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Editorial: Schools and Catechisms

A recent paper based on the British Social Attitudes Survey reported that while 33% of people aged 75 and over identified themselves as members of the Church of England, the corresponding figure for those aged 18-24 was 1%.¹ Quoting these figures, someone on Twitter commented: ‘Surely the big question here is, “what exactly has been happening in all those C of E schools over the past generation?”’. This prompted a response from a clerical tweeter: ‘This really is the right question. We educate 30% of the nation’s children and 1% emerge as Anglicans—where is the institutional outrage? Where are the reports on where we have got it so wrong . . . ? Where are the policies for turning this round urgently?’ There were some further replies from different viewpoints, one clergyman retorting that ‘it sounds as if there’s an expectation of an increased number of Anglicans in exchange for an education. So wrong! The Church provides schools in and for communities. Not faith schools. And more [are] getting rid of admission criteria of church attendance’.

That last comment more or less echoes official pronouncements. Though admission policies are devolved, the centre has encouraged the removal of any kind of religious test and the Vision for Education on the Church of England’s website is expressed in terms which are wholly secular. At most it is claimed that Church schools should have a Christian ‘ethos’ and teach ‘virtues rooted in the Christian faith’, but when this ethos and these virtues are translated into educational aims they seem no different from aims which would be supported by any decent school. The question is not whether the schools are providing a good education—many are—but whether they are providing education in the Christian faith or ‘in the principles of the Established Church’. Some undoubtedly are, but the Church of England Education Office often seems intent on downplaying this and on portraying Church schools as, in the words of the clergyman quoted earlier, ‘schools in and for communities. Not faith schools’. One historian of the National Society has noted that whereas Roman Catholic schools, for example, have retained ‘a more confessional approach to RE’ the approach in Church of England schools

looks very similar to aims for RE in community schools. The original

1 David Voas & Steve Bruce, *Religion: Identity, Behaviour and Belief Over Two Decades* (British Social Attitudes 36), National Centre for Social Research 2019, p.6.

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clear commitment to bringing children up as members of the Church of England has shifted as understanding of the educational processes has changed and as the population of the country has changed . . . reports from the Church of England have recognised this difference from the 1970s on. Anglican Diocesan syllabuses, where they exist, are generally indistinguishable from local authority syllabuses, recommending that pupils learn about the other faiths as well as Christianity, and rarely offering any specific Anglican teaching.²

And whilst the National Society's advice is that 'Christianity should be the majority study in RE in every school. In church schools that should clearly be adhered to', it should be noted that this amounts to saying that Christianity need be given no greater prominence in Church Schools than in other schools. And so far as any distinctively Anglican content to instruction is concerned the SIAMS³ guidelines are explicit that 'in a Church of England . . . school religious education should be non-confessional and is considered an academic subject'⁴

This certainly represents a 'shift' from the 'original clear commitment' of the National Society. A major influence in this direction seems to have been the 1970 Church report *The Fourth R*, which recommended, among other things, that the term 'religious instruction' should be replaced by 'religious education', which 'should form part of the general education received by all school pupils' and that 'the dual system should not be perpetuated for "denominational advantage", but only to enable the Church "to express its concern for the general education of the young people of the nation"'.⁵ No doubt this reaction against 'instruction' was part of a much wider educational movement: battles about formal instruction, rote learning, grammar etc. have continued through to the present.

All this raises the question in the observer's mind: 'In what sense then are these schools now, other than nominally, Church of England Schools?' For that Church schools conceived themselves as having more distinctly 'Church' purposes than this, in line with the National Society's original charter, lies within living memory. I fell into conversation the other day with some older members of my local church. I asked whether any of them had been required to learn the Catechism—'Yes!' came the reply. Two ladies remembered learning it at about the age of eight or nine in

2 Lois Loudon, *Distinctive and Inclusive: The National Society and Church of England Schools 1811-2011*, 2012, the National Society, pp.5-6.

3 Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools.

4 SIAMS: An Evaluation Schedule for Schools and Inspectors, April 2018.

5 Paul A Welsby, *A History of the Church of England 1945-1980*, 1984, p.127. The commission responsible for the report was chaired by Ian Ramsey, then Bishop of Durham.

the late 1940s; one had learned it at a Church school, the other within the church in a parish which had no Church school. In neither case had it been learnt directly in preparation for Confirmation, but at an earlier age in the ordinary course of Church education. The parishes concerned were not middle class.

The Prayer Book rubric requires the Curate of a parish ‘upon Sundays and Holy-days, after the second Lesson at Evening Prayer’ to ‘instruct and examine’ the children sent to him ‘in some part of [the] Catechism’. This was found difficult in the eighteenth century, when the rubric seems at best to have been followed during Lent or in the summer months⁶—Parson Woodforde doesn’t refer to catechising. There seems no doubt that the spread of the National Society schools, and the greater number of confirmations made possible by better transport, widened knowledge of the Catechism. It was the conviction of the Society that ‘the National Religion should be made the Foundation of National Education, and should be the first and chief thing taught to the poor according to the excellent *Liturgy and Catechism* provided by our Church for that purpose’.⁷ The centrality of the Catechism in education (and not only in National Society schools of course) helps to account for the innumerable casual references to it in the literature of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. As here in *The Railway Children* (the children have been taking coal from the railway station):

The station-master loosed Peter’s collar, struck a match, and looked at them by its flickering light.

‘Why’, said he, ‘you’re the children from the Three Chimneys up yonder. So nicely dressed, too. Tell me now, what made you do such a thing? Haven’t you ever been to church or *learned your catechism* or anything, not to know it’s wicked to steal?’⁸

Child readers would be expected to know what was referred to.

The essential point of the Catechism was to ensure that children had by heart the Lord’s Prayer the Apostle’s Creed and the Commandments, and this was not new with the Book of Common Prayer, but had formed the staple of vernacular instruction for centuries. What was new was the question-and-answer format and the requirement to follow and learn an authorised form of words. As so often the turning point in attitudes seems to have come in the 1960s. It is noteworthy, for example,

6 See Norman Sykes, *Church and State in the XVIIIth Century*, 1934.

7 Quoted by Loudon, *op.cit.*, p.13.

8 Edith Nesbit, *The Railway Children*, 1906, Chapter 2 (italics added). In a later chapter the children’s mother suggests that they might ‘ask God to show his pity upon all prisoners and captives’, showing the familiarity then of the Litany, too.

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that Ernest Southcott in his account of a radical approach to parochial ministry published in 1956 takes for granted that the Catechism is to be learnt—one of his suggestions is that ‘parents should be helped to teach their children the Catechism’.⁹ It doesn’t seem unreasonable even today to ask children—whether under the aegis of the parish church or in Church schools—to absorb these essential texts (unless of course their parents object).

As against this apparent drifting away from their original purpose by the Church schools over the last fifty years, we can set some signs of a recent revival of interest in catechisms and catechesis. One of the suggestions accompanying the Renewal and Reform proposals was that there should be a new or revised Church Catechism. But when a question was asked about progress on this in the General Synod the Bishops replied that, having given the matter due thought they had decided ‘not to proceed with the proposal’. Instead the authors of the Pilgrim course had been invited to produce a ‘teaching resource which sets out the basis of the Christian faith’, but this would not be ‘a formal, authoritative statement of the teaching of the Church of England, or a replacement of the currently authorised Catechisms (the BCP Catechism and the Revised Catechism last authorised in 1994)’.¹⁰ I am not sure about the current status of the proposed ‘teaching resource’, but I do note that the Leader’s Pack for Pilgrim contains the Revised Catechism, described as ‘the inspiration’ for the Pilgrim course. In other words there has been some reaction in higher parts of the Church in favour of ‘instruction’ of the Church’s laity, just as there were signs a few years back of a desire to introduce more common, and more Anglican, content into ordination training. The latter ran into the sand unfortunately—there is always huge inert resistance in the Church of England to anything which looks too ‘directive’ or ‘prescriptive’.¹¹ Perhaps the same will happen to the idea of a revival in catechesis, whether in the parish or in Church schools, but we must hope otherwise. It is nearly twenty since the Dearing report put its schools ‘at the centre of the Church’s mission to the nation’ and urged the opening of more—in the light of that ambition the 1% of 18-24 year-olds with which I began does look worrying.

John Scrivener

9 Ernest Southcott, *The Parish Comes Alive*, 1956, p.85. The parish was Halton, Leeds.

10 General Synod July 2017 Questions.

11 Ian Paul has written relevantly about this on his Psephizo blog (‘What are the Issues in Ministerial Training?’ March 4 2019) and in a recent letter to the Church Times. Cf my editorial in *Faith & Worship* 72, Easter 2013.

Coverdale's God: The Theology of the Psalms

JOHN GOLDINGAY

In the sixteenth century, Miles Coverdale was involved with William Tyndale in the first translation of the Bible to be printed in English. Eventually, of course, the 'King James Version' was produced and it became the 'Authorized Version' for use in church, but Coverdale's translation of the Psalms had already been put into the Prayer Book, and there it stayed. I first got to know Coverdale's Psalter, though I didn't know that's what it was, when I was a choirboy. I especially remember how we sang the Venite, Psalm 95, every Sunday, and sometimes we sang a setting of the Jubilate, Psalm 100, as well. I had no idea then that they are a great place to start in understanding God.

The God We Give Praise To

Here is the beginning of Coverdale's Psalm 95:

1. O come, let us sing unto the Lord :
 let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
2. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving :
 and shew ourselves glad in him with psalms.
3. For the Lord is a great God :
 and a great King above all gods.
4. In his hand are all the corners of the earth :
 and the strength of the hills is his also.
5. The sea is his, and he made it :
 and his hands prepared the dry land.
6. O come, let us worship and fall down :
 and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
7. For he is the Lord our God :
 and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

I'll leave the last part of the Venite for now and come back to it later. The psalm invites people into enthusiastic rejoicing on the basis of two complementary truths about God. First, the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods. Now one modification to Coverdale's

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translation will help us get the point here. He follows the Vulgate in using the word Lord to replace the actual name of God, Yahweh, which is what the psalm uses. Sometimes that change makes no difference, but sometimes it means we lose something. To say 'the Lord is a great God' does say something. But the psalm's point is a different one. It is that Yahweh is a great God. That statement is a much bolder one, because the Israelites were surrounded by people who thought that Marduk was a great god or Baal was a great God, and they were perpetually tempted to give in to those other beliefs. In worship you say things about God that people outside don't believe, and it makes a difference to your life. People who believed that Baal was God could be prepared to sacrifice their children to Baal to show how devoted they were. Yahweh wasn't that kind of God.

To say that Yahweh is a great King above all gods is also a bold statement, because Israel was usually under the control of a great king such as Assurbanipal or Nebuchadnezzar. In the New Testament, to say 'Jesus is Lord' was a brave declaration because you were supposed to say 'Caesar is Lord.' To say Yahweh is a great King is to say something brave and important. It's to say that you don't have to be afraid of the world's big political authorities and that you mustn't rely on them. You have someone bigger.

There's something else in that statement. The psalm isn't interested merely in monotheism, in the idea that there is only one God. Well, it is interested in that idea, but only in association with the fact of who the one God is. Yahweh is the one God. He is the one who owns the entire created world because he made it. We could think about that fact as we concern ourselves with the need to stop destroying it.

