnest Exhortation to Housekeepers, to Maintain Family Instruction and Devotion; With Daily Prayers for Morning and Evening. The twentieth edition, corrected.* 20th edn, London 1807.

²⁵ R. Raikes, *Morning and Evening Prayer*, Gloucester 1788; T. Stevenson, *A Manual of Family Devotions, Containing a Form of Prayer for Every Morning and Evening in the Week, Selected Chiefly from the Book of Common Prayer*, London 1825.

²⁶ T. Backhouse, *Family Devotions for Every Day in the Week Selected from the Liturgy of the Church of England*, Blackburn 1825, p.4; Thomas Potts, *Elementary Discourses, Designed for the Use of a Young Person after Confirmation*, 2nd edn, London 1804, pp.83-9.

²⁷ Anon., *Morning and Evening Prayer for Families and Private Persons as Masters, Mistresses, Children and Servants*, 18th edn, London 1815, p.33.

Alongside the use of published prayer manuals, households and individuals might make their own personal selection from the Prayer Book. Lady Elizabeth Hastings, who died in 1739, assembled her household four times a day to join in prayers and Bible readings selected from the liturgy. These were conducted either by the local vicar, who served as her chaplain, or by a senior servant.²⁸ Following his initial spiritual awakening at Cambridge, Charles Simeon gathered together a number of college servants for Christian instruction on Sunday evenings during which he ‘read some good book to them, and used some of the prayers of the Liturgy for prayer...’. At other times he used the Litany with his servants, and read over the psalms and lessons appointed in the Prayer Book as the basis for his own private devotions.²⁹

A third approach taken by Georgian devotional manuals was to blend Prayer Book material with newly-composed prayers or devotions drawn from other sources. Susanna Hopton’s *Prayers at Night for a Family* interspersed petitions drawn from a variety of sources with responses drawn directly from *The Book of Common Prayer*, imitating the rhythm of the Litany.³⁰ This approach was echoed in aristocratic and gentry households where domestic chaplains would blend the use of the liturgy with prayers of their own composing.³¹ Similarly, Thomas Seaton’s collection of prayers for servants of 1720 freely blended prayers and phrases taken from the Prayer Book with other material. At the end of the period, works like Edward Pearson’s *Prayers for Families* of 1800 combined Prayer Book material with prayers taken from William Vickers’s *The Companion to the Altar* and the anonymous *Pious Country Parishioner*.³² This approach was also common in adapting the Prayer Book for more personal use. Bishop Hume’s meditations for Communion, prepared for the Duke of Newcastle in August 1765, included a suffrage written by Hume himself, two prayers from *The Book of Common Prayer*, together with a short prayer for use each morning and evening.³³

Did these different ways of using the Prayer Book change over time? At first sight the frequent reissuing of devotional works suggests a consistency of approach across the eighteenth-century. Howell’s *Best Companion* was used by Edward Pearson in his family prayers of 1800. Similarly, Nelson’s family prayers had reached a twelfth edition by 1756 and were still in circulation at the start of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, from the final decades of the eighteenth century some shifts of emphasis can be discerned. This was a period in which, as William Jacob has noted,

²⁸ Jacob, *Lay People and Religion*, p.103.

²⁹ William Carus, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon, M.A., Late Senior Fellow of King’s College, and Minister of Trinity Church, Cambridge*, 2nd edn, London 1847, pp.11, 19, 20.

³⁰ Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason*, p.123.

³¹ Gibson, *The Domestic Chaplain*, pp.70-71, 172.

³² Thomas Seaton, *The Conduct of Servants in Great Families*, London 1720, pp.282-92; Edward Pearson, *Prayers for Families*, Loughborough 1800, p.xxviii.

