

Indications of a Superintending Providence in the Preservation of the Prayer Book and in the Changes Which It Has Undergone

by J.H. Newman

The sermon explores the role of superintending Providence in the preservation of the Prayer Book and the changes that have occurred within it, highlighting the importance of recognizing the hand of God in the Church's history.

Scripture: Mark 11:24

Topics: "Church History", "Liturgical Reform"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the expressions of repentance introduced into the liturgy, exploring the divine purpose behind the changes in the Church's prayers and practices. He delves into the historical context, the general tone of the Prayer Book, the significance of Sunday Lessons, changes in the Rubric, and omissions like anointing at Baptism and Confirmation. Newman reflects on the alterations in the Visitation of the Sick, highlighting the shift from miraculous expectations to ordinary faith and the subtle expressions of doubt and humility in the revised prayers.

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PART I. EXPRESSIONS OF REPENTANCE INTRODUCED INTO OUR LITURGY.

1. Whether a Divine purpose be ascertainable.

THE expression used by the Parliament of that day, respecting the first Book of king Edward, was, that it had been done "by the aid of the HOLY GHOST with mutual agreement." Such we may suppose was as it were the echo of GOD'S voice in His Church, and that in these words that assembly, then perhaps to be considered Catholic, prophesied, though, in so doing, they like Caiaphas of old knew not the full meaning of their words. But these we may adopt in their amplest signification, nothing doubting but that, by the superintending care of CHRIST in His Church, there has been in that, and other circumstances of change, a controlling Power beyond the reach of man's wisdom; provisions against future evils in the dark womb of time, and adaptations to the existing condition of the Church, beyond what entered into the thoughts of those concerned.

The object of the present enquiry is to ascertain whether, after the lapse of time, we may not obtain some slight clue to the object of such dispensations; whether there are not discernible some remarkable indications of such a presiding Hand, not only controlling the tide of popular changes which have come over the Church, so as to have preserved to us that dispensation under which we now live, but also regulating and directing those changes to meet the wants of succeeding ages.

Had these revolutions been produced by persons acting in the largeness of human wisdom, and by forethought directing their views to one great design, and that design peculiarly suitable to the wants of the Church, even in this case we should, have to acknowledge that superintending Hand in which are the hearts of men. But if this does not appear to have been the case, excepting on some particular occasions, yet, notwithstanding, at one time by the aid of persons supporting the Catholic Truth, at another by that of those opposing it, at one time by the care of reverential men, at another by the passions of the inconsiderate, there may be traced the predominance of one great and overruling purpose. And if such a Providential Power, now converting and then controlling; now amalgamating, then neutralizing; in short, either by maturing or by frustrating the thoughts of men, has throughout, so far as we can discern, made all things to work to one great end, and that an end peculiarly suitable to our condition--if such be the case, then surely such an enquiry as the present may do something towards regulating the feelings with which we regard those events, and pointing out the line of conduct which our position requires.

I am aware that such an investigation demands the greatest circumspection and reverence, for although we have the promise that CHRIST shall be with His Church to the end of the world, yet therein, as in His natural Providence, "His ways are in the deep waters, and His footsteps are not known." But if even in our lives as individuals, where we can still less comprehend in our view the lengthened bearing or end of the

circumstances which encompass us, yet even in the short course of our existence on earth we may trace in past events manifest Providential leadings, and something of a design with respect to ourselves--much more may we suppose that such indications of GOD'S care may be discerned in the protection of His Church, where we have entire centuries through which to mark the footsteps of a Divine Governor. And if in the former case it be considered the part of wisdom and piety, in a review of our life, to divert the attention from persons and events, and thus divesting ourselves of human passions and prejudices, to acknowledge and discern the Hand of GOD and to look upon apparent contingencies only as the instruments which He uses in conducting the great ends of His wisdom; in like manner also, with regard to the history and position of our Church, to turn our thoughts from man to GOD, is one of the best means of learning to judge and to feel correctly: in short, we ought to be very cautious how we consider events without recognising therein His Presence.

One protest only it is necessary to make, that the argument is very distinct from that unreal eclectic system, which confounds truth, and degrades our sense of Providence, by looking on the different forms of error only as various modes of educating good under the Divine control. The cases are perfectly distinct, inasmuch as it is one thing, where GOD has promised to be present for our guidance, "to feel after Him, if haply we may find Him," in order to know what that guidance is; and another to acquiesce in, and reconcile ourselves to, shapes of evil, on the ground that they will ultimately redound to His glory.

2. Such an enquiry particularly necessary at present.

The consideration which is here entered upon appears to be especially necessary at the present crisis; for the more our attention is turned to the ancient Liturgies and usages, the more, I suppose, shall we be convinced that such could have come from no other source than that from which the Holy Scriptures have themselves proceeded. This thought, indeed, is familiar to most of us, from what we have retained. And impressed with this awful sense of the sanctity of the ancient forms of worship, a reverential mind will naturally shrink from the idea of their being remodelled and altered by man.