So Psalm 95 says, rejoice in Yahweh because he is a great and powerful God. It also says, fall down and kneel before Yahweh, because he's our Maker, our God, and we are the people he pastures, we are the sheep in his hand. This second declaration is more personal. Now when my wife and I drive around England we love seeing sheep on the hillsides minding their own business. I guess the shepherds are somewhere, but they're nowhere to be seen. The sheep look after themselves. It's not like that in Israel. Grass is a rarer commodity there, and in Old Testament times Israel had lions and tigers, so having a shepherd to look after you is a matter of life and death. And 'we are the people he pastures, the sheep of his hand.' He provides for us and he protects us. He knows where there's enough moisture in the soil to make grass grow, and his hand points us towards it. So being his sheep means following his direction, otherwise we are screwed. He directs us, we follow.

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That's Psalm 95, the Venite. Here is Psalm 100, the Jubilate, and from now on I will put the name Yahweh in where the psalm has it, instead of the expression 'the Lord.'

1. O be joyful in Yahweh, all ye lands :
 serve Yahweh with gladness,
 and come before his presence with a song.
2. Be ye sure that Yahweh he is God :
 it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;
 we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
3. O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving,
 and into his courts with praise :
 be thankful unto him, and speak good of his Name.
4. For Yahweh is gracious,
 his mercy is everlasting :
 and his truth endureth from generation to generation.

You can see that much of that overlaps with Psalm 95, but there are some extra theological points it makes. First, it urges all countries to be joyful in Yahweh. Now mostly the Psalms focus on Israel and its relationship with God, but they don't think that Yahweh is just Israel's God, he's not just a little local God for Israel, so that it's fine for the Babylonians to worship Marduk and the Canaanites to worship Baal. Yahweh is the only God, and the entire world needs to acknowledge it. And it's not bad news for them, but good news—think again about the contrast with a religion that expects you to be willing to sacrifice your children. So all the countries are invited to be joyful in Yahweh.

Then there are three things that are said about Yahweh in the last verse of the psalm. In one sense it's the same thing said three times in slightly different ways, which is the way the parallelism in psalms works. The first thing is that Yahweh is gracious. Again I think Coverdale is influenced by the Vulgate, which uses a word that suggests he is winsome or lovely or gentle. Only in the course of preparing this lecture did I discover that Coverdale didn't know Hebrew when he produced his translation, though he did learn it later. He produced his translation on the basis of retranslating the Latin translation known as the Vulgate, and Luther's translation into German, and maybe others. So I think he got the word 'gracious' from there. It's a slightly odd translation because the Hebrew word is the ordinary word for 'good.' But that Hebrew word can carry the connotations that attach to the word good when we say something

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is good to eat or that someone was good to me. It's the word in Genesis when it says that God looked at what he had made and it was good. Yahweh is good in the sense of gracious, graceful, gentle, tender, kind.

The second thing is that Yahweh's mercy is everlasting. The psalm is talking about a particular kind of mercy. It uses the Hebrew word *hesed*, which often gets translated steadfast love, or constant love, or just love. There are two kinds of mercy or love that it refers to. Sometimes a person may act towards you in a merciful or loving way, a way that makes a kind of commitment to you, and there is no reason why they should have done it. They were not under obligation to you, but they acted as if they were. And sometimes a person may carry on acting towards you in a merciful or loving or faithful way when you have let them down and done the wrong thing and been unfaithful to them. Those are two contexts in which Hebrew talks about *hesed*, about this kind of mercy, about steadfast love. The English word 'commitment' is close to the idea—when you make a commitment that you didn't have to make, or when you keep a commitment when the other person has forfeited any right to your doing so. The psalm says, that's what Yahweh is like. He makes commitments to us when he doesn't have to, and he keeps them when we have forfeited the right to his doing so. And, it says, his mercy or commitment is everlasting. He keeps on doing it.

The third way of making the point is to say that his truth endures from generation to generation. His truth is his truthfulness or faithfulness or steadfastness. Yahweh is someone you can rely on to keep his word, to keep his promises. The Hebrew word for truth is *emunah*, which is related to the word Amen. It suggests that Yahweh keeps saying amen to the things he has said before.

The God We Pray To

Those two psalms, 95 and 100, are two psalms in which people are praising God. Now we will look at two psalms in which people are praying for something, and see what that kind of psalm tells us about God. They are Psalms 42 and 43, which are two psalms, though I cheat slightly because there are overlaps between them in the way they express themselves, and it looks as if Psalm 43 has been composed to be a continuation of Psalm 42.

Here's the second half of Psalm 42.

8. My God, my soul is vexed within me :
therefore will I remember thee
concerning the land of Jordan, and the little hill of Hermon

9. One deep calleth another, because of the noise of the water-pipes :
 all thy waves and storms are gone over me.
10. The Lord hath granted his loving-kindness in the day-time :
 and in the night-season did I sing of him,
 and made my prayer unto the God of my life.
11. I will say unto the God of my strength,
 Why hast thou forgotten me :
 why go I thus heavily, while the enemy oppresseth me?
12. My bones are smitten asunder as with a sword :
 while mine enemies that trouble me cast me in the teeth;
13. Namely, while they say daily unto me :
 Where is now thy God?
14. Why art thou so vexed, O my soul :
 and why art thou so disquieted within me?
15. O put thy trust in God : for I will yet thank him,
 which is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Two or three things about God here. First, God allows us an astonishing freedom in the way we talk to him. ‘Why hast thou forgotten me,’ the psalm asks. It’s rather disrespectful, isn’t it? Can you say that kind of thing to God? Apparently you can. Remember the psalm that Jesus uses on the cross, Psalm 22, which begins ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Can you accuse God of having abandoned you or forgotten you? Apparently you can. When we think about the inspiration of the Psalms as part of the Scriptures, it evidently means something different from when we think of the inspiration of the Prophets. They’re just as inspired, but inspired in a different way. When a prophet says ‘Thus says the Lord,’ the implication is that God is the origin of the words, almost as if he dictated them. In a psalm, a human being says to God what that human being wants to say, and the people of God said, ‘That’s a good prayer, put it in the book,’ and God said, ‘That book’s good, I like it.’ In the New Testament’s words, every scripture is given by divine inspiration, which includes the Psalms. It turns out that the Psalms are 150 examples of things you can say to God. And one of them is, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’

You can say anything to Coverdale’s God. Now here’s an odd thing. The Psalms don’t refer to God as our Father. Just once they say God is like a father to us, in Psalm 103. Yet they picture God in a way that shows he has all the characteristics of a father. We’ve seen it already. He’s gracious and merciful and faithful. I don’t mean he is like a father as opposed to a mother. Actually there is an amusing aspect to that comparing of God to a father in Psalm 103. It says that God is like a father in the way he has

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compassion on his children. But the Hebrew word for compassion is the word for a woman's womb. Compassion is the feeling a mother has for the children she bore. So in the very verse where the psalm says God is like a father it also says God is like a mother. In fact there are quite a few psalms that say that God has those motherly feelings, though there is just the one that explicitly says God is like a father.

Yet I suggest that the way the Psalms assume you can say anything to God shows that he is like a father. There were times when I had to say tricky things to my father, but I always got away with it. I hope my sons could say anything to me. The Psalms show that God is like a father in that respect. You don't have to wait until you've calmed down or regained your balance before you talk to God. If you feel angry or abandoned or scared, that's not your barrier to prayer, it's your way into prayer. If you're not sure you believe in him, you start by telling him that.

There's another significance to this disrespectful courage that the Psalms show. Suppose you are angry about something that is nothing to do with you and that you can't do anything about. A couple of years ago in the United States I took part in a Eucharist at the border fence at San Diego, a Eucharist we shared with Anglicans on the Mexican side of the fence whom we could see and sing with but not touch or share bread with (they banned even the service the next year). It could make you angry. The Psalms are free with being angry. We can be free to God with our anger on our own behalf when we pray the Psalms. But we can also be free with our anger on other people's behalf when we pray the Psalms. Because we are talking to our Father, and we can press him to do something about it.

The possibility of pressing him to do something about it links with another point about the way the Psalms say that God has abandoned us or forgotten us. It might look like a contradiction to complain to God that he has abandoned us or forgotten us. If someone has forgotten you or forsaken you, then by definition they are not listening. But that puts us on the track of something significant about the meaning of those words. When God abandoned Jesus, it meant he did nothing to help him, not until two days later. It didn't mean he wasn't there watching Jesus suffer. There's something there about the way God relates to the world. It's not just that he doesn't micromanage it. It's almost that he doesn't manage it at all. He created it in such a way that he could then leave it to run itself. In some respects he gave it over to humanity to manage. He may not let it get terminally out of hand, but he doesn't intervene in it very often. That would negate the point about creating it. But he does intervene in it sometimes. So it's possible to say to him rhetorically, 'Why have you

abandoned me' and to urge him to come back to you, or to utter that protest and pray that prayer for other people.

There's a kind of converse point about the idea of God forgetting us. We may think of forgetting as something that happens inside our heads and as something that happens by accident. The Psalms are more Freudian. They think of forgetting at least as often as something one does deliberately, and as something that involves action not just thoughts. To forget is to put something out of mind, and to remember is to apply your mind to something. To forget is then to fail to take action about it and to remember is to take action. In the Psalms, God forgets and God remembers. God forgets, by that logic I just suggested: he is not much in the business of intervening. In the Psalms, God also remembers, which means he then does intervene and act. So when the Psalms urge God to remember, they are urging God to make this occasion one when he does intervene.

That fact links with Psalm 43

1. Give sentence with me, O God, and defend my cause against
the ungodly people :
O deliver me from the deceitful and wicked man.
2. For thou art the God of my strength, why hast thou put me
from thee :
and why go I so heavily, while the enemy oppresseth me?
3. O send out thy light and thy truth, that they may lead me :
and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling.
4. And that I may go unto the altar of God,
even unto the God of my joy and gladness :
and upon the harp will I give thanks unto thee, O God,
my God.
5. Why art thou so heavy, O my soul :
and why art thou so disquieted within me?
6. O put thy trust in God : for I will yet give him thanks,
which is the help of my countenance, and my God.

'Give sentence with me, O God, and defend my cause against the ungodly people.' That's how Psalm 43 starts. The King James Version changed it to 'Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation.' Giving sentence with me (Coverdale) could be good news. Judging me (King James) sounds like bad news. The context makes clear that the psalm is indeed assuming that Yahweh is someone who judges, but that Yahweh's giving judgment can be a positive thing for you. The

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verb for giving sentence or judging is the word that lies behind the word for the judges in the Book of Judges. For the most part they were not people who made decisions in a court but people who acted decisively and authoritatively as leaders of their people. 'Leaders' would be a better word to describe them. Judging needn't be a negative word. It means having authority and acting decisively, which will be bad news if you are the bad guy but will be good news if you are the bad guy's victim. That's why in the development of this first verse in the psalm, it goes on from 'give sentence with me' to 'defend my cause' to 'deliver me.' And incidentally, that fact about the meaning of this verse is significant in another context in the Psalms. When the Episcopal Church of the United States produced its revision of the Book of Common Prayer, in 1789, it reworked the Venite. Here is the last part of the Venite.

7. To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts :
as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.
8. When your fathers tempted me :
proved me, and saw my works.
9. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said :
It is a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways;
10. Unto whom I swear in my wrath :
that they should not enter into my rest.

The United States Prayer Book omits that section and replaces it by verses from the end of Psalm 96:

1. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness :
let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
2. For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth :
and with righteousness to judge the world,
and the people with his truth.