³³ N. Sykes, *Church and State in England in the XVIIIth century*, Hamden 1962, p.282.

there was increasing anxiety that social and economic changes were eroding the practice of family devotion, especially amongst the lower classes.³⁴ In 1800 Edward Pearson could lament that the ‘duty of Family Prayer is very generally neglected’. Charles Simeon wrote of the need to simplify devotional material, especially its language, in order to make it more accessible.³⁵ In response, manuals such as those produced by Raikes, Stevenson and Backhouse, while drawing on the Prayer Book, followed the earlier example of Edmund Gibson’s *Family Devotion* by reaffirming the need to offer much more concise forms of prayer which, they hoped, the lower social classes would be more likely to use. Similarly, the appearance of works like the *Seaman’s Prayer Book* of 1822, which drew mainly on the Prayer Book’s material written for use ‘daily at sea’, attempted to make the liturgy more accessible for particular groups. The distribution of cheap Prayer Books for family use undertaken by both the Prayer Book and Homily Society and the SPCK, also sought to bolster the domestic use of the liturgy. In these ways late-Georgian authors continued to value and promote The Book of Common Prayer as ‘a treasure of Christian devotion’ while also seeking to adapt and simplify its material in response to the changing context.

Devotional Material Inspired by the Prayer Book

The use of the liturgy as a source for domestic prayer was complemented by its role as a key reference point for the production of other devotional material. This included guides to the Prayer Book, devotional sermons and commentaries on the liturgical calendar. Thomas Comber’s *Companion to the Temple and Closet*, was pioneering in making the liturgy itself a subject for private meditation. Through a series of discourses and paraphrases on the Prayer Book, it was designed to help readers pray ‘with as much zeal and more knowledge, as much spirit and more truth, than by any other kind of prayer’. This personal engagement was intended to enable a fuller participation in public worship, leading to the spiritual integration of devotion in both the ‘temple and the closet’.³⁶

Comber’s work was drawn on by later writers and helped pave the way for other guides to the Prayer Book that combined devotional reflections with scholarly instruction.³⁷ One of the most widely circulated of these was Nelson’s *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England*. First issued in 1703, it offered a comprehensive guide to all the fasts, festivals, saints’ days and seasons appointed in the Prayer Book. Each entry began with a series of questions and answers after the manner of the Catechism and concluded with a number of prayers that combined material from the Prayer Book alongside other prayers and devotions.³⁸ Others

³⁴ William Jacob, ‘“Conscientious Attention to Publick and Family Worship of God”: Religious Practices in Eighteenth-century English Households’ in *Studies in Church History*, pp.50, 307-317, (317)

³⁵ Pearson, *Prayer for Families*, p.xxi

³⁶ Bethmont, ‘Promoting Anglican Liturgical Spirituality’, p.4.

³⁷ Anon (ed.), *A Pleasant and Useful Companion to the Church of England: Or, a Short, Plain, and Practical Exposition of the Book of Common-Prayer*, London 1764; Green, ‘Varieties of Domestic Devotion’, p.20.

³⁸ Nelson, *Festivals and Fasts*.

followed Nelson's lead. *The Christian's New Year's Gift*, published in 1764, also provided 'a companion' for the feasts and fasts of the Church of England.³⁹ By contrast the anonymous *Observations on the Principal Fasts and Holydays of the Church of England* of 1819 concentrated on the chief celebrations like Easter and Christmas, offering short prayers and suitable forms of self-examination for each festival.⁴⁰ At the end of the Georgian period, John Keble's *The Christian Year*, first published in 1827, renewed this tradition. In the preface Keble wrote of the 'soothing tendency of the Prayer Book, which it is the chief purpose of these pages to exhibit'. As a poetic companion to the Prayer Book, its verses were intended to invite spiritual contemplation and enrich an appreciation of the liturgical calendar.⁴¹