And the discovery that this has been to a certain extent the case in our own Liturgy may have a tendency to impair that (I may say) filial affection and respect, which is due to her from whom we have received our Spiritual birth in one Sacrament, and the bread of life in the other. And, indeed, obedience to her, as standing in the nearest of parental relations, is a part of that charity without which even the understanding of mysteries and knowledge avail not. When our thoughts revert to earlier and better times, we shall, of course, be filled with some sad reflections at the melancholy contrast, looking upon the later Church as "the second temple," and in the words of holy Herbert, "deserving tears;" or in the more sacred words in the Prophet Haggai, "Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"

But He who spake these words, and who now alloweth us to see this contrast, added to them, "Yet now be strong, for I am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts. According to the word that I covenanted with you, when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you." It is on this promised presence of CHRIST, who hath covenanted to abide with His Church, that these observations are founded. With regard to the general principle, of course, the only question can be, whether our Church has done any thing to forfeit those promises.

But this, we may confidently trust, is not the case. Strong judicial withdrawals doubtless there may have been, and withholdings of light, as indicating a threatened removal of that candlestick itself, in which the light is placed, if we repent not. But those essentials, to which the promise has been annexed, have not

been forfeited, while we retain those mysteries which are "necessary to salvation;" and Divinely-commissioned stewards to convey them. And with regard to an Apostolic form of Liturgy, the Church in all ages has allowed, that, as long as the substance continues the same, circumstantial varieties are permitted to particular Churches.

This, Mr. Palmer maintains, in his "Origines Liturgicae," and Hooker implies the same. "No doubt," says he, "from GOD it hath proceeded, and by us it must be acknowledged a work of His singular care and providence, that the Church hath evermore held a prescript form of common prayer, although not in all things every where the same, yet for the most part retaining still the same analogy. So that if the Liturgies of all ancient Churches throughout the world be compared amongst themselves, it may be easily perceived they had all one original mould."

So that in these things we have not forfeited the promise. And surely if the use made of the Septuagint version in the New Testament furnishes us with a Scriptural proof that this translation of the Scriptures was conducted under the control of that Spirit from which those Scriptures themselves proceeded, notwithstanding alterations made in the text, and the persons engaged in that work: in like manner may we regard even the alterations which have taken place in our Liturgy.

It may be we do not approve of the persons, or of the motives which produced them. It may be that those changes took from us a part of our ancient inheritance; yet, should we not rather say, with a religious caution, that the same Hand which has mercifully afforded us so much beyond our deserts, has in justice withdrawn such higher privileges for our unworthiness? And if we show ourselves meet to receive them by a pious use of what remains, then it may be we shall have them more fully restored. Or may they not be withholden in mercy, no less than in justice, as injurious to an age that cannot receive them but to condemnation, according to the words of a Latin hymn,Â--

"Quam nos potenter allicis?

Te, CHRISTE, quando detegis,

Te quando celas, providus

Nobis perque consulis."

TRANSFIG. Do. Paris. Brev.

To recur to the reference just made to the Septuagint. If, as St. Augustin maintains, the same Spirit which was in the Prophets when they spake, was in the translators of the Septuagint when they interpreted, expressing the same things differently, in the same manner that He does by different Prophets in Scripture, and omitting, or adding, or altering, as best suited the wisdom of His purpose; so also the omissions and additions and alterations in our own Liturgy, we may reverently trust, were ordered by the same Spirit under whose control the first rites of Catholic worship were ordained. For if the presence of CHRIST still continues in His Church, in what circumstances can we conceive His Divine control to be more exerted than in regulating these changes? For rituals and forms of prayer, however unimportant in human eyes, assume a very high character and value when considered as the appointed means of access from man to GOD; as methods of approach to Him which He has Himself provided, and of which we are bound to make use,Â--for as individuals we have no choice;Â--as moreover objects of sacred association to which the affections of good men will naturally become attached from use, and the more attached the

better they are; as instruments, however mean in man's estimation, which serve as vehicles through which healing and virtue go forth from CHRIST to restore our soul's maladies; as moulds of thought and expression to those suits which, in the majestic words of Hooker "the ALMIGHTY doth there sit to hear, and angels, intermingled as associates, attend to further."

This consideration will afford a high value and importance to many changes in themselves apparently trivial; and it must be remembered that the lessons of Divine wisdom are often written in the very smallest characters, and that it is not from single letters or syllables, but from the combination of them, when carefully put together, that those lessons are to be understood. The proof will consist more in an accumulation of a number of little detached accidents, all tending collectively to one great purport or effect, than in any signal revolutions or events. It is necessary therefore to claim a patient attention to each, and assent is only required, if the evidence for the whole appears to bear out the case. Each point may be but slight in itself, yet all these in their connections one with another may be such as to form a perceptible and distinct chain, partially indeed interrupted by clouds from our view, yet such as may be seen to extend far beyond the reach of man's contrivance, so as to shew that it can be no other chain than that which is suspended from the throne of GOD.

3. The three divisions of the argument.

These indications of a superintending Providence will be considered in regard to three points into which the subject naturally resolves itself in its various bearings.

