

# Bishop Bull on the Ancient Liturgies

by J.H. Newman

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of set forms of prayer in the Christian Church, demonstrating their apostolic origin through the consistency of ancient liturgies and the examples of the Sursum corda, Thanksgiving, and Doxology.*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 14:40, Ephesians 4:4, Colossians 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:1, Jude 1:3

**Topics:** "Apostolic Tradition", "Liturgical Prayer"

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## Description

J.H. Newman preaches on the importance of following the apostolic tradition of set forms of prayer in the Church, as instructed by St. Paul to Timothy. He highlights how these ancient liturgies, though altered over time, still contain divine forms of prayer and thanksgiving that point back to apostolic origins. Newman emphasizes the unity and harmony found in these liturgies across different Christian churches, showcasing the consistency in prayers like the Sursum corda, Thanksgiving in the Communion, and Doxology. He also notes the significance of the prayer of Oblation in the Eucharist, which remains a testimony against later doctrinal innovations and corruptions.

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## Transcript

(From his XIIIth Sermon.)

[Number 64]

[To Timothy,] to this public person, to this great bishop of the Church, is this charge given by St. Paul, in my text: "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men," &c. He was to take care that such prayers should be made in all churches and congregations under his inspection and jurisdiction.

And how could he do this, but by providing by his authority that there should be set forms of prayer, framed according to this rule, given him by the Apostle, to be used in those churches? Sure I am, the primitive Catholic Church understood this to be the meaning of the Apostle. Hence, in all the churches of CHRIST over the world, however distant from each other, we find set forms of public prayers, suited and conforming to this direction of the Apostle.

And, indeed, if we consult all the ancient liturgies extant at this day, we shall find this observation to be most true; they are all framed and composed according to this rule of the Apostle.

And it is observable, that however those ancient liturgies have been altered and corrupted in after times by many additions and interpolations, yet there are in all of them still remaining many excellent and divine forms of prayer and thanksgiving, wherein they do all perfectly agree, and which, therefore, can not reasonably be thought to have any other original than apostolical order and appointment, delivered to the several nations and people, together with the first preaching and planting of Christianity among them.

Such, for example, is the *Sursum corda* in the Office of the Communion, the Priest saying, "Lift up your hearts;" and the people answering, "We lift them up unto the Lord." There is no Liturgy in any church of CHRIST to this day but hath this form.

Such is the excellent form of Thanksgiving, in the same Office of the Communion, to be performed by the Priest and people; the Priest saying, "Let us give thanks unto our Lord God;" and the people answering, "It is meet and right so to do." This form also is to be found in all the most ancient Liturgies.

Such also is the Doxology, or glorification of the ever-blessed Trinity: "Glory be to the Father," &c.

I add to what hath been already observed, the consent of all the Christian churches in the world, however distant from each other, in the prayer of Oblation of the Christian Sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist, or Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; which consent is indeed wonderful. All the ancient liturgies agree in this Form of Prayer almost in the same words, but fully and exactly in the same sense, order, and method; which whosoever attentively considers, must be convinced that this order of prayer was delivered to the several churches in the very first plantation and settlement of them. Nay, it is observable, that this Form of Prayer is still retained in the very Canon of the Mass, at this day used in the Church of Rome, though the Form doth manifestly contradict and overthrow some of the principal articles of their new faith. For from this very form of prayer, still extant in their Canon, a man may effectually refute those two main doctrines of their Church, the doctrine of Purgatory, and that of Transubstantiation.... Thus, by a singular providence of GOD, that ancient, primitive, and apostolic Form of Prayer still remains in the Liturgy of that Church, as a convincing testimony against her latter innovations and corruptions of the Christian doctrine. But this by the way.

The same harmony and consent of the ancient liturgies (i. e. services) is to be found in the office of Baptism, where the person to be baptized is obliged first to "renounce the Devil and all his works, the pomp and vanity of the world," &c., and then to profess his faith in the Holy Trinity, "God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." This Form is to be found in the liturgies of all the churches of CHRIST throughout the world, almost in the very same words, and is therefore doubtless of primitive and apostolical origin....

Other instances of the like nature I could give you, if the time would permit. But these I think are sufficient to show that there were set, prescribed Offices and Forms of Prayer and praise, and professions of faith, delivered to all the Churches of CHRIST by the Apostles or their immediate successors; many of those Forms (notwithstanding the manifold corruptions and depravations of the primitive Liturgies in after times) being still retained, and unanimously used in all the Churches of CHRIST to this day.

The following account of the Thanksgiving in the Holy Eucharist, mentioned by Bishop Bull in the above extract, is from Bingham, *Antiq.* xv. 3.

"As soon as the Common Prayers were ended, and they had saluted one another with a kiss, bread, and wine and water were brought to the President; who receiving them, gave praise and glory to the FATHER of all things by the SON and HOLY SPIRIT, and made a long thanksgiving for the blessings which he

vouchsafed to bestow upon them. And when he had ended the prayers and thanksgiving, all the people that were present, answered with acclamation, Amen".

After the same manner Irenaeus, "We offer unto Him His own gifts, thereby declaring the communication and truth of both flesh and spirit. For as the bread, which is of the earth, after the invocation of GOD upon it, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two parts, the one earthly, the other heavenly: so all our bodies, receiving the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, whilst they live in hopes of a resurrection. But we offer these things to Him, not as if He stood in need of them, but as giving Him thanks for His gifts, and sanctifying the creature."

So Origen says, "They eat the bread that was offered to the Creator, with prayer and thanksgiving for the gifts that He had bestowed on them...."

Cyril of Jerusalem more particularly specifies the substance of this thanksgiving in his Mystical Catechisms, saying, "After this we make mention of the heaven, and earth, and sea, &c...." This is much the same with the thanksgiving in St. James's Liturgy, which was used in the Church of Jerusalem, in this form: "It is very meet and right, becoming us and our duty, that we should praise Thee, and celebrate Thee with hymns, and give thanks unto Thee, the Maker of all creatures, visible and invisible, the Treasure of all good, the Fountain of life and immortality, the GOD and LORD of all things, whom the Heavens, and the Heaven of Heavens praise, and all the host of them; the sun and moon and the whole company of stars; the earth, the sea, and all that are in them; the celestial congregation of Jerusalem; the Church of the first born, who are written in heaven; the spirits of just men and prophets, the souls of martyrs and apostles; angels and archangels, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, the tremendous hosts, and cherubims with many eyes, and seraphims with six wings, with two whereof they cover their faces, and with two their feet, and with two they fly, crying out incessantly one to another, and singing with loud voices the triumphant song of the magnificence of Thy Glory, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory, Hosannah in the Highest. Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the LORD. Hosannah in the Highest."

OXFORD,

The feast of St. Barnabas.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jh-newman/bishop-bull-on-the-ancient-liturgies/>

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