Sermons and liturgical commentaries also featured within this literature. Bishop Beveridge's sermon on the Prayer Book was one of the most frequently re-issued works of this kind, appearing in over thirty different editions by the middle of the eighteenth century.⁴² The epistle and gospel readings for the Holy Communion service were the subject of a commentary by George Stanhope, dean of Canterbury from 1704 to 1728. Initially appearing in three parts between 1705 and 1708, they had reached a ninth edition by 1775.⁴³ *The Family Chaplain* of 1775 contained sermons for the Christian year selected from the works of Archbishop Tillotson, Archbishop Secker and others.⁴⁴ The pattern of devotion such literature might feed is reflected in diary entries made by Charles Simeon for the 23 February 1780: 'at 11 read Bishop Beveridge's sermon on Common Prayer till 12, and then prayed fervently for several graces out of the *Whole Duty*. In (evening chapel) prayed devoutly without much wandering: at night but short prayers, but tolerably performed'.⁴⁵

Sermons on the Prayer Book were complemented by the production of liturgical commentaries. One of the most popular was Charles Wheatly's *A Rational Illustration of The Book of Common Prayer*. First issued in 1710, and owing a debt to the work of earlier commentators including Thomas Comber and Anthony Sparrow, it offered a detailed explanation of the origins, meaning and purpose of each part of the Prayer Book. Issued throughout the eighteenth century, Wheatly's guide regularly

³⁹ Anon., *The Christian's New Year's Gift: Containing a Companion for the Feasts and Fasts of the Church of England*, London 1764; Anon., *The Family Chaplain*, London 1775.

⁴⁰ Anon., *Observations on the Principal Fasts and Holy Days of the Church of England*, London 1819.

⁴¹ J. Keble, *The Christian Year: Thoughts in Verse for the Sundays and Holydays throughout the Year*, London 1827.

⁴² William Beveridge, *A Sermon Concerning the Excellency and Usefulness of the Common-Prayer* 33rd edn, London 1753.

⁴³ George Stanhope, *A Paraphrase and Comment upon the Epistles and Gospels, Appointed to be Used in the Church of England on All Sundays and Holy-Days*, London 1706-1709.

⁴⁴ Anon., *The Christian's New Year's Gift*; Anon., *The Family Chaplain*.

⁴⁵ Carus, *Charles Simeon*, p.19.

appeared in the book collection sent out to local churches by the Trustees for Erecting Parochial Libraries.⁴⁶ In its turn, the *Rational Illustration* paved the way for the growing number of Prayer Book commentaries produced from the 1790s. Responding to the upsurge in criticism of the Church and its liturgy from both nonconformists and political radicals, the guides written by High Church authors such as Richard Mant, and by Evangelicals including Thomas Biddulph and Charles Simeon, not only sought to refute the Prayer Book's critics but to provide instructive material that could become part of a household's devotional reading.⁴⁷

Works like Wheatly's *Rational Illustration* and Nelson's *Festivals and Fasts*, linked their material directly to the Prayer Book text, but resonances between the liturgy and domestic devotion were felt in other ways. One of the most important of these was the priority given to spiritual self-examination within Georgian piety. A practice already encouraged within seventeenth-century devotional manuals, it echoed the Prayer Book's emphasis on penitence, confession and the pursuit of virtue. As Stephen Sykes has argued, these themes can be traced back to Cranmer's own concern to construct a liturgy the theological language and metaphors of which made the pursuit of purity of heart and union with God central.⁴⁸ Georgian prayer manuals, especially those sections intended for personal use, picked up these themes so that, as Ian Green has observed, 'the function of prayer most frequently encouraged was the confessing and repenting of sins, and seeking God's help in avoiding sin in the future.'⁴⁹ Rooted in the Prayer Book, it was a spirituality that expressed a 'moral-ascetic theology' in which personal and moral self-examination, penitence and the pursuit of virtue in daily life were seen as a unity.⁵⁰

We can see these themes converging in the work of Robert Nelson. His *Daily Prayers for Morning and Evening*, quoting the Prayer Book Catechism, included a prayer for children which asked God to 'keep my hands from picking and stealing, and my tongue from evil speaking, lying and slandering...'.⁵¹ Nelson also provided 'heads of self-examination' in his *Festivals and Fasts* which listed at length sins against God, neighbour, church, family and self, challenging readers to identify and remedy those practices and attitudes that fell short of Christian virtue.⁵² Many other works, including Gibson's *Family Devotion*, Law's *Serious Call*, Henry Venn's *Complete*

⁴⁶ Michael Perkin, *A Directory of the Parochial Libraries of the Church of England and the Church in Wales*, London 2004, p.50.