The first is, that these changes through a long course of time have one prevailing character, and that so deeply and so gently infused, as to prove no human intention, and so extensive as to imply a design beyond the limited range of man's foresight.

Secondly, that they are replete with Providential remedies and warnings against those peculiar evils which have since arisen, and are likely to increase in the last days, as Scripture has foretold.

And, thirdly, that changes in the external condition of the Church, and its pervading peculiarities, harmonize with those that are internal, so as to indicate one controlling design and purpose.

In all these cases it will, I think, appear that though in tracing historically these alterations, external circumstances were not such as we could have wished or approve, yet that notwithstanding there has resided in the Church a Divine life, a power of assimilating, and converting, and turning into nourishment, heterogeneous, and often hurtful substances. And thence it has happened that notwithstanding the worldly influences to which she has been subject, the King's Daughter, though she has passed through the fire, has been in misfortune, and is in captivity, yet, under all changes, is still "glorious within," and "her clothing of wrought gold."

4. That we have given us the language of servants rather than sons.

The first point which I would wish to show is, that through these alterations there runs one prevailing tendency, to put into our mouths the language of servants rather than that of sons. Now, though it may be matter of doubt whether the Reformation was in all respects what the name imports, or whether it were brought about in general by motives of sincere repentance, yet it must be allowed that it was a call to repentance on the part of GOD, a call to the Church to return to her first love and repent. And that it was on the part of man a profession of repentance. Previously therefore to, and independently of, any proof, it

seems not unreasonable to suppose, that as in the case of an individual, so also with the Church at large, He who sees the returning penitent afar off, and hastens to meet him, should also put those becoming words into his mouth, by which he confesses himself to have forfeited the claim of sonship, and to be willing to be received in a lower state.

5. The Collects.

First of all, to turn our attention to the Collects, and the alterations made respecting them. They are indeed not many, but consist either in the entire rejection of the older, and the substitution of a new form, or in the adaptation of another old one, or else in a slight change of expression, in the process of their passing into the English form. When we compare them, as they now stand, with earlier Liturgies, and endeavour to ascertain the causes of the changes, we do not find, I think, that the rejections or alterations of the ancient prayers have taken place merely on account of "the interpolations of things false and superstitious" as is usually stated to be the case. But one thing I cannot but observe, that, whether designedly or not, these changes seem to have one drift, and bear one way, in the point alluded to, namely this, that entire Collects, or expressions in them, which imply the privileges of the faithful, or spiritual rejoicing, as of sons, are dropped; and prayers substituted in a lower tone.

To take the first Collect in Advent. It is one newly introduced, and though it is mainly remodelled on the language of the Epistle and Gospel, Mr. Palmer gives a Latin prayer which he supposes it to resemble. The difference in the two forms consists in this--we find that in the ancient form there are the words "who rejoice according to the flesh for the coming of Thine only begotten Son." These are not in ours, but we have instead the sentence "in the time of this mortal life in which Thy Son JESUS CHRIST came to visit us in great humility."

Proceeding to Christmas day, we find in King Edward's First Book, there was a double service for this festival, and the Collect, which was afterwards omitted, is the following:

"GOD, which makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Thy only Son JESUS CHRIST: Grant that as we joyfully receive Him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold Him when He shall come to be our Judge."--

Compare the more subdued prayer for renewal, in the Collect we have for this day, with this one which is now omitted, or with the Collect in the Parisian Breviary, which is thus:

"O GOD, who hast given the bread of angels to be the food of the faithful in the fold of the Church, grant us, we pray Thee, in this present world, a foretaste of the sweetness of the heavenly joys, that, in that which is to come, Thou mayest lead us to the fulness of everlasting rewards, through the same:--"

The object of Divine wisdom, in these changes, may have been that, as "leaping for joy," and being "exceeding glad," are commands given only, in Scripture, on occasions of external persecution and distress, such were not suited for the times of worldly prosperity which our Church was to be tempted with beyond others. But I only speak now of the fact.

In like manner take the Sunday after Ascension Day; one cannot but at once inquire, why the former Collect for this day has not been retained? The present Collect I can only find used as an antiphon in the Roman Breviary on this day. The Collect in the Parisian Breviary alludes to the gifts poured on the Apostles, as if still continued in the Church. That selected for our use is, that we be not left "comfortless,"

"ne nos derelinquas orphanos."

The Collect for St. John the Baptist's day is another instance; in the Sarum Missal and Parisian Breviary, it is,

"O GOD, who hast made this present day honourable unto us by the nativity of the blessed John, grant unto thy people the grace of spiritual joys, and direct the minds of all the faithful unto the way of eternal salvation, through--."

Compare this with our own, of him who was "sent to prepare the way of our SAVIOUR, by preaching of repentance, that we may follow his doctrine and life, truly repent, and patiently suffer." There is in the Roman Missal another Collect for this day, which might be quoted, with the former as bearing on the same point of view.

For St. Bartholomew's day the Latin form begins thus--

"Almighty and everlasting GOD, who hast afforded unto us the reverend and holy joy of this day in the festival of Thy Blessed Apostle Bartholomew;" this is altered in ours, but the latter part is the same, which it may be observed is purely practical.