And the *Alternative Service Book* 1980 in part did the same. I have two comments. I don't know what led to the changes, but I've heard it suggested that the last part of Psalm 95 surely applied only to Israel under the old covenant, and that the idea of God being grieved with us or loathing us (as the NRSV puts it) is surely inappropriate. Whatever the reasoning, it is ironic that it should be this last section of the psalm not the first part that is quoted in the New Testament, in Hebrews 3-4, and

made the subject of a kind of homily. The New Testament thinks that we need to take seriously the fact that God can get angry with us. The other comment is that the talk of God judging the world sounds negative, but a realization that the verb means something more like rule or exercise of authority changes things—especially when we take account of the fact that this exercise of authority is concerned not with God acting like a judge in a court but God acting as someone who defends people and delivers them.

Psalm 43 puts it like this: ‘O send out thy light and thy truth, that they may lead me : and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling.’ It’s a great image of God’s involvement in the world. While the Psalms don’t call God Father, we have noted that they do sometimes call him King. But as is the case with calling him Father, they also describe him in kingly terms without actually using the word, and this is an example. It links with another point about monotheism. Other peoples in Israel’s world believed in quite a few gods, and these gods sometimes argued with each other and fought each other. The Old Testament knows that Yahweh is the only God. But it also knows that there are lots of other supernatural beings, the beings we may think of as angels, which it refers to as sons of God or God’s envoys, gods with a small g. They aren’t divine; they are created by the one God and they can die if they don’t conduct themselves in the proper way as God’s servants. They are the members of Yahweh’s cabinet. They join with him in discussing what needs to happen in the world, and God then sends them out with commissions to do what the cabinet decides. That’s the background image to the prayer in Psalms 43, ‘send out thy light and thy truth, that they may lead me: and bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling.’ God’s light and God’s truth or his truthfulness are demythologized versions of those envoys that are members of God’s cabinet going out to implement its decisions.

The God We Give Thanks To

Suppose God does as you ask and he does send out his light and his truth and he does make it possible for you to go to worship him again: what happens next, what do you do when you get there? Well obviously you give thanks to him for doing it. And so there are psalms of thanksgiving that you can pray when you get there. Here is the first half of Psalm 30.

Psalm 30

1. I will magnify thee, O Lord, for thou hast set me up :
and not made my foes to triumph over me.

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2. O Lord my God,
 I cried unto thee : and thou hast healed me.
3. Thou, Lord, hast brought my soul out of hell :
 thou hast kept my life from them that go down to the pit
4. Sing praises unto the Lord, O ye saints of his :
 and give thanks unto him for a remembrance of his holiness
5. For his wrath endureth but the twinkling of an eye,
 and in his pleasure is life :
 Heaviness may endure for a night,
 but joy cometh in the morning.

The second half of the psalm then essentially says the same thing again. It's a bit the way the second half of a verse in a psalm often restates the first half, as if saying it once isn't enough. But for our purposes just one half will do. Psalm 30 is a psalm of praise like the Venite and the Jubilate in a way, but there's a difference. You can say the Venite or the Jubilate any time, so the way they appear in the Prayer Book is quite appropriate. They say the things that are always true about God. But a thanksgiving psalm like Psalm 30 gives the kind of praise that you give when God has just got you out of a specific mess. So you've been praying for God to send out his light and his truth to rescue you from people attacking you, and he has done so, and now you come to the temple with your thankoffering and you pray your thanksgiving prayer so that everyone knows about it and they have their faith built up, too.

There are two things in the psalm that I want to comment on in connection with our thinking about the theology of the Psalms, about Coverdale's God. First, the psalm is giving thanks 'for a remembrance of his holiness.' There's that idea of remembering again, of mindfulness, of keeping in mind and therefore acting in the light of what we remember. Earlier on we saw the idea applied to God. Here it's applied to us. Part of the point of the psalm is to get other people to be mindful of what God has done for this person and to let it shape their own faith and their own hope. There's something else there in that verse that's worth noting in this connection. The psalm calls us saints, and the word for saints is an adjective related to that word for steadfast love or commitment that appears in the Jubilate. God is characterized by commitment to us. We are people who are characterized by commitment to him. We are the people who are committed to him. That's what being saints means. When you come across the word 'saints' in the Prayer Book Psalter, that's usually what the word means.

The way the psalm then expresses the point is in terms of remembering

or being mindful of God's holiness. Now it's a bit pathetic that I have got this far through my talk without referring to God's holiness, but at least I have got there eventually. Yahweh is the holy one. In a sense it's just the same as saying that he is God. It's been said that describing God as the holy one is about the only thing about God we can say that is literally true. Because when we say that God is Father or King we are using images from human life, images that apply to human beings first but that we can then apply to God. Holiness works the other way around: it's a term that applies to God first and then to us. God's holiness means that God is different, another kind of being, supernatural, awesome, overwhelming, extraordinary, out-of-this-world. The seraphs that attended on God cried out holy, holy, holy. And the fact that God is the holy one means we have to take him really seriously. He is not just your friend, your buddy. But he is your friend. Or as this psalm puts it, he is the one who healed me, who kept my life from going down to the pit. God is the great, awesome, holy one. He is also the one who comes down to us in our need. When God became a human being and lived among us full of grace and truth in Jesus, he wasn't doing something odd that was alien to what he had always been. He had always been that kind of God. What he did in Jesus was embody what he had always been.

Those facts about God link with the other thing I wanted to note in connection with the way this psalm talks about God. Let's think some more about the way it describes God's act of healing and rescue. 'Thou, Lord, hast brought my soul out of hell: thou hast kept my life from them that go down to the pit.' Now in the creeds we sometimes refer to Jesus going down into Hell, but it's misleading. The New Testament has two words for Hell, the word Hades and the word Gehenna. Hades is the place where everyone goes when they die, at least for a while. It's a kind of non-physical equivalent to a tomb. It's not a place of suffering. Gehenna is a place of torment that is a kind of negative equivalent of life in the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth. When Jesus dies, the New Testament says he went to Hades, not to Gehenna. And it's Hades that the psalm is referring to. The Hebrew name for it is Sheol. The Old Testament never talks about Gehenna, a place of torment, it only talks about Sheol, which is quite a nice place, really, it's a place where you can go to sleep for a long time. But you don't want to go there too soon, do you? I mean, I'm getting on, though I've got two or three more books I'd ideally like to write, but if the time comes, it comes, and I'll have a nice sleep, and then I'll wake up for resurrection day. So the Old Testament's ideal is that you die full of years, as Coverdale did, and then go and join the members of your family who've passed already.

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But it's then a bit sad to die young, when you haven't lived a full life. So the psalm is giving thanks for the experience of having a near-death experience but of that not being the end. 'You didn't let my foes triumph over me. You healed me. You brought my soul out of Sheol. You kept my life from them who go down to the pit.'

There's an important theological point here. The Canaanites, who believed in lots of gods, believed there was a god in charge of death, Death with a capital D. He was a powerful figure. He could defeat the regular gods that you turned to for help and rescue and life. The Old Testament knew that there wasn't a separate god of death. Yahweh was the only God, and he was therefore in control of death as he was in control of everything else. Suppose it seemed that death was about to take hold of you before your time, as happened to Tyndale when he was half Coverdale's age. God could keep your life from going down to the pit. Death has no power except the power that God allows it. We have nothing to be afraid of in death.

What about that phrase 'you brought my soul out of hell,' out of Sheol? There's another point there. The Old Testament does sometimes tell of God bringing someone back from the dead, but the Psalms also talk about God bringing you back from death in another sense. When you are seriously ill, for instance, it is as if death has got hold of you already. We can talk about feeling like death. The New Testament will likewise talk about us being dead in trespasses and sins and God then giving us new life. So this psalm points to another aspect of the Psalter's understanding of God, something else that is good news. If death seems to have got hold of you, God can bring you back to fullness of life.

One final thing about these thanksgiving psalms. We always have things to thank God for, but the way these psalms work relates to the way God does things for us from time to time when we are in special need, and then we have special reason for giving thanks. So on any given Sunday, most people will be praising God for the things that are always true, but it's quite proper that there are a few people who have reason especially to thank God for something that happened that week. Likewise on any given Sunday there will be some people in church in pressing need who could pray one of those protest and prayer psalms with feeling, but most of us won't need to. So how do we relate to the psalms that don't apply to us personally in that way this week? Part of the answer is that we pray them with the people who need to pray them, people who are there in church and people in other parts of the world. Another part of the answer is the one that applies to the Scriptures as a whole. We immerse ourselves in the Psalms so that they shape our thinking about God and

about our relationship with him. When we enter the Book of Psalms, we enter a different world from the everyday world, and they help to shape us so that we live in their real world and don't get swallowed up by the apparently real world outside church.

Coverdale's God, the God of the Psalms, is a great God and a great King, the only God, and one who shepherds his people. He's the God of all peoples, the God who is gracious and committed and truthful. He's the God to whom you can say anything, like a father, and who sometimes gets angry and acts in the world with authority on behalf of victims of wrongdoing. He sends out his light and his truth to set us free. He's the holy one, awesome and transcendent, who rescues us from death.

'O come, let us sing unto the Lord : let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.'

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The Language of the Psalms

AUSTEN SAUNDERS

I am going to talk today about the language of the Psalms as they were translated into English in the sixteenth century. More specifically, I want to share a personal reflection on my experience of one translation in particular—Miles Coverdale’s. This was first printed in 1535. It is the translation included in the Prayer Book since 1662 and often bound with it even before that. But whilst today it can be heard daily in cathedrals, chapels and churches across the world, in the sixteenth century you would have been far more likely to hear the metrical translation of Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins. So I will begin by putting Coverdale’s translation into a little bit of context.

Sternhold and Hopkins’ translation has never been loved for its literary qualities. It has an unvarying meter and is full of obvious rhymes. But it was the most commonly used translation for at least one hundred years precisely because regular rhythms and predictable rhymes are very good for congregational singing. When we remember that most people in sixteenth-century churches couldn’t read, the value of Sternhold and Hopkins’ memorable jingles becomes more apparent. But despite this backhanded praise I will not be making their case today, although I will glance at them from time to time when doing so sheds some light on Coverdale. I might also very, very sparingly venture into the lyrical paraphrases made by Philip and Mary Sidney. These are an important example of a tradition at the furthest remove from Sternhold and Hopkins’ translation. A tradition of translations which are lyric rather than choric, elite rather than popular, varied where Sternhold and Hopkins are predictable, written for the page and solitude rather than the church and service time, and a little self-regardingly sophisticated.

Coverdale’s translation manages to sit rather interestingly between these two extremes. It’s much easier to sing than the Sidneys’ translations would be, but harder than Sternhold and Hopkins and really needs a trained choir familiar with the conventions of English Psalm singing. But once learnt, those conventions are liberating. They free the text from the rigid patterns that other forms of congregational singing require whilst encouraging a concision and balance of phrasing that makes Coverdale’s translation leaner, more direct, and much more memorable than its

contemporaries. It's more carefully crafted than Sternhold and Hopkins, but seems less artificial than the Sidneys.

To give a single example, chosen simply because it is one of my favourites, here is Coverdale's opening of Psalm 42:

Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks:
 so longeth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God:
 when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?

Sternhold and Hopkins manage this:

Like as the hart doth breathe and bray
 the wellsprings to obtain,
So doth my soul desire alway
 with the Lord to remain.
My soul doth thirst and would draw near
 the living God of might;
Oh, when shall I come and appear
 in presence of his sight?

The Sidney version is:

As the chased hart which braieth
 Seeking some refreshing brooke,
So my soul in panting plaieth,
 Thirsting on my God to looke.
My soul thirsts indeede in mee
 After ever-living thee;
Ah, when comes my blessed being,
 Of thy face to have a seeing.