⁴⁷ Braddock, *The Role of the Book of Common Prayer*, pp.43-47.

⁴⁸ Stephen Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism*, Cambridge 1995, pp.31, 40-41.

⁴⁹ Ian Green, 'Varieties of Domestic Devotion', p.25.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson and Rowan Williams (eds), *Love's Redeeming Work. The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, Oxford 2001, p.192.

⁵¹ Robert Nelson, *An Earnest Exhortation to Housekeepers, to Maintain Family Instruction and Devotion, with Daily Prayers for Morning and Evening*, 9th edn, London 1802, p.12.

⁵² Nelson, *Festivals and Fasts*, pp.510-13.

Duty of Man, and the anonymous *Morning and Evening Prayers for Families*, also provided guidance for personal examination, confession and repentance.⁵³ The diary of the Suffolk gentleman-farmer William Coe, who died in 1729, suggests that he often used the Ten Commandments as a framework for personal reflection, mirroring its role in the Communion service.⁵⁴ Jane Austen, in her family devotions, reflected these concerns when she wrote of the need ‘on each return of night’ to ‘consider how the past day has been spent by us, and what have been our prevailing Thoughts, Words, and Actions during it’. Her prayers gave expression to this intention. Echoing phrases and cadences from the Prayer Book itself, she asked for grace ‘so to pray, as to deserve to be heard, to address thee with our hearts, as with our lips. Thou art everywhere present, from thee no secret can be hid. May the knowledge of this teach us to fix our thoughts on thee, with reverence and devotion that we pray not in vain’.⁵⁵ Such prayers amplified the spirituality of the Prayer Book so that the themes explored in domestic piety echoed and reinforced the key themes to be found in the liturgy itself.

These themes of self-examination and repentance were particularly important in relation to preparation for participation in Holy Communion. The first exhortation in the Communion service required communicants to examine their ‘lives and conversations by the rule of God’s commandments’. Guides to Communion, including *The Week’s Preparation for a Worthy Receiving of the Lord’s Supper*, first issued in 1679 but popular throughout the eighteenth century, the more moderate *New Week’s Preparation* of 1749, and William Vickers’s *A Companion to the Altar*, responded to this need by providing prayers, forms of self-examination and acts of confession to be used in the days before receiving the sacrament. The Ten Commandments were often used as a framework for personal preparation, a practice that consciously echoed their liturgical use in the Communion service. Vickers’s *Companion*, for example, took each commandment in turn and added to it a series of supplementary questions. The material relating to the eighth commandment was typical of Vickers’s approach, and asked communicants to consider if they had not only avoided stealing, but had been just and true in all their dealings and avoided taking advantage of others.⁵⁶

Other works underscored the Georgian emphasis on participation in Communion as a renewal of the covenant made in Baptism, especially the promise to fight against sin, the world and the devil. The High Church bishop Thomas Wilson provided a

⁵³ Anon., *Morning and Evening Prayers for Families*, p.16; Gibson, *Family Devotion*, pp.22-5; Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, pp.265-72; Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man: Or, a System of Doctrinal and Practical Christianity*, London 1795, pp.259-286.

⁵⁴ Matthew Storey (ed.), *Two East Anglian Diaries, 1641-1729: Isaac Archer and William Coe*, Woodbridge 1994, p.210.

⁵⁵ David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen*, London 1978, p.194.