Add to this, that although we have indeed on Whit-Sunday retained the ancient prayer which speaks of "rejoicing" in the comfort of the Spirit, yet even at this season the daily Collects, which speak of the adoption and spiritual Joy, find no place in ours. Take for instance the following, which is found on Monday in Whitsun-Week in the Missals, (on Friday in the Parisian Breviary) .

"O GOD, who hast given unto Thine apostles Thy holy Spirit, grant unto Thy people the effectual obtaining of their petition, that upon those to whom Thou hast given faith, Thou mayest bestow peace also; through--"

The nearest petition which we have to this is perhaps the Collect, "that what we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually;" where it is to be observed that the prayer in ours is hypothetical. Several other Collects at this season in the ancient liturgies are of the same, or even higher tone than the one above translated.

This tendency, in our own Prayer Book, to bring out, as it were by accident, the more humble and practical character in these changes, may be observed in the Collect, which we have for the first Sunday after Easter. Until the Review in 1662, the Collect, which occupied this place, was that which is the "Prefacet" at the Communion for Easter Day, the commencement of which, it may be remembered, is this--

"But chiefly are we bound to praise Thee for the glorious Resurrection of Thy Son JESUS CHRIST,--and the end "who by His death hath destroyed death, and by His rising to life again hath restored to us everlasting life."--

A form consisting entirely of thanksgiving. Instead of this, we have on this Sunday the modern Collect before used on Easter Tuesday, as we find it in the Scotch Prayer Book, containing the supplication, "That we may so put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may serve Thee in pureness of living and truth."

The Collect for Ash Wednesday, again, although Mr. Palmer traces the beginning of it to a Latin one in the Sarum Missal, has for its own those earnest words of penitence, "create and make in us new and contrite

hearts that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the GOD of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness."

6. Verbal alterations.

Sometimes, indeed, this change in the tone and spirit of our Church is indicated in the mere alteration of a word, as in the dropping of the expression "fidelium;" such, for instance, is the following, in the Collect for the 4th Sunday after Easter: the Latin was "qui fidelium mentes unius efficit voluntatis." This was at first literally rendered in our own, as we find it in the Scotch Prayer Book, as follows: "who makest the minds of Thy faithful people to be of one will." In the Review of the Liturgy in the year 1662, this was altered to "who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men." Here a prayer for love among faithful sons becomes imperceptibly one for ordering the unruly affections of sinful mankind.

If there is any force in this omission of the word "fidelium," there is the same in the frequent incidental adoption of that of "servant." In the Collect for the 3d Sunday in Lent the term "humilium;" that of "supplicantium," in that for the 10th after Trinity; in that of the 6th after Easter "supplicibus tuis;" and also in the daily Collect for grace that of "supplices tuos," are all rendered "humble servants," though the Latin is in other respects for the most part closely translated. In the 13th after Trinity the expression was "ut ad promissiones tuas sine offensione curramus." It was literally preserved in the expression, "that we running to Thy promises may be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasure;" and in the Scotch, "that we may so run to Thy heavenly promises that we fail not finally to attain the same." In 1662 the words were introduced "that we may so faithfully serve Thee." And, again, in the Litany, "O GOD, merciful Father," the words "we Thy servants," are entirely introduced into the translation in the Collect.

The same tendency may be traced through other changes, at first sight even apparently more trifling, as where in the Collect for Ascension Day the words are inserted "that we may thither ascend," in the original it is only that we may dwell in mind in heavenly places, "mente in coelestibus habitemus." It will be seen, that the prayer is, as it were, from a lower station; the ancient form, that we may continue to dwell in those heavenly places to which we have already arrived by baptismal privilege; the later, that we may arise as from an inferior state. In like manner it is curious to observe, that in the Collect for the 20th Sunday after Trinity, the words "liberis mentibus," in both of Edward's books "with free hearts," becomes in the last Review, "cheerfully," where the idea of freedom is lost.

With regard to the word "servant," it may be said that this term is more congenial to our language, or to the sober temper of our nation; but even were it so, (and perhaps similar reasons might be found for explaining the whole effect which is here traced,) yet such remarks only refer to secondary causes, and do not touch the main argument, that there is a Providential purpose to place us in this position. Nor, indeed, can they be attributed to any puritanical influences studiously assuming the tone of humility; but the contrary. Indeed, it is curious to observe, from

Hooker, that "abjection of mind," and this very term "servility" is one of the charges which the Puritans brought against the Prayer Book. Alluding to two Collects, the one for the 12th Sunday after Trinity, and the other a prayer after the Offertory, similar to it, the words of Cartwright are--"This request carrieth with it still the note of the Popish servile fear, and savoureth not of that confidence and reverent familiarity that the children of GOD have through CHRIST with their Heavenly FATHER." And yet from the instances already adduced in this treatise, it would seem that this "note of servile fear" is one peculiarly our own, as differing from the forms of prayer which we have in common with the Church of Rome.