I must say I certainly prefer the direct economy of Coverdale's 'Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks' to the more wordy paraphrases of the other two versions. I especially prefer it to Sternhold and Hopkins who have to twist their syntax to get 'obtain' at the end of the second line so that they can rhyme it with 'remain' later on.

I don't want to hammer away at Sternhold and Hopkins who have had their fair share of criticism to deal with, and I certainly don't want to speak ill of the Sidneys whose version really is fine (I do like the pun on 'chased hart / chaste heart'). But I thought it would be a good idea

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to start by placing Coverdale's translation alongside these two others from the same century to remind ourselves of the range of very different versions encountered by the first generations to hear Psalms in modern English. It's a useful corrective to any tendency to think of a single version as the definitive translation, a reminder of the power of the Psalms as a spur to a flourishing diversity of creative responses, and a handy way to appreciate the virtues of a particular version by throwing it into relief.

Turning now more squarely to Coverdale, I'm going to spend the rest of my time sharing a selective journey through what I will call three moods of Coverdale's Psalms. By moods I mean patterns of vocabulary, ideas, and effects which combine to shape a recognisable quality of Coverdale's text. The three moods I will explore are strangeness, fear, and trust. They will not together provide an exhaustive account of Coverdale's Psalms. They are not the only and may not be the best selection which could be made. But they are moods which have struck me as I have read Coverdale's Psalms and I would like to share them with you.

The first mood I want to talk about is strangeness.

There are strange words in Coverdale's translation. His translation of Psalm 6 includes an appeal 'O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed'. 'Vexed' is not a word I would use to describe my bones. It is a word I am not expecting. I find it strange.

This is to some extent a result of the way our use of the word 'vex' has changed over the last five hundred years. But even in the sixteenth century, when it was more often applied to physical discomfort than it is today, a sense of mental distress predominated. Shakespeare (an old-fashioned user of words in his day) only uses 'vex' to signify mental anguish. For example in *Richard II* Bolingbroke tells Bushy and Green that he will not 'vex' them by repeating their crimes before they are executed. And Shakespeare always applies the word to persons as mental subjects, not to isolated parts of the body like the bones. So I think the earliest readers of the Psalms would have found this word unusual and maybe, as I do, rather uncanny in its implication of thinking bones within me.

Unexpected wrinkles like this are important in Coverdale's Psalms. The linguistic weirdness slows me down when I read and forces me to take my time as I make my way through a linguistic landscape which feels like it should be familiar after centuries of communal use, but is often stranger than it first seems.

Some of my own favourite passages are striking because of these strange usages. Take, for example, from Psalm 8: 'The fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea: and whatsoever walketh through the paths of the seas'. The word I find strange here is 'walketh'. Not all of the things

in the sea have legs. 'Walk' seems an odd word to use to describe the way fish, or whales, or ships move. The translators of the King James Version clearly felt so. They replaced 'walketh' with 'passeth'. This makes more sense, but it produces a far less striking phrase: 'whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas'. Note also the fussy alliteration, sibilance, and half-rhyme created by 'passeth' and 'paths', which with 'seas' at the end threatens to disintegrate into a lisping hissing of 'passeth', 'paths' and 'seas' that would be quite unpleasant to sing. Coverdale's 'walketh', on the other hand, is a nice round word in the mouth which bears a lot of weight on the first syllable. It's a good resting point from which to launch into the rest of the verse.

As well as strange words, Coverdale's Psalms include strange landscapes: 'all the foundations of the earth are out of course' he has it in Psalm 82. This image of a dislocated earth is uncanny like the vexed bones of Psalm 6. I don't know how the foundations of the earth could be 'out of course'. It feels like a category error, a misapplication of language. It feels wrong. But that's the point. The sensation of wrongness, of uneasiness, is exactly what the verses should evoke.

Other strange landscapes are strangely joyful rather than strangely sinister: 'the mountains skipped like rams: and the little hills like young sheep' writes Coverdale in Psalm 114. An animate sense seeps unexpectedly into things. Just as bones unexpectedly took on the capabilities of thinking things, mountains and hills take on the capabilities of skipping things.

We as readers, singers, listeners, are strangers in these strange landscapes. Perhaps this might make us consider what we have in common with the strangers who appear occasionally through the Psalms. 'Jacob', we are told in Psalm 105, 'was a stranger in the land of Ham', whilst the speaker of Psalm 119 describes him- or herself as 'a stranger upon earth'. Other characters are not described as strangers, but (like Jacob) make themselves strangers when they travel over the earth. Psalm 107 speaks of:

They that go down to the sea in ships: and occupy their business in great waters.

These men see the works of the Lord: and his wonders in the deep.

I imagine a scene at night, out on the Mediterranean, a little boat scuttling beneath the ocean stars and a terrified crew suddenly confronted by one of the wondrous works of the Lord. Perhaps it is the mighty Leviathan which appears in Psalm 104.

Sternhold and Hopkins emphasize the peril these mariners face. As they have it:

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Those men are forcèd to behold
the Lord's works what they be;
And in the dangerous deep the same
most marvellous they see.

The Sidney Psalm describes a sailor's 'feare-open eye'.

Danger feeds a sensation of awe, a sensation which is a minor motif of Coverdale's translation. Awe is a positive emotion for Coverdale. 'Stand in awe, and sin not' we are advised in Psalm 4. It is also an appropriate response to some of the sublime scenes which Coverdale describes. Some of these are inhabited by the unseeable presence of God. Psalm 77 says that not only is the sea full of the wonders which the sailors witness, but that (addressing God here), 'thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters: and thy footsteps are not known'. If this is mysterious, other scenes are awe-inspiringly visual: 'He made darkness his secret place: his pavilion round about him with dark water and thick clouds to cover him'. That is Psalm 18, which then immediately tells us that 'at the brightness of his presence his clouds removed: hailstones, and coals of fire'. I think Milton might have learnt something from Coverdale about how to yoke together in English verse light and darkness in order to create sublime effects.

The movement from strangeness via wonder to awe and the sublime has already brought me to the second of my moods—fear.

'Fear' is a common word in Coverdale's Psalms. Like 'awe' it is almost without exception presented as a desirable thing, and it is always expressed in relation to God. 'Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord' says Coverdale's Psalm 112. So enamoured of fear is Coverdale that some of his expressions about it seem non-sequiturs. 'There is mercy with thee' says Psalm 130, 'therefore shalt thou be feared'. I find this argument, that someone is to be feared *because* they are merciful, surprising. The KJV's version—'there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared'—is little clearer.

I am very poorly qualified to comment on Coverdale's skill as a translator or to offer a theologically informed reading of his Psalms. But as a reader of a sixteenth-century text, this surprising combination of fear and mercy alerts me to the possibility that Coverdale is using the word 'fear' in a way which is not familiar to me. It's a provocative pairing which invites me to work harder at understanding how Coverdale uses the word. It also invites me to reshape my own sense of its possibilities. And what I notice is that when the speakers of Coverdale's Psalms repeatedly enjoin us to fear, celebrate those that fear, and assert their own

fear as a strong point in their favour, it's possible to trace a loose web of connections which Coverdale establishes between 'fear' and another very important word which he associates with God: 'trust'. This is very clearly expressed in Psalm 33: 'Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him: and upon them that put their trust in his mercy'.

My second mood, fear—which grew out of some of the effects of strangeness—turns out therefore to be bound up with my third mood: trust. In fact I would argue that once you pay attention to how 'fear' is used by Coverdale, it disappears as a distinct concept or mood in his Psalms. It only appears at first to be distinct from trust if, like me, you are used to using 'fear' negatively to refer to something undesirable. A careful reading of Coverdale's Psalms alters the meaning of this familiar word so that it can mean almost precisely the opposite. It is related to awe, and also to reverence (Psalm 2 recommends us to 'serve the Lord in fear: and rejoyce unto him with reverence'). It certainly isn't the same as being frightened.

So a false start with 'fear' brings me to 'trust'. This, with two words with which Coverdale often associates it—'hope' and 'mercy'—is a dominant mood of his Psalms. 'Trust' on its own is used over fifty times. 'Hope' appears a little under half as frequently. 'Mercy' appears half as often again, but almost always very close to 'trust'—as in Psalm 13 where the speaker says 'my trust is in thy mercy'.

Before exploring this mood a little further, I think it's worth noting one word which doesn't belong to it, and that is 'belief'. (Nor, I might note, does 'faith' belong to it). From 1549 onwards the Prayer Book translation of the Creed starts 'I believe...'. But the attentive church-goer (perhaps still orientating themselves to a new vocabulary of vernacular worship) would not find the same word echoed in Coverdale's Psalms. Nor would they hear it in Sternhold and Hopkins, although it again appears in their Creed.

Now I said I wasn't going to say anything about translation, but even my Latin is up to the Vulgate's 'Domine Deus meus, in te speravi'. This is the opening of Psalm 7, which Coverdale has as 'O Lord my God, in thee have I put my trust'. Sternhold and Hopkins render it:

O Lord my God, I put my trust
and confidence in thee.

Both English texts carry across the distinction between 'credo' (I believe) at the start of the Creed and the Vulgate's 'spero' (I hope) in the Psalms. This means that the 'trust-hope-mercy' vocabulary of the Psalms is different to the language of 'belief' that people encountered in other places. These other places include the Thirty-Nine Articles where it is

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specified that some propositions (such as that Christ descended into Hell) are to be 'believed'. The Psalms, then, seem to ask for something different to the assent to propositions which the Creed and the Articles call for.

'Believe' in the Creed and the Articles is a verb. It's something that congregants are called upon to do. In contrast, 'trust' in Coverdale's Psalms is almost always a noun. There are many variations on phrases like 'put thou thy trust in the Lord' (Psalm 37) or 'blessed is the man that putteth his trust in thee' (Psalm 84). So whilst believing is something you do in the Creed, trust in the Psalms is a thing, a thing which is given (or ought to be given) to God (although 'trust' is used as a verb in Psalm 131 when Israel is urged to 'trust in the Lord' and in Psalm 28 when the speaker says that 'my heart hath trusted' in the Lord).

'Trust' is more commonly used as a verb than as a noun in contemporary English. As an action, trust is something we have in our control. We trust someone unless we think we have reason not to, in which case we can stop trusting them. Similarly we stop believing something if we don't think we have reason to believe it any more. Getting something back when you've given it to someone is harder. What happens when you put your trust in someone when you shouldn't have done?

This was an important everyday consideration for people in sixteenth-century England. Trust was more heavily involved in peoples' thinking about economic life than it is today because there weren't enough coins to facilitate all the economic transactions that took place. Most purchases were therefore on credit and any village or urban community (like a parish which sang Psalms together) sustained a complicated network of debt. Knowing who to trust with credit was an important business because the consequences of putting trust in the wrong place couldn't be easily undone. A lot of energy went into the communal monitoring of peoples' reputations for creditworthiness, often using moral behaviour as a proxy for financial soundness. People wanted to put their trust in people of sound character.