⁵⁶ William Vickers, *The Companion to the Altar: Shewing the Nature of the Preparation Required, in Order to a Worthy and Comfortable Receiving of that Holy Sacrament*, Birmingham 1776, pp.37-40.

private re-affirmation of baptismal promises to be used before receiving Holy Communion. Similarly, Vickers's *Companion* included a renunciation of 'the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh'. In this way the sacraments of Baptism and Communion were united through personal devotion and the discipline of spiritual and moral self-examination.⁵⁷

For some spiritual writers, however, manuals of domestic devotion also provided an opportunity to respond to the Prayer Book's perceived weaknesses and constraints. Some liturgical scholars criticised the Prayer Book for a lack of fidelity to the pattern to be found in ancient liturgical texts. Non-jurors like Thomas Brett and Henry Gandy, and a number of High Churchmen, including John Johnson of Cranbrook, were particularly critical of the 1662 Communion service for not including a clear offering of the elements of bread and wine as part of the introduction to the prayer of consecration, nor an evocation of the Holy Spirit over them that they might become the body and blood of Christ.⁵⁸ This could partly be addressed through the personal prayer of communicants. *The New Week's Preparation* included a prayer for use during the consecration in which the communicant asked that God would 'send down thy Spirit and blessing upon this means of grace and salvation, which thou thyself, O Jesus, hast ordained'.⁵⁹ Vickers's *Companion to the Altar* also sought to amplify the liturgy, providing a prayer to be used as the bread and wine were placed on the altar which asked that God would sanctify the worshippers.⁶⁰ Such prayers enabled what was, at best, implicit in the Prayer Book, to be made explicit in communicants' own devotions.

Other devotional writers looked to private prayer as an opportunity to expand the breadth of Anglican devotion. Those writing from a Non-Juring perspective, like Susanna Hopton and Thomas Deacon, looked to the Roman Breviary, the Apostolic Constitutions and 'the Ancient Liturgies' as well as to the Prayer Book as a source of inspiration. Providing prayers to be read 'for the Morning and Evening, and for the ancient hours of prayer, Nine, Twelve, and Three', Hopton argued that this was 'after the manner of the ancient Christians, in the best, most pure, Primitive Times.'⁶¹ Those of a more Evangelical or Low Church persuasion, also saw domestic prayer as an opportunity to break away from the restrictions of the liturgy. The preface to Benjamin Jenks' *Prayers and Offices of Devotion for Families* argued that there should be 'liberty' in the forms of private and domestic prayer. Nonetheless, within his extensive collection of prayers, Jenks, like Hopton and Deacon, did not seek to

⁵⁷ Vickers, *Companion to the Altar*, p.49; W. K. Lowther Clark, *Eighteenth-Century Piety*, London 1944, p.13; Rowell, Stevenson and Williams (eds), *Love's Redeeming Work*, p.188.

⁵⁸ Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason*, pp.116-123.

⁵⁹ *The New Week's Preparation for a Worthy Receiving of the Lord's Supper*, London 1749, p.114 .

⁶⁰ Vickers, *Companion to the Altar*, p.43.

⁶¹ Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason*, pp.123-125.

ignore the Prayer Book, but to supplement it, and his *Prayers and Offices* included material written for the Church's appointed fast days, feasts and seasons.⁶² In this way the rhythms of the Prayer Book and its calendar continued to provide a common reference point for Georgian Anglicans in their private and domestic devotion as well as in their public worship.

Conclusion

As both a source and reference point for domestic prayer, Georgian Anglicans turned to The Book of Common Prayer as a treasury of devotion. Unlike the emphasis on order and uniformity associated with its use in public worship, in the domestic sphere the familiar words and phrases of the Prayer Book were freely adapted and blended with other material to help it meet a wide variety of devotional needs. In their turn, other devotional works complemented and amplified the Prayer Book and its spirituality. These different approaches ensured that the domestic role of the Prayer Book remained a living and evolving tradition. To echo the words of Henry Stebbing, within the vibrant and varied world of eighteenth-century devotional literature, The Book of Common Prayer was received as a treasure of Christian devotion, both public and private, and Georgian Anglicans esteemed and used it as such.

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⁶² Jenks, *Prayers and Offices of Devotions*, pp.xviii, 85-108 .