7. Commencement of our Liturgy.

This subject of the Collects must be again resumed to set forth another view which will, also, I think, do much by the way to confirm and establish the present one. Perhaps enough has been said to afford us a clue to the spirit of these changes, a spirit not appearing so much on the surface as to imply purpose in the agents, yet on enquiry so manifesting itself as clearly to indicate a secret tendency one way. With the clue thus furnished let us take up the Prayer Book.

We find on opening it that it commences in a manner perfectly different from any of the liturgical books immediately preceding it, those of Sarum, York, and Hereford, to which we may also add the First Book of Edward the Sixth. All these commence, I believe, with the LORD'S Prayer, and from thence proceed to the Creed. Instead of this we have the Sentences, the Exhortation, the Confession, and the Absolution, preceding that Prayer. And all and each of these points, in the place which they hold, are so little analogous to other Liturgies, that they may be considered peculiarly characteristic of our own.

Now, the LORD'S Prayer is well known to have been always considered as especially the "Prayer of the faithful," the peculiar inheritance of sons. So much so, that in Primitive Liturgies it is supposed not to have been used openly, as their assemblies were resorted to by the Catechumens and others unbaptized, who, not having received the adoption, could not of course approach GOD as a Father. It is thought that their Prayers usually began with a Psalm. This objection to the public use of the LORD'S prayer was of course done away with, when the world became Christian. And it afterwards occupied the first place in the Breviaries. The position therefore that it holds with us speaks an emphatic language, as connected with the portions of the service which precede it, which are calculated to serve, as it were, for spiritual ablutions, preparatory to our being allowed to approach GOD with that filial prayer.

Each of the preceding parts of our worship is of this character. First of all, the Sentences. Fault is found with them for this very peculiarity; it is said that they go back to the Law, rather than abound in the privileges of the Gospel. They are calls to Repentance, or deep professions of Repentance throughout; three of them are from the most penitential of the Psalms (the 51st). And in fact they not only adopt the language of the Law and of the Baptist, the Preacher of Repentance, but the very words of the returning prodigal: "I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy Son," and proceed in the same profession of humiliation, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O LORD."

This character (which also pervades the sentences in the Scotch Prayer Book, though they are themselves different) will appear more strongly by looking at the American Prayer Book. Though the members of that Church have adopted our prefatory sentences, yet they have prefixed three additional ones of their own, which seem quite to lose sight of this bearing on the Confession, and are of another tone; the first of these is, "The LORD is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him." The next from Mal. i. 11, "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the Heathen, saith the LORD of Hosts;" and the third "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be alway acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer."

Now these texts of Scripture in our Prayer Book are followed by the Exhortation, which, it is needless to observe, is of the same character, viz. that of a call to repentance. Indeed, how much exhortation and

such appeals indicate a low and decayed state, as the natural remedies for it, will appear from the great tendency to Sermons since the Reformation. At the same time it should be observed, in the words of one whose sentiments are ever to be remembered with affectionate esteem, that such passionate appeals to the feelings, as these often are, would not be so objectionable in themselves, if they were given outside the Church, and not allowed to occupy the place of Religious Worship.

We then come to the Confession. It is needless to show how deeply it is pervaded with this penitential tone. It appears new in itself, and also new in this place in the service, in which it is not supported by much authority in antiquity, excepting perhaps a passage referred to by Bishop Sparrow, and other ritualists, from St. Basil, professing it to be their custom to begin with Confession. May we not trust that these strong words of preparatory humiliation are put into our mouths by Him who spake the same language in His Church of old, under circumstances not dissimilar to our own. For it may be observed, that in the time of the captivity, and in the return from it, the prayers of Daniel, of Ezra, and of Nehemiah, in behalf of their people, begin with a Confession, the very words of which might be put into our mouths at the Reformation. And these Prayers of humiliation may be contrasted with that of Solomon, which commences with blessing and thanksgiving.

But there is still something wanting before we are allowed to approach GOD with the Christian's Prayer, and to use the language of the spirit of adoption; and this is the Absolution. A more merciful provision, than that it should have been preserved and occupied this place, can scarce be conceived.

Such a commencement therefore may prove the characteristic of our Church, as expressive of the position in which GOD has placed us. It might be said that these introductory parts were insertions in the 2nd Book of Edward, by the intervention of foreigners, who, having shorn and left us bare of so much that is holy and valuable, have necessarily put us into a degraded condition. But it must be remembered, that our object is to divest ourselves of the consideration of secondary agents; to drop all consideration of individuals, as such, is the peculiar privilege and duty of all true members of the Catholic Church. Such deprivations were doubtless judicial; but it may be shown hereafter, how overruling mercies blend with those judgments, frustrating the designs of men; and our purpose is to trace indications of our peculiar dispensation beyond the influences or intention of any set of persons.