I don't wish to argue that a sixteenth-century reader of the Psalms would have thought of an economic relationship with God when they heard the word 'trust', but I think it's revealing to recognize how its associations with social action would sit alongside more introspective connotations. The relational implications of 'trust', the implications of a word associated with communal life and mutual obligation in the face of uncertainty, make themselves felt most strongly when the speaker articulates a relationship with God in the language of social hierarchy and material wellbeing. Thus in Psalm 34 the speaker says that 'the Lord delivereth the souls of his servants: and all they that put their trust in him,

shall not be destitute'. The Lord sounds almost like a good householder able to maintain his servants, the sort of person you would be happy to trust with credit and the sort of person all the congregation want to be seen to be. It also informs statements like that in Psalm 118 that 'it is better to trust in the Lord: than to put any confidence in man'. Trust in the Lord is repeatedly contrasted with mundane forms of trust which a sixteenth-century nation of servants, labourers, and credit-dependent householders would recognise as worryingly impermanent. 'There be some that put their trust in their goods: and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches' says the speaker of Psalm 49. Not as a compliment!

But having recognized some everyday, economic implications of 'trust', it's time to step back and recognize that the repeated combination of 'trust' with 'hope' and 'mercy' enlarge its function as a word within Coverdale's Psalms far beyond these social contexts. 'Our fathers hoped in thee: they trusted in thee, and thou didst deliver them' says the speaker of Psalm 22. 'Hoping' here means far more than wishing. 'To hope' in the sixteenth century can mean 'to expect'. It is a form of probabilistic knowledge founded on an assessment of what is likely to happen. When Coverdale's speakers talk of their 'hope' in what the Lord will do for them, 'hope' is a word about expectations. It links the relational concept of 'trust' to a belief about what will be.

Maybe 'hope' would be a better name for my third mood than 'trust'. Its forward looking, not-quite-certain, but more-than-wishful quality is, I think, a better description of the Psalms' orientation towards the future than the repeated assertions of 'trust' in the Lord which are always hedged (at least implicitly) by lamentations, fears, doubts. Trust is a component of something bigger. It might be necessary for hope, but is not enough on its own. I also wonder whether, in a similar way, hope might draw energy from and ultimately encompass the moods of strangeness and fear which I explored earlier.

To return to the sailors of Psalm 107: 'These men see the works of the Lord: and his wonders in the deep'. I focused earlier on the fear this might inspire, but the natural world can be beautiful as well as frightening. Sometimes both at the same time. I think Coverdale captures something of this in Psalm 98: 'Let the floods clap their hands, and let the hills be joyful together before the Lord'. The idea of animate oceans clapping and festive mountains rejoicing makes me feel very small, but also very happy. The notion of a rejoicing earth is, in a deep sense, a hopeful one. It suggests an unspoken promise that even the rocks might experience some deep sympathy with a principle of animating happiness.

Hope ties together the strangeness of the world of the Psalms with

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that impulse to trust which seems to animate some of its inhabitants. It manifests itself in what I should perhaps have introduced as a fourth and crowning mood: beauty. I've spoken about how reading Coverdale's Psalms carefully requires us to rethink what some words like 'fear' can mean. Perhaps it also requires us to rethink a little of what the world can mean. What is the right way to experience this world, our home, one every bit as strange as Coverdale's linguistic universe? I think he might give us an answer in Psalm 96: 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: let the whole earth stand in awe of him'.

(Delivered to the Prayer Book Society at the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, 17 August 2019. Dr Austen Saunders is one of the editors of the Oxford Traherne, an edition of the writings of Thomas Traherne to be published in fourteen volumes by Oxford University Press. He is secretary of the Ruskin Society and works at the Bank of England on policies for regulating banks and insurers.)

The Old Traditions to the Present Generation: A Reading of Psalm 78

NICHOLAS J. MOORE

Among the many possible bifurcations of humanity, one of the more persistent is the distinction between idealists and realists. There are those who are more interested in the theory, and those who simply want to get on with the practice; those who pay more heed to doctrine, and those who privilege experience. In the terminology bequeathed to us by the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, we might describe this as the difference between those who are J, 'Judging', structured and planned, and those who are P, 'Perceiving', spontaneous and adaptive. This kind of dichotomy, between a blueprint and its outworking, between the ideal and the real, is at best an oversimplification and at worst simply false. Yet it names two tendencies we all recognize. Many debates in society, in organizations, and within the Church, can be construed as conflicts between the idealist and the realist.

In what follows, I wish to suggest that Psalm 78 presents us with just such a dichotomy between a noble ideal and a rather more disappointing reality. This Psalm, the second longest in the Psalter, is 'a unique piece of literature'¹ incorporating history, wisdom, and praise. Whatever its affinities with these different genres, and whatever judgment is ultimately made about what kind of psalm it is, Psalm 78 has a clear didactic concern: this is history retold and reshaped with an eye to informing and transforming the present and indeed the future. The Psalm is structured around two grand recitals of sections of Israel's history. These two cycles mirror each other in telling of God's saving action, his people's rebellion, God's response in judgment, and then in gracious forgiveness.² In this reading, I will trace a complementary logic or sequence at work in the Psalm. The ideal vision of knowledge of God passing down the generations—the Psalmist's thesis statement, as it were—runs up against its antithesis, the reality of forgetfulness. In

1 Nancy L. de Claissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), p. 617.

2 This is Richard Clifford's proposal, followed with minor variations by a number of later commentators; *Psalms 73-150*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), p. 43. Beth Tanner comments that Psalm 78 'has a unity or flow that has made it difficult to divide into clear stanzas', p. 617.

response, the Psalm does not simply reassert the ideal, but rather issues in a synthesis which embraces both the ideal and the real within the wider purposes of God.

A Noble Ideal: Intergenerational Catechesis

The opening eight verses of the Psalm³ paint a picture of a glorious cascade of the knowledge of God down the generations. God made a covenant

... which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children;
That their posterity might know it : and the children which were yet unborn;
To the intent that when they came up : they might shew their children the same

(vv. 5–7, emphasis added)

There is some ambiguity in the referents of the pronouns here, but the Psalmist directly names at least three and probably four generations. In either case, the pattern is clear and the intention is that it should be replicated generation after generation. The knowledge of God is summarized in verse 5 with the terms ‘covenant’⁴ and ‘law’.⁵ The exodus and giving of the Law at Mt Sinai are obliquely in view, and what is to

3 The Prayer Book Psalter is based on the ‘Great Bible’, Miles Coverdale’s translation, and its versification differs from that which has become standard. Although Hebrew Bible verse divisions had long been established (but not numbered), Coverdale did not know Hebrew and worked from the Gallican Psalter of the Vulgate (in his translation of the whole Bible he also had reference to Tyndale’s English and Luther’s German translations). (See Anthony Gelston, *The Psalms in Christian Worship: Patristic Precedent and Anglican Practice*, Joint Liturgical Studies, 66 (Norwich: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2008), pp. 8–14.) Verse numbers as we now know them are usually attributed to the Parisian printer Robert Estienne, who in 1551 published a Greek and Latin New Testament with verse numbers, followed by French and Latin versions of the New Testament and whole Bible in ensuing years of that decade. (For an accessible overview of the origins of verse divisions and numbering see Peter J. Williams, ‘Chapter & Verse’, *Tyndale House Ink Magazine* 1 (2018), 4–7.) The 1552 Prayer Book versifies the Psalms for congregational reading but does not number them, and there are subtle differences between Coverdale’s versification and Estienne’s numerical system. The 1662 Prayer Book incorporated the King James text for lessons, but retained Coverdale’s Psalter. This explains why the verse numbers in the 1662 Prayer Book (which follow the 1552 layout) do not entirely agree with those that are standard across modern editions. The differences in Psalm 78 are as follows (S = standard; C = Coverdale): v. 6 (S) = vv. 6–7 (C); vv. 30a–31b (S) = vv. 30b–31b (C); v. 38 (S) = vv. 38–39 (C); total verses: 72 (S), 73 (C). This results in identical enumeration for two short stretches (vv. 1–5; 32–37) and different enumeration for the rest of the Psalm. In this article I use Coverdale’s translation and the verse numbers in the 1662 Prayer Book.

4 תודע *eduth*, meaning ‘testimony’, a sense not unrelated to ‘covenant’ (the two are used interchangeably in parts of the Pentateuch) but perhaps even more pertinent to the context given the desire for an ongoing witness to God.

5 תורה *torah*, meaning ‘instruction’ or ‘teaching’; the same term is used in v. 1, and Coverdale makes clear the link by translating both as ‘law’.

be passed down incorporates not only divine ‘commandments’ (v. 8) and revelation (v. 5), but also the account of God’s saving ‘works’ (vv. 4, 8). There are echoes here of Deuteronomy 6, that hugely important passage which includes the Shema (‘Hear, O Israel...’). Deuteronomy 6 is also situated after the exodus and giving of the Law, and has a similar orientation towards the future, in particular through teaching the generations that are coming (see esp. Deut 6.2, 7, 20–21). Both Deuteronomy and the Psalmist envisage intergenerational catechesis, teaching passed through the generations of God’s people.

In Bishop Auckland, ancient home of the Lord Bishops of Durham, there is an open-air show each summer called ‘Kynren’. Kynren is an old Saxon word that means ‘generations’; our word ‘kin’ derives from the same Germanic roots.⁶ The show is truly spectacular, involving more than a thousand cast and crew, and it tells the history of Britain: our ‘generations’, as it were. The intention in mounting such a performance is clear: to understand who we are, we need to know where we have come from, and that knowledge and memory is passed on through the generations.

For the Psalmist this is not simply a national identity, but a theological one. The knowledge that is passed on through the generations is ‘the honour of the Lord, his mighty and wonderful works that he hath done’ (v. 4). More still than this: to know God is to depend on him, and the Psalmist continues: ‘that they might put their trust in God : and not to forget the works of God, but to keep his commandments’ (v. 8, my emphasis). Intergenerational catechesis is not a matter of abstract knowledge alone, but of knowledge in the fullest sense of the word. Truly to know God is to enact faith, remembrance, and obedience. Each generation is to help the following generations to trust God, to remember his works, and to obey him.

A Sobering Reality: Intergenerational Amnesia

The first eight verses of Psalm 78 portray a glorious and noble ideal. Yet immediately on the heels of this vision, the Psalmist directs our eyes to its failure. For in verse 9 we leave behind the ideal, the blueprint for intergenerational catechesis and discipleship, and we collide with the reality: their forefathers were ‘a faithless and stubborn generation : a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit cleaveth not stedfastly unto God’.⁷ Much of the rest of the Psalm continues in this

6 For more on Kynren see www.kynren.com. The OED notes ‘a generation’ as a now obsolete sense for ‘kin’ (I.1.c; the broader heading I is ‘Family, race, blood-relations’).

7 Commentators’ structural proposals have either vv. 1–9 or vv. 1–12 as the Psalm’s introduction. On either view, the crushing reality of the faithlessness of previous generations of Israelites intrudes into the introduction, a point which already undermines any simplistic reliance on the ideal.

vein. Twice over, we hear of God's miraculous, saving interventions in the exodus and wilderness (vv. 13–17) and in bringing his people to the land of Canaan (vv. 43–56); we hear of the Israelites' sin, faithlessness, and insincere repentance (vv. 18–21; 57–59); we hear of God's wrath and judgment (vv. 22–33; 60–65); and, at last, of his merciful forgiveness (vv. 34–40; 66–73).⁸ Deliverance, sin, judgment, forgiveness. A cycle rolling on through the generations, some five hundred years of Israel's history in the space of some fifty verses.

The ideal seemed so promising, yet the reality is crushing. If knowledge of the faith can be passed down the generations, how much more the ingrained habits of faithlessness. It is a reality we recognize all too readily. Allan Massie's novel *The Sins of the Father* is a fictional telling of the story of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi leader who escaped to Argentina.⁹ His identity is unmasked when a blind Jewish concentration camp survivor recognizes his voice, at a family gathering to celebrate their children's engagement. He is abducted, deported, and stands trial. The sins of the father catch up with him, but not with him alone; they have inescapable and damaging repercussions for the generations that follow.