8. The general tone and spirit of our Prayer Book.

The next point which may be observed, as showing the difference which pervades our own Prayer Book, is a certain spirit, which characterizes the whole tenor of it. We cannot look into Breviaries and Missals without observing their high choral tone in distinction from our own. To advert to particulars; we have the ancient Kyrie Eleison, but have not the Hallelujahs; which indeed, in the solemn accents of the ancient Hebrew form are so frequent in other Churches, that they remind one of the high evangelical promises alluded to in the Apocrypha, "The streets of Jerusalem shall be paved with beryl, and all her streets shall say Allelujah." The Introitus, or Psalm introducing the Communion, we have lost. The Hosannah, at the end of the Trisagion, the Gloria Deo at the Gospel, (excepting as observed by traditionary use) are omitted. In king Edward's first book were the words in the Communion, "Let us keep a joyful and holy Feast with the Lord;" these find no place in ours. But we have a penitential responsory on having broken each of the Commandments, and a peculiar prayer of humiliation as unworthy "to gather up the crumbs under the table." We have indeed the Gloria in excelsis, but removed to the Post-Communion, and usually said kneeling. Add to this, that we are even to this day without Canonical Hymns, notwithstanding all efforts to obtain them; but instead of Psalms and Spiritual Songs, even our Thanksgiving assumes the

shape, and soon falls into the language of Prayer: like them of old in a condition in some degree analogous to our own, "we sit down and weep, when we remember thee, O Sion; as for our harps, we hang them up upon the trees that are therein." Of the few hymns which we have at the end of the version of the Psalms, one is "the humble suit of a sinner," and two are "the lamentations of a sinner." With such a beautiful and touching adaptation to our position does the silence and the language of our Liturgy seem to conspire, all brought about by the influence of that unseen Hand, that changes night into day and summer into winter, by an imperceptible process that none can mark. The roll put into our hand has lamentation written on it. "Praise," says the Son of Sirach, "is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner, for it was not sent him of the LORD."

Again, from the Prayer "for the Church militant," we have excluded the more solemn commendation to GOD, and Prayer for the Dead; this is a moving thought, for may we not venture to consider it in this light, that we are by this exclusion, as it were, in some degree disunited from the purer communion of those departed Saints who are now with CHRIST, as if scarce worthy to profess ourselves one with them? For the dead who are the objects of prayer are such as are considered in a state of comparative if not complete blessedness; to pray for such in any condition, and for their perfection, is the privilege of saints rather than the office of servants. And in the Prayer of Oblation, the beautiful mention of Angelic ministries, as bearing our supplications into the presence of the Divine Majesty, is lost: as if thereby (to follow the former train of reflection) we were not to be considered meet to be of that sacred society, who are "come to the Mount Sion," to "the innumerable company of angels," any more than to that of "the spirits of just men made perfect." But instead of these--the higher and more inspiring commemoration of the spirits of the blessed, and the mention of good angels,--we have introduced into our offices an awful service of "Commination" to the living; and in it an appeal, combining the most fearful denunciations to be found in Scripture, forming an office peculiar to ourselves.

Moreover, other churches have had their Litanies in times of public calamity, when "GOD'S wrath lies hard upon them;" but to us our own is given as our weekly, nay our almost daily food. And not only so, but it has come to be that of our Sundays also, for it is remarkable, that it was first appointed only for the Wednesday and Friday. How much this contributes to the tendencies alluded to is very evident, in that it infuses so strongly penitential a tone into the Sunday itself. But no intention of this kind is attributed to those who introduced it, but only that of a more solemn service. And the Litany itself, if it differs from former supplications of the kind, it is in this, that it appears to be a combination of every most moving petition, and a deprecation of every evil of body and mind to which guilty sinners are subject, and penitent sinners are brought to the sense of. This peculiar ethos of our own Church will be seen by a reference to the American. For the most part adhering to our own Prayer Book (excepting in the Communion Service, which is more primitive,) it will sometimes, by the mere influence of its own inherent difference of spirit, or led by the tendencies of later times, as it were inconsiderately, start aside from its parent's hand. We find, by a slight direction inserted before the Kyrie Eleison, that the most moving part of the Litany from thence to the prayer, "We humbly beseech Thee," may be omitted at the discretion of the minister.

Another trifling circumstance may be noticed. Every body must have observed, how much the short prayer to be used after the occasional prayers, which speaks of our "being tied and bound by the chain of our sins," is of this penitential character. But observe, how it has crept, as it were, imperceptibly into its present position. It was first only to be used after the prayer in public sickness, on an occasion, that is, of public humiliation, but now it almost occupies a place in the general service, as coming after the Ember Prayers and others.

9. The Sunday Lessons.

The next point which comes before us is that of the Sunday Lessons, and on this subject it will be sufficient to adduce the testimony of the "Tract for the Times" (No. 18.) In this the writer considers that there is a general principle, if not intended yet at all events evidenced by the selection, as running through it, and a key to which may be found in the 95th Psalm. It is curious to find that the American Prayer Book actually omits the latter part of this Psalm, which the writer considers as so expressive in implying this lesson. This general principle alluded to he shows to be one of admonition, by setting before us the conduct of GOD'S people of old, and GOD'S dealings with them: "that amidst the daily experience we have of Christians behaving so very differently from what one should expect a priori in GOD'S elect, unworthy Christians might discern themselves, by anticipation, in the faithless demeanour of the Jews." Now, what is this but to remind us that we, like the Jews, have fallen back from our privileges, and that if we do not take heed we shall forfeit the final inheritance also. For it may be observed, that it is the analogy of the Jewish nation which arrests our attention to the fact, and explains to us the later appearances of Christianity as states of degradation.

And may not the compression of the seven canonical Hours into our two daily services be considered also of this character? The Psalmist, indeed, though a Jew, in the state of a servant, yet speaking in the Spirit, anticipates the privileges and language of a son, when he says, "Seven times a day do I praise Thee;" but we, as if having lost the glad spirit of adoption, which such frequent worship would imply, have come to nothing more than the morning and evening sacrifice of the Jew. Or, if the Litany be considered as a distinct service, to the three times a day of the Jews' public prayers observed by Daniel and David. By the which change, that which had more the character of a spontaneous and free offering, as of the son who was "always with" his Father, becomes more like the forced returns of a servant, and an appointed task.

10. Changes in the Rubric.

To pass from the matter of our Services themselves, there is a circumstance in the Rubric which will serve as a Comment on these changes in the Prayers.

In the time of Edward the Sixth, and sanctioned by his First Book, it seems to have been the custom for the Prayers to be said by the priest in the chancel, turning to the East. Although this was discontinued in the Second Book (where the Rubric spoke of the place where the people could best hear), during the year and a half of its duration, it seems to have been partially restored by that of Elizabeth, which prescribes "the accustomed place of the church, chapel, or chancel," which accustomed place cannot, one would think, allude to that of King Edward's Second Book, as a year and a half before the intervening reign of Mary could not of course then be the accustomed place. But to this it is added, "except it be otherwise appointed by the Ordinary." Whatever the Rubric may have originally intended, the Morning and Evening Prayer seems gradually to have passed from the chancel to the outer church in Bishop Sparrow's "Rationale," and a note there quoted of Bishop Andrews, the middle of the church is spoken of as the place for the Litany. Whatever may have occasioned it, the fact itself may serve as a practical illustration of what has been said on the substance of the prayers. That we seem thereby gently thrust as it were aside, and put off from a nearer approach to the Altar, bid to stand off awhile, and take the lower place, the position of suppliants, at the entrance of the chancel, and to "weep between the porch and the altar."

It may be noticed that this proceeding typifies, as it were, by external act, another circumstance of our spiritual condition. The mystical interpretations of Holy Scripture are spoken of by the Fathers as the peculiar privilege of sons, as the inner temple of sacred writ, the holier place. In the Breviaries, such spiritual and deep meanings are much brought before us by the verses which are made to answer each other in the responses, and in the lessons from the Fathers. But by our own church they seem scarcely at all openly taught or recognised; perhaps the most remarkable instance of it may be found in the penitential confessions attached to the reading of each of the commandments as broken, which, of course, must apply to the interior sense as explained by the Catechism: and indeed in the Rubric in the Scotch Prayer Book, it is said distinctly "according to the mystical interpretation." In both of these cases we are set afar off, but yet allowed to draw near, not prohibited from doing so; and indeed it is to be observed that in almost all the subjects that this view embraces, we are not actually excluded from the higher privileges, so much as that they are quietly withdrawn from our sight. And it may be perceived that, through them all, though we have put into our mouths the expressions of servants, yet the language of mercy is ever breaking forth, which, though we come as servants, is ready to receive us as sons. "Is Ephraim my dear son is he a pleasant child? for after I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still."

In speaking of the Rubric, the substitution of the term "Table," "Holy Table," and in the Scotch of "GOD'S Board," for that of "Altar," which is in Edward's First Book (as well as "GOD'S Board,") is a strong instance of this our judicial humiliation. For what is it but to say that the higher mysteries which this word "Altar," represents are,--not taken away from us (me genoito), --but partially withdrawn from view; and doubtless, therefore, lost to many who "consider not the LORD'S body." To the participation, indeed, which the word "Table" implies, all are admitted, but the oblation which the term "Altar" indicates is more removed. Thus they are received at "GOD'S board" indeed, but not made so sensible of the presence of Him who admits them as His guests; and therefore, as the Jews of old, receive not equally the benefits of His presence. Such a loss is, therefore, doubtless a great one, which withholds the Altar from our due acknowledgment: but who reads not in this the visitation upon children's children of the sacrilegious pollution it has undergone in this country! But still, as observed before, mercy is mixed with judgment, and the case so stands with us that it says, "He that can receive it, let him receive it." A great privilege, when it is considered that by the last Review, and the insertion of the word "oblations," we have that which prophets and kings have desired to see, what King Charles the First and Bishop Andrews had not. And perhaps what was made the subject of Bishop Andrews' prayer, when for the Church of England his supplication was that "its deficiencies should be restored." And with regard to the Oblation itself, is not the case significant of our position, for it is not that no Oblation is made for we pray that "our oblations" may be accepted, but that the oblation is made in silence. Is not this silence expressive? May it not be considered eloquently significant, more than any words of our condition, that the higher part of the service, which look more like the privilege of sons, is performed in humiliation and silence? In the First Book, when the elements were placed on the Altar the priest was to say the lauds and anthem.