The Psalmist leaves us in no doubt as to the reason for this faithlessness: intergenerational amnesia, a fatal inattention to the actions and purposes of God. The intention of the pattern in verse 8 was 'not to forget the works of God', but they 'forgot what he had done' (v. 12). Although 'they remembered that God was their strength' (v. 35), this remembrance was only momentary and superficial (see vv. 36–37). In stark contrast to the God who 'considered that they were but flesh' (v. 40), they 'thought not of his hand' (v. 43).¹⁰ Each generation is entrusted with the responsibility of remembering what has come before and passing it on faithfully to those who follow—and yet the generations of the Israelites fell short of this ideal time and again.

A Surprising Resolution: Election and Provision

In the Psalm so far, then, we have encountered both a high-minded ideal and a messy reality. At this point the temptation for both of the types sketched in the introduction, the realist and the idealist, is to dig

8 This account of the cycles or 'recitals' (given according to Coverdale's versification) follows Clifford, p. 43, with a little modification. For verbal parallels between each cycle see Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), p. 325. Given the lack of verbal parallels between the two closing 'forgiveness' sections, and the more emphatic and decisive nature of the verbs in vv. 66–73, which form the ending to the Psalm, I think it is right to set this final section slightly apart, as I do below in treating it as the 'resolution'. See also Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary, 20 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), pp. 294–95, who titles it 'The Great Awakening'.

9 Allan Massie, *The Sins of the Father* (London: Hutchinson, 1991).

10 The Hebrew verb is the same in both v. 40 and v. 43, זָכַר, *zachar*, 'remember'.

in. The idealist tends to emphasize the value of a high standard or goal, and to redouble efforts to attain it. The realist, on the other hand, pushes for an adaptation of expectations, and accommodation to the reality of human forgetfulness and sin. This is one way to construe the positions of traditionalists and revisionists as they have argued down the ages on a wide variety of topics; it is a caricature, but like our opening dichotomy it rings true. Yet the Psalmist offers us a different resolution.

‘So the Lord awaked as one out of sleep’ (v. 66). With this awakening, the rhythm of the Psalm changes. We find a series of verbs in successive verses which carry us through to the end: ‘the Lord awaked ... He smote ... He refused ... But chose ... he built ... He chose ... he fed’ (vv. 66–73, with the exception of the parenthetical v. 72). Coverdale is adept at creating this kind of rhythm: he deploys it to similar effect in recounting the plagues of Egypt in verses 45–52. At the end of the Psalm, however, he has rather serendipitously brought out the rhythm of the Hebrew, which—here and only here in this Psalm—uses an extended series of identical verbal forms to begin an auspicious seven out of eight successive verses.¹¹

The focus of this sequence is Judah, Jerusalem, and the house of David:¹²

[God] chose the tribe of Judah : even the hill of Sion which he loved.

And there he built his temple on high : and laid the foundation of it like the ground which he hath made continually.

He chose David also his servant : and took him away from the sheep-folds.

(vv. 69–71)

If much of the rest of the Psalm reads as a tale of Israel’s rejection of God and God’s corresponding rejection (or at least chastisement) of Israel, these final few verses are an account of God’s election of his people. God chose the tribe of Judah. God’s surprising response to his people’s faithlessness is election; he answers their failure to keep covenant with a renewed and perpetual commitment to his covenant. This eternal and

11 The third person masculine singular *waw* consecutive plus imperfect tense, often now referred to as the *wāyiqtol*, the guiding line of primary discourse in many narrative texts. The Hebrew of vv. 45–52, by contrast, sequences a variety of verbal forms, offering a different kind of poetic rhythm from the one Coverdale achieves.

12 Although there is apparent judgment of ‘the tribe of Ephraim’ (the Northern Kingdom of Israel) alongside God’s enemies (vv. 67–68), it would seem that ‘the psalmist considers the Ephraimites as part of greater Israel and asserts that the defeat does not mean the end of the people’, Clifford, p. 45.

The Old Traditions to the Present Generation: A Reading of Psalm 78

inviolable commitment of God to his people finds expression in two very concrete realities: temple and monarchy. These two institutions exist to support and sustain the covenant.

The temple provides deliverance from sin, through sacrifice; and the monarchy provides deliverance from enemies, through an anointed redeemer. These institutions guarantee ongoing worship of God through the cultic system, and ongoing rule by God through the monarchy. That monarchic rule, as so often with the Davidic dynasty, is portrayed in terms of the pastoral leading and feeding a shepherd provides for his sheep: God 'took [David] away from the sheep-folds ... that he might feed Jacob his people' (vv. 71–72). At this point a Christian reading of this Psalm instinctively thinks of Jesus, our Priest and King, whose death and resurrection deliver us from all sin and enemies, whose ongoing priestly and royal reign at God's right hand provides ever-ready help to those who follow him. Verse 73 applies as readily to great David's greater Son: 'he fed them with a faithful and true heart: and ruled them prudently with all his power.'

The ideal pattern of intergenerational catechesis, passing the knowledge of God down through the generations, was never intended to be freestanding. It does not and cannot exist apart from the covenant of God, which precedes and establishes it. And the crushing reality of intergenerational amnesia, sin and faithlessness generation after generation, was no surprise downfall or defeat for God's purposes. It simply underlines and reinforces the need for his covenant to be founded not on fickle human passions, but on the unchanging grace and mercy of God.

This resolution, in God's election and provision, compels us to return to the beginning of Psalm 78 and re-read it. As we do so, we discover that the ideal and the real are not in fact opposed, but combined. In the very retelling of the faithlessness of former generations, the Psalmist has recorded and remembered God's glorious works and gracious forgiveness. In that retelling, he is passing on the faith to the next generation. Retelling the reality has become a means of enacting the ideal.

The Old Traditions to the Present Generation

As one commentator notes, 'Few psalms seem, on first reading, to be as irrelevant to modern life as Ps 78.'¹³ Yet if the reading (and re-reading) offered above is found persuasive, Psalm 78 would seem to warn

13 Clifford, p. 47.

against two opposite tendencies. Neither commitment to a perceived ideal under human strength, nor accommodation to the encountered reality of human weakness, is an acceptable response to the action of God. Instead, the Psalmist leads us towards a paradigm in which God's election and salvation of his people take priority, and in which both the faithfulness and the faithlessness of the generations 'shew the honour of the Lord'.

What is envisaged, then, is a retelling of the gracious acts of God, illustrated by the good in former generations and by the bad. Such a retelling requires creativity, just as the Psalmist reframes Israel's history in poetic form, but it does not entail unbounded innovation. One commentator puts it like this: 'Only by understanding the old traditions can the present generation avoid repeating the sins of the previous one.'¹⁴ This quotation is the inspiration for the title of this article; the phrase 'the old traditions to the present generation' is evocative of what Thomas Cranmer sought to achieve through the Prayer Book. He was committed to the 'old traditions', both in retaining what was good in pre-Reformation worship in England,¹⁵ and in allowing these old traditions to be critiqued and reformed by the 'older traditions' of Scripture and the Church Fathers. Yet his commitment to these old traditions was for the sake of the 'present generation', with the worship of God available twice daily, in the local parish church, in a tongue 'understood of the people' (Article XXIV). In this setting, the sins of former generations are brought to our attention by the expansive reading of Scripture and by canticles such as the Venite (Psalm 95) with its reminder of God's curse on the faithless; and acknowledgement of our own sin is actualized by regular confession. Yet this forthright honesty is always accompanied by the narration of God's gracious election, forgiveness, and provision for his people.

Within this paradigm, where human faithfulness and human faithlessness show forth the overarching faithfulness of God, there are grounds for both humility and hope. Psalm 78 drives us to humility and repentance, as we recognize that we, like the generations that precede us, have fallen short of the ideal. There have been times when we have spurned God's miraculous deliverance, forgotten his goodness, feigned repentance, or been insincere in our devotion. The current state of the Church in the West compels us to reflect, too, on the ways in which we have failed to pass on the faith.

¹⁴ Tate, p. 289.

¹⁵ One thinks here of the creeds, daily offices, liturgical calendar, collects and other liturgical elements, and more broadly of the threefold order and parish system.

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There is also, however, a firm basis for hope. If this Psalm exhorts us to ‘pass it on’, it also assures us that the knowledge of God will cascade down the generations, precisely because God has made provision for it to do so. This assurance liberates us to pass on the great truths of the faith, the heritage we share, the very knowledge of God himself. Each Christian and every church is entrusted not simply with the responsibility, but also with ample opportunity to hand on the faith to others.

I close, then, with two brief stories of encouragement. At Cranmer Hall, the theological college where I serve as a tutor, there has long been an annual ‘BCP Week’, where all worship takes place according to the Prayer Book.¹⁶ I think it is fair to say that this has often met with a response that is more of duty than of joy. This last year, however, something interesting happened: in response to student requests, it has become a biannual rather than an annual fixture. Some of our ordinands noted their appreciation for its simplicity, and commented with regard to Evensong: ‘I was pleasantly surprised at how natural it felt’ to lead; they found it offers the opportunity to ‘decompress’ at the end of a long day. They also found the Prayer Book to be expansive in its treatment of the human condition, and to provide a connection with the worship offered by our ancestors, describing its liturgy as ‘inherently deeply formational’.¹⁷ The old traditions to the present generation.

A second and final story: in my family, one spiritual practice we are more successful in observing regularly is to pray with our children at bedtime. We pray spontaneously, offering prayers of thanks and petition, for the events of that day or moment and any imminent happenings. In this, we hope to teach our children to know that they can speak to God about anything and everything, with whatever words come to them. Yet alongside this we use one of a number of set prayers, in order to equip them with the age-old liturgy of the Church, to connect them with the old traditions. Earlier this year I was going through the usual routine with my eldest, who normally listens quietly; the set prayer I chose was the Evening Collect, and to my surprise and deep joy he joined in, entirely unprompted, with words I had not even realized he had learned.¹⁸ The old traditions to the present generation.

16 There is also a weekly Evensong throughout the academic year, led by ordinands and sung by St John’s College choir.

17 I am grateful to Grace Hart and Josh Jackson for these comments.

18 I share this story with his permission. It is noteworthy, in light of the *Common Worship* version of the collect which begins ‘Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray...’ (as set, for example, for Evening Prayer on Sunday in Ordinary Time), that my son refers to the collect as ‘beseech thee O Lord’, suggesting that its rhythms and resonances, and consequent memorability, are part of its appeal.

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Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee O Lord, and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

(The Revd Dr Nick Moore is MA Director and Tutor at Cranmer Hall, Durham. This article is based on the text of a sermon preached at Evensong at the Prayer Book Society Conference, on 15 August 2019, Psalm 78 being the Psalm appointed for the fifteenth evening of the month.)

A Neglected Gem: The Sunday First Lessons in The 1662 Book of Common Prayer

SAMUEL BRAY

Anglicans have always read the Hebrew Bible in public worship. As Anglican theologian Wesley Hill recently pointed out¹, that reading of the Old Testament has been insistently theological. The Psalms and Lessons are framed and interpreted by the *Gloria Patri* and the Canticles. But there have been changes in how the Old Testament appears in Anglican public worship. One is quantity.

On the First Sunday in Advent in 1718, a typical parishioner would have attended Morning Prayer, Litany, and Ante-Communion (i.e., the Holy Communion service through the Gospel). That parishioner would have heard ninety-eight verses from the Old Testament: fifty from the Psalms, thirty-one verses from Isaiah, and seventeen verses from Exodus. Some parishioners would also have attended Evening Prayer on that First Sunday in Advent, hearing another sixty-two verses from the Old Testament (forty from Psalms, twenty-two from Isaiah), making a total of 160 Old Testament verses.

In 2018, a typical parishioner in the Episcopal Church attends church once, for a service of Holy Communion. On the First Sunday in Advent, this typical parishioner heard twelve verses from the Old Testament—nine verses from the Psalms and three verses from Jeremiah. Nor is the picture different in the Anglican Church in North America: thirteen verses from the Old Testament—six verses from the Psalms and seven verses from Zechariah. (There is a longer Psalm option, though.)

There has been an eighty-five percent reduction in the quantity of reading from the Old Testament just on this one Sunday morning. That can be traced, in part, to a trend in how twentieth-century American lectionaries—1928, 1943, and 1979—dramatically reduced the reading of the Old Testament for Morning and Evening Prayer on Sundays. It can also be traced to the shift and contraction of Anglican Sunday worship from Morning Prayer, Litany, Ante-Communion, and Evening Prayer to a single service of Holy Communion.

1 Wesley Hill, 'The Trinitarian Theology of Morning Prayer' on the Covenant website, 20 November 2018, <https://livingchurch.org/covenant>.

When Anglicans read a lot of the Old Testament in public worship, what exactly were they reading? Part of the answer is Psalms—lots of them. In the Church of England the *Venite* (Ps. 95) was read in full. And on both sides of the Atlantic the Decalogue was read. (Before the 1928 book, American prayer books required the Decalogue to be said at least every Sunday.)

Yet there is another part of the answer: the disappearance of the Sunday First Lessons. Beginning with the prayer book of Elizabeth I (1559), the Book of Common Prayer included a table called (to use the 1662 name) ‘Proper Lessons to Be Read at Morning and Evening Prayer, on the Sundays Throughout the Year.’

These Sunday First Lessons had a definite logic. It was not the logic of the Epistles and Gospels at Holy Communion—those had been formed through centuries of Western Christian tradition, inhabited the seasons, and were tied to each other and often to the Collect of the Day. Nor was it the logic of the Daily Office, for which Cranmer had prescribed readings in course through nearly the entirety of the Holy Scriptures and large swathes of the deuterocanonical books.

What was the logic of these Sunday First Lessons? The starting point is to see the reliance on canonical order. With two important exceptions—Isaiah and Proverbs—the Sunday First Lessons proceed in the order of the English Bible, going from Genesis through Habakkuk.

That general commitment to canonical order meant that for the long arc of biblical narrative the readings are sequential. Thus, beginning on Septuagesima, the readings move from the creation of the world all the way to the exile to Babylon, winding through selections from Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These selections are presented together as a single story—the very kind of theological shaping that is implicit in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke and in the ordering of the canon (even in its different variations).

But what about the departures from the received canonical order, Isaiah and Proverbs? Here it is useful to remember Wesley Hill’s point about the interpretative framing of the Old Testament in Anglican worship. How are Christians to read this Eden-to-Babylon narrative? That is where the introduction and conclusion come in.

The introduction to the Sunday First Lessons was Isaiah, often called the Fifth Gospel. All through Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany the First Lessons are from Isaiah. Twenty-four chapters of Isaiah are read in all (and twenty-five if one adds the proper First Lesson for Morning Prayer on Whitsunday). Reading Isaiah as the introduction to the Old Testament encourages the reader to approach the text Christologically. Having read Isaiah, we would have ears to hear if we were to find ourselves on a road near Emmaus as an

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apparent stranger was ‘beginning with Moses’ and interpreting ‘in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself’ (Luke 24:27).

And the conclusion? After reading through the history of Israel, and reading fifteen chapters from the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, Micah, and Habakkuk, what follows in the Sunday First Lessons is very surprising to a contemporary reader. The conclusion to the annual course is 11 chapters from the Proverbs. One might surmise again a Christological implication, with Christ as divine wisdom. But that theme is not emphasized by the selections (e.g., Proverbs 8 is not read). There is a better explanation for the sapiential conclusion to the narrative sequence, and it ties in with the Christological introduction.

The key to understanding the Sunday First Lessons is *law*, and specifically the three uses of the law. That is, the law can reveal to us our inability to keep God’s commandments, driving us to Christ (the pedagogical use); it can restrain evil in the life of a polity (the civil use); and it can guide the believer in what it means to love God and neighbor (the moral use). The civil use may be found in Deuteronomy and the readings about the kings of Judah and Israel, but it is the first and third uses that predominate in the Sunday First Lessons. When one has in mind the uses of the law, everything falls into place.

Isaiah tells the reader to look for Christ, so when the stories of sin and judgment come—as they do over and over in the Pentateuch, the stories of the kings, and the exile—we will see our condition, and run to Jesus. Lord, have mercy upon us.

But these stories of sin and judgment are also supposed to work on our moral imagination, to guide and form our intention for obedience. For that purpose, the pithy axioms found in Proverbs are invaluable. When placed at the end of the entire year’s reading, the Proverbs reveal and sum up wisdom from the narratives. *Incline our hearts to keep this law*. And the sequence is exactly right: we move from the first use of the law to the third, from justification to sanctification.

In between Isaiah and Proverbs, we see how God chastises and corrects his covenant people, and we thus learn how God deals with us as individuals. This point was made by John Keble in his analysis of the Sunday First Lessons:

The selection may be accounted for on this supposition, viz. That the arrangers desired to exhibit God’s former dealings with His chosen people *collectively*, and the return made by them to God, in such manner as might best illustrate His dealings with each *individual*, chosen now to be in His Church, and the snares and temptations most apt to beset us as Christians.²

2 Tract 13, *Sunday Lessons: The Principle of Selection*.

With exquisite skill, Keble works through the entire year of Sunday First Lessons. He concludes that his sketch

may serve to point out the thread of warning, which, it is conceived, runs through the Sunday Lessons, and renders it very improper to deal with them as if they had been taken at random, or might fitly be changed at will, for others supposed in themselves more edifying.

This, then, is the logic of the Sunday First Lessons. They present the story of Israel from creation to exile, but they also, by carefully framing the Old Testament narrative with Isaiah and Proverbs, guide us in how to read that story. We look for Christ (Luke 24). And we also, as in a mirror, look at ourselves, with a warning to be ‘the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts’ (James 1:25).

Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Now the reader may have a nagging doubt. This is how the Sunday First Lessons once worked, but can they still work this way today? Is the logic of the Sunday First Lessons compatible with prayer books from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

Yes. All one has to do is allow the series of Old Testament Lessons to have its logic. The Epistles and Gospels have their logic, and are tightly connected with each other and sometimes with the Collect. Or, in a service of Morning or Evening Prayer, a seasonal proper for the Second Lesson will have its logic. Or, if a New Testament book is being read through in course for an expository series, those readings will have their logic.

Each of those can be complemented well by the Sunday First Lessons. Consider, for example, whether the Sunday First Lessons would pair well with the Epistle and Gospel in a contemporary service of Holy Communion. The answer is yes, and without regard to whether the Epistle and Gospel come from the traditional Book of Common Prayer Eucharistic lectionary or the Revised Common Lectionary. Either way, a congregation formed throughout the year by Israel’s story will be better able to grasp, Sunday after Sunday, the allusions and echoes in the Epistle and Gospel. It’s Richard Hays meets Thomas Cranmer.

Moreover, the Sunday First Lessons better fit ancient Christian tradition than other schedules of Old Testament Lessons do. There is a very long history of Christian reading of Isaiah in Advent and Genesis in the Sundays preceding Lent (Septuagesima, Sexagesima, Quinquagesima). And the logic is sound: Isaiah prepares us for the birth of the Savior at Christmas, and the failures of Adam and the patriarchs prepare us for

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the mortification of Lent. Neither one of these ancient Christian patterns is consistently followed in other lectionaries, including the lectionary printed in the 1928 US prayer book (i.e., the 1943) and the Revised Common Lectionary. In those lectionaries there is some Isaiah in Advent and some Genesis before Lent, but without consistency.

What would be required for a congregation to try the Sunday First Lessons, assuming there was ecclesiastical permission to do so? It might involve adding Morning Prayer before Holy Communion. Or the Sunday First Lesson could be used instead of the Old Testament Lesson at Holy Communion in the 1979 American Book of Common Prayer or ACNA's 2019 Book of Common Prayer.

For any congregation that used the Sunday First Lessons, one difference would be immediately detected. The readings are longer. Yet this length is often accompanied by greater understanding, because the longer reading is more coherent and sensible as a unit. That, at least, has been my experience at Christ Church in South Bend, Indiana, which has been using the Sunday First Lessons from the Book of Common Prayer (1662). The chapters chosen for the Sunday First Lessons are often rhetorical masterpieces, the kind that cannot be successfully peeled and diced into smaller units, such as Genesis 3, Daniel 4, and Ezekiel 18. These chapters are far more coherent when read whole (contrast, e.g., Genesis 3 in the Sunday First Lessons with Genesis 3:8-15 in the Revised Common Lectionary).

Anglicans like to think we read a lot of the Old Testament in our public worship services. The reality is that we read a lot less than we used to. We have forgotten that for centuries Anglicans used to read far more, and we've forgotten which parts were read, and why. William Wilberforce, the renowned abolitionist and Evangelical Anglican, once called the 1662 Book of Common Prayer

justly inestimable, as setting before us a faithful model of the Christian's belief, and practice, and language ... [and] daily shaming us, by preserving a living representation of the opinions and habits of better times, like some historical record which reproaches a degenerate posterity, by exhibiting the worthier deeds of their progenitors.

Wouldn't it be nice if he were wrong?

(Samuel L. Bray is a professor of law at Notre Dame Law School in South Bend, Indiana. He is also the coauthor, with John F. Hobbins, of *Genesis 1-11: A New Old Translation for Readers, Scholars, and Translators* (2017). This article originally appeared on the *Covenant* website in December, 2018 and is reprinted here by kind permission.)

‘A Treasure of Christian Devotion’: The Book of Common Prayer and Domestic Piety in Georgian England

ANDREW BRADDOCK

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’s 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

1 Jeremy Gregory, ‘The Prayer Book and the Parish Church: from the Restoration to the Oxford Movement’, in C. Heffling 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*

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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 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

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 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

5 J. 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

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 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

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

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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 extemporaneous prayer.¹¹ Humphrey Prideaux believed that, by the first decades of the eighteenth century, there was a growing 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

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.

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)

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 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

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

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.

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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 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

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.

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

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

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

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.

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.

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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, 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

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.

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

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 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

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*.

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.

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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 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

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.

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

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 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

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.

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.

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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 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

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.

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 ignore the Prayer Book, but to supplement it, and his *Prayers and Offices*

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.

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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 .

Thoughts Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy on Alterations in the Liturgy

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

Attempts are making to get the Liturgy altered. My dear Brethren, I beseech you, consider with me, whether you ought not to resist the alteration of even one jot or tittle of it. Though you would in your own private judgments wish to have this or that phrase or arrangement amended, is this a time to concede one tittle?

Why do I say this? Because, though most of you would wish some immaterial points altered, yet not many of you agree in those points, and not many of you agree what is and what is not immaterial. If all your respective emendations are taken, the alterations in the Services will be extensive; and though each will gain something he wishes, he will lose more from those alterations which he did not wish. Tell me, are the present imperfections (as they seem to each) of such a nature, and so many, that their removal will compensate for the recasting of much which each thinks to be no imperfection, or rather an excellence?