11. Omission of anointing at Baptism and Confirmation.

There is another circumstance now to be observed, of more importance than any which have been hitherto considered, the entire omission of the use of oil at baptism and confirmation. The practice on both of these occasions appears to have been primitive, universal, and, possibly, apostolical. In the First Book of Edward, it was appointed that the white vesture or chrism should be put on the child baptized with these words:

"Take this white vesture as a token of the innocency, which GOD'S grace in this holy sacrament of baptism is given unto Thee."

After the above the priest was to anoint the head of the infant, saying--

"Almighty GOD, the FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who hath regenerated Thee by water, and the HOLY GHOST, and hath given unto thee remission of all thy sins. He vouchsafe to anoint thee with the unction of His Holy Spirit, and bring thee to the inheritance of everlasting life."

It is probable that this anointing after Baptism was considered as preparatory to Confirmation, so as to supply the place of that anointing. And in the service for Confirmation there was a prayer that seemed to allude to this external anointing, in which it is said, "Confirm and strengthen them with the inward unction of the Holy Ghost, mercifully unto everlasting life. Amen."

Now it does not appear that even Bucer himself attempted to deny the ancient authority of this practice, though indeed he appears to have had but little real reverence for antiquity, but the ground for his having this practice rejected is, "because he thought they, (i. e. the chrism and anointing), carried more show of regard and reverence to the mysteries of our religion than men really retained."

Now, if it be allowed that there is the strongest Church authority for the use of this significative emblem, and also that in Christianity there is no such thing as a merely external and significative rite without being in some degree sacramental also; if it be also the case, that if a custom is found to be primitive, it can hardly be conceived, with any deference to the piety of those ages, but that it must have been apostolical: if we consider, moreover, the little likelihood that Apostles would have invented any thing of a sacramental nature of themselves; if, moreover, we call to mind the typical signification of oil in Scripture, so exceedingly high and holy, and the occasions of its use, viz. in separating from others the most elevated stations which prefigured the Messiah; in its typical use applied (not as baptism administered to conforming heathens, but) to Prophets, Priests, and Kings of the sacred people.--When we consider these things, surely no one can say the greatness of the gifts which are here withdrawn; how much we have thereby fallen from the high appellations of "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people:" and we have together with it lost the white robe of baptism. The essentials, indeed, are not touched, but they are things of this kind which we have lost. The lessons of humiliation, of being "buried and crucified with Christ," it may be shown hereafter we have still retained. We may still get up to our lower dispensation, and have privileges restored on our repentance; but we cannot expect or wish it, I think, without "He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bear his sheaves with him."

12. Changes in the Visitation of the Sick.

There are three Omissions in the office for the "Visitation" of the sick since Edward's First Book, which seem to me capable of the same construction as illustrative of the last subject; and perhaps not more so in themselves than in the reasons by which their disuse is generally supported by our English Ritualists. The first is the practice of Anointing the sick, if he required it. There is, I believe, no mention of this custom during the first centuries. But the ground on which its disuse is generally maintained is, that it applied, as mentioned by St. James, to miraculous cures, and therefore is not suitable to our days. Here therefore a broad line of distinction is drawn, between miraculous cures, and those to be now expected, as if we were not in a state to receive what our forefathers did. Can this be warranted, except on the supposition that the faith required must be of this lower and ordinary kind? That the "grain of mustard seed," which is now

borne by the tree whose branches fill the earth, is not of the quality of the first seed, which had the promise that it should "remove mountains." The next is a trivial omission, but of the same character. In the first of Edward there was this prayer for the sick:

"Visit him, O LORD, as Thou didst Peter's wife's mother, and the captain's servant; and as Thou didst preserve Toby and Sarah by Thine angel from danger, so restore unto this sick person his former health, if it be Thy will." The rejection of this prayer, it is worthy of observation, is usually approved of for the same reasons, that it refers to miraculous cures not to be now expected.

The other alteration is one apparently still more slight, but not unimportant, as bearing on this principle; in the last Review, (in the year 1662), the four last verses of the 71st Psalm, which is used in "the Visitation," are omitted. The grounds of this alteration are, that the psalm then turns to one of thanksgiving, beginning with this verse--

"O what great troubles and adversities hast Thou shewed me, yet didst Thou turn again, and refresh me, and broughtest me from the deep of the earth again." But it is observable, that most of the Psalms written under the pressure of affliction do thus turn from deprecation to thanksgiving. And what is this slight omission? Surely it may be considered as a silent and undesigned expression of misgiving respecting the existence of that faith required for the promise of prayer. For the promise is not future only, but present,--"Whatsoever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (St. Mark xi. 24.) Another alteration is, that this office did begin with a Psalm, the 143d, but now with a Litany. We allow that these are not important changes in themselves, but it is not unimportant to notice that, wherever we find changes, they should speak to the same effect.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jh-newman/indications-of-a-superintending-providence-in-the-preservation-of-the-prayer-boo/>

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