There are persons who wish the Marriage Service emended; there are others who would be indignant at the changes proposed. There are some who wish the Consecration Prayer in the Holy Sacrament to be what it was in King Edward's first book; there are others who think this would be an approach to Popery. There are some who wish the imprecatory Psalms omitted; there are others who would lament this omission as savouring of the shallow and detestable liberalism of the day. There are some who wish the Services shortened; there are others who think we should have far more Services, and more frequent attendance at public worship than we have. How few would be pleased by any given alterations; and how many pained!

But once begin altering, and there will be no reason or justice in stopping, till the criticisms of all parties are satisfied. Thus, will not the Liturgy be in the evil case described in the well-known story, of the picture subjected by the artist to the observations of passers-by? And, even to speak at present of comparatively immaterial alterations, I mean such as do not infringe upon the doctrines of the Prayer Book, will not

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it even with these be a changed book, and will not that new book be for certain an inconsistent one, the alterations being made, not on principle, but upon chance objections urged from various quarters?

But this is not all. A taste for criticism grows upon the mind. When we begin to examine and take to pieces, our judgment becomes perplexed, and our feelings unsettled. I do not know whether others feel this to the same extent, but for myself, I confess there are few parts of the Service that I could not disturb myself about, and feel fastidious at, if I allowed my mind in this abuse of reason. First, e.g. I might object to the opening sentences; 'they are not evangelical enough; Christ is not mentioned in them; they are principally from the Old Testament.' Then I should criticise the exhortation, as having too many words, and as antiquated in style. I might find it hard to speak against the Confession; but 'the Absolution,' it might be said, 'is not strong enough; it is a mere declaration, not an announcement of pardon to those who have confessed.' And so on.

Now I think this unsettling of the mind a frightful thing; both to ourselves, and more so to our flocks. They have long regarded the Prayer Book with reverence as the stay of their faith and devotion. The weaker sort it will make sceptical; the better it will offend and pain. Take, e.g. an alteration which some have offered in the Creed, to omit or otherwise word the clause, 'He descended into hell.' Is it no comfort for mourners to be told that Christ Himself has been in that unseen state, or Paradise, which is the allotted place of sojourn for departed spirits? Is it not very easy to explain the ambiguous word, is it any great harm if it is misunderstood, and is it not very difficult to find any substitute for it in harmony with the composition of the Creed? I suspect we should find the best men in the number of those who would retain it as it is. On the other hand, will not the unstable learn from us the habit of criticising what they should never think of but as a divine voice supplied by the Church for their need?

But as regards ourselves, the Clergy, what will be the effect of this temper of innovation in us? We have the power to bring about changes in the Liturgy; shall we not exert it? Have we any security, if we once begin, that we shall ever end? Shall not we pass from non-essentials to essentials? And then, on looking back after the mischief is done, what excuse shall we be able to make for ourselves for having encouraged such proceedings at first? Were there grievous errors in the Prayer Book, something might be said for beginning, but who can point out any? cannot we very well bear things as they are? does any part of it seriously disquiet us? No, we have before now freely given our testimony to its accordance with Scripture.

But it may be said that 'we must conciliate an outcry which is made; that some alteration is demanded.' By whom? No one can tell who cries, or who can be conciliated. Some of the laity, I suppose. Now consider this carefully. Who are these lay persons? Are they serious men, and are their consciences involuntarily hurt by the things they wish altered? Are they not rather the men you meet in company, worldly men, with little personal religion, of lax conversation and lax professed principles, who sometimes perhaps come to Church, and then are wearied and disgusted? Is it not so? You have been dining, perhaps, with a wealthy neighbour, or fall in with this great Statesman, or that noble Landholder, who considers the Church two centuries behind the world, and expresses to you wonder that its enlightened members do nothing to improve it. And then you get ashamed, and are betrayed into admissions which sober reason disapproves. You consider, too, that it is a great pity so estimable or so influential a man should be disaffected to the Church; and you go away with a vague notion that something must be done to conciliate such persons. Is this to bear about you the solemn office of a Guide and Teacher in Israel, or to *follow a lead*?

But consider what are the concessions which would conciliate such men. Would immaterial alterations? Do you really think they care one jot about the verbal or other changes which some recommend, and others are disposed to grant? Whether 'the unseen state' is substituted for 'hell,' 'condemnation' for 'damnation,' or the order of Sunday Lessons is remodelled? No; they dislike the *doctrine* of the Liturgy. These men of the world do not like the anathemas of the Athanasian Creed, and other such peculiarities of our Services. But even were the alterations, which would please them, small, are they the persons whom it is of use, whom it is becoming, to conciliate by going out of our way?

I need not go on to speak against doctrinal alterations, because most thinking men are sufficiently averse to them. But, I earnestly beg you to consider whether we must not come to them if we once begin. For by altering immaterials, we merely raise without gratifying the desire of correcting; we excite the craving, but withhold the food. And it should be observed, that the changes called immaterial often contain in themselves the germ of some principle, of which they are thus the introduction: e.g. If we were to leave out the imprecatory Psalms, we certainly countenance the notion of the day, that love and love only is in the Gospel the character of Almighty God and the duty of regenerate man; whereas the Gospel, rightly understood, shows His Infinite Holiness and Justice as well as His Infinite Love; and it enjoins on men the duties of zeal towards Him, hatred of sin, and separation from sinners, as well as that of kindness and charity.

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To the above observations it may be answered, that changes have formerly been made in the Services without leading to the issue I am predicting now; and therefore they may be safely made again. But, waving all other remarks in answer to this argument, is not this enough, viz. that there is peril? No one will deny that the rage of the day is for concession. Have we not already granted (political) points, without stopping the course of innovation? This is a fact. Now, is it worth while even to risk fearful changes merely to gain petty improvements, allowing those which are proposed to be such?

We know not what is to come upon us; but the writer for one will try so to acquit himself now, that if any irremediable calamity befalls the Church, he may not have to vex himself with the recollections of silence on his part and indifference, when he might have been up and alive. There was a time when he, as well as others, might feel the wish, or rather the temptation, of steering a middle course between parties; but if so, a more close attention to passing events has cured his infirmity. In a day like this there are but two sides, zeal and persecution, the Church and the world; and those who attempt to occupy the ground between them, at best will lose their labour, but probably will be drawn back to the latter. Be practical, I respectfully urge you; do not attempt impossibilities; sail not as if in pleasure boats upon a troubled sea. Not a word falls to the ground, in a time like this. Speculations about ecclesiastical improvements which might be innocent at other times, have a strength of mischief now. They are realized before he who utters them understands that he has committed himself.

Be prepared then for petitioning against any alterations in the Prayer Book which may be proposed. And, should you see that our Fathers the Bishops seem to countenance them, petition still. Petition *them*. They will thank you for such a proceeding. *They do not wish these alterations*; but how can they resist them without the support of their Clergy? They consent to them, (if they do,) partly from the notion that they are thus pleasing you. Undeceive them. They will be rejoiced to hear that you are as unwilling to receive them as they are. However, if after all there be persons determined to allow some alterations, then let them quickly make up their minds *how far* they will go. They think it easier to draw the line elsewhere, than as things now exist. Let them point out the limit of their concessions now; and let them keep to it then; and, (if they can do this,) I will say that, though they are not as wise as they might have been, they are at least firm, and have at last come right.

The Burial Service

We hear many complaints about the Burial Service, as unsuitable for the use for which it was intended. It expresses a hope that the person departed, over whom it is read, will be saved; and this is said to be dangerous when expressed about all who are called Christians, as leading the laity to low views of the spiritual attainments necessary for salvation; and distressing the Clergy who have to read it.

Now I do not deny, I frankly own, it is sometimes distressing to use the Service; but this it must ever be in the nature of things; wherever you draw the line. Do you pretend you can discriminate the wheat from the tares? Of course not.

It is often distressing to use this Service, because it is often distressing to think of the dead at all; not that you are without hope, but because you have fear also.

How many are there whom you know well enough to dare to give any judgment about? Is a Clergyman only to express a hope where he has grounds for having it? Are not the feelings of relatives to be considered? And may there not be a difference of judgments? I may hope more, another less. If each is to use the precise words which suit his own judgment, then we can have no words at all.

But it may be said, 'everything of a personal nature may be left out from the service.' And do you really wish this? Is this the way in which your flock will wish their lost friends to be treated? a cold 'edification,' but no affectionate valediction to the departed? Why not pursue this course of (supposed) improvement, and advocate the omission of the Service altogether?

Are we to have no kind and religious thoughts over the good, lest we should include the bad?

But it will be said, that, at least we ought not to read the Service over the flagrantly wicked; over those who are a scandal to religion. but this is a very different position. I agree with it entirely. Of course we should not do so, and truly the Church never meant we should. She never wished we should profess our hope of the salvation of habitual drunkards and swearers, open sinners, blasphemers, and the like; not as daring to despair of their salvation, but thinking it unseemly to honour their memory. Though the Church is not endowed with a power of absolute judgment upon individuals, yet she is directed to decide according to external indications, in order to hold up the rules of God's governance, and afford a type of it, and an assistance towards the realizing it. As she denies to the scandalously wicked the Lord's Supper, so does she deprive them of her other privileges.

The Church, I say, does not bid us read the Service over open sinners. Hear her own words introducing the Service. 'The office ensuing is not

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to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves.' There is no room to doubt whom she meant to be excommunicated, open sinners. Those therefore who are pained at the general use of the Service, should rather strive to restore the practice of excommunication, than to alter the words used in the Service. Surely, if we do not this, we are clearly defrauding the religious, for the sake of keeping close to the wicked.

Here we see the common course of things in the world. We omit a duty. In consequence our services become inconsistent. Instead of retracing our steps we alter the Service. What is this but, as it were, to sin upon principle? While we keep to our principles, our sins are inconsistencies; at length, sensitive of the absurdity which inconsistency involves, we accommodate our professions to our practice. This is ever the way of the world; but it should not be the way of the Church.

I will join heart and hand with any who will struggle for a restoration of that 'godly discipline,' the restoration of which our Church publicly professes she considers desirable; but God forbid any one should so depart from her spirit, as to mould her formularies to fit the case of deliberate sinners! And is not this what we are plainly doing, if we alter the Burial Service as proposed? We are recognizing the right of men to receive Christian Burial, about whom we do not like to express a hope. Why should they have Christian burial at all?

It will be said that the restoration of the practice of Excommunication is impracticable; and that therefore the other alternative must be taken, as the only one open to us. Of course it is impossible, if no one attempts to restore it; but if all willed it, how would it be impossible; and if no one stirs because he thinks no one else will, he is arguing in a circle.

But, after all, what have we to do with probabilities and prospects in matters of plain duty? Were a man the only member of the Church who felt it a duty to return to the Ancient Discipline, yet a duty is a duty, though he be alone. It is one of the great sins of our times to look to consequences in matters of plain duty. Is not this such a case? If not, prove that it is not; but do not argue from consequences.

(This tract, published in 1833, was the third of the Tracts for the Times which marked the advent of the Oxford or Tractarian movement, and the third written by John Henry Newman (1801-1890). Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. He was canonised on 13 October 2019. The Tract is reprinted as a recall of the early Tractarian opposition to changing the Prayer Book, and for Newman's acute analysis of the tendency, where liturgical revision is concerned, for the appetite to grow with eating.)

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