



The
COMPLETE WORKS
of JOHN OWEN

The Trinity • Volume VIII

The Holy Spirit—The Comforter

INTRODUCED & EDITED BY

Andrew S. Ballitch

The Complete Works of John Owen

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- Vol. 2 *The Trinity Defended: Part 1*
- Vol. 3 *The Trinity Defended: Part 2*
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of John Owen*

THE TRINITY

VOLUME 8

The Holy Spirit—
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John Owen

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Andrew S. Ballitch

GENERAL EDITORS

Lee Gatiss and Shawn D. Wright

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Works Preface

JOHN OWEN (1616–1683) is one of the most significant, influential, and prolific theologians that England has ever produced. His work is of such a high caliber that it is no surprise to find it still in demand more than four centuries after his birth. As a son of the Church of England, a Puritan preacher, a statesman, a Reformed theologian and Bible commentator, and later a prominent Nonconformist and advocate of toleration, he is widely read and appreciated by Christians of different types all over the globe, not only for the profundity of his thinking but also for the depth of his spiritual insight.

Owen was born in the year that William Shakespeare died, and in terms of his public influence, he was a rising star in the 1640s and at the height of his power in the 1650s. As chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, dean of Christ Church, and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, he wielded a substantial degree of power and influence within the short-lived English republic. Yet he eventually found himself on the losing side of the epic struggles of the seventeenth century and was ousted from his position of national preeminence. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 effectively barred him from any role in the established church, yet it was in the wilderness of those turbulent post-Restoration years that he wrote many of his most momentous contributions to the world of theological literature, despite being burdened by opposition, persecution, family tragedies, and illness.

There was an abortive endeavor to publish a uniform edition of Owen's works in the early eighteenth century, but this progressed no further than a single folio volume in 1721. A century later (1826), Thomas Russell met with much more success when he produced a collection in twenty-one volumes. The appetite for Owen only grew; more than three hundred people had subscribed to the 1721 and 1826 editions of his works, but almost three thousand subscribed to the twenty-four-volume set produced by William H. Goold

from 1850 onward. That collection, with Goold's learned introductions and notes, became the standard edition. It was given a new lease on life when the Banner of Truth Trust reprinted it several times beginning in 1965, though without some of Owen's Latin works, which had appeared in Goold's edition, or his massive Hebrews commentary, which Banner did eventually reprint in 1991. Goold corrected various errors in the original seventeenth- and eighteenth-century publications, some of which Owen himself had complained of, as well as certain grammatical errors. He thoroughly revised the punctuation, numeration of points, and Scripture references in Owen and presented him in a way acceptable to nineteenth-century readers without taking liberties with the text.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, and especially since the reprinting of Goold's edition in the mid-twentieth century, there has been a great flowering of interest in seventeenth-century Puritanism and Reformed theology. The recent profusion of scholarship in this area has resulted in a huge increase of attention given to Owen and his contribution to these movements. The time has therefore come to attempt another presentation of Owen's body of work for a new century. This new edition is more than a reprint of earlier collections of Owen's writings. As useful as those have been to us and many others, they fail to meet the needs of modern readers who are often familiar with neither the theological context nor the syntax and rhetorical style of seventeenth-century English divinity.

For that reason, we have returned again to the original editions of Owen's texts to ensure the accuracy of their presentation here but have conformed the spelling to modern American standards, modernized older verb endings, reduced the use of italics where they do not clarify meaning, updated some hyphenation forms, modernized capitalization both for select terms in the text and for titles of Owen's works, refreshed the typesetting, set lengthy quotations in block format, and both checked and added Scripture references in a consistent format where necessary. Owen's quotations of others, however, including the various editions of the Bible he used or translated, are kept as they appear in his original. His marginal notes and footnotes have been clearly marked in footnotes as his (with "—Owen" appearing at the end of his content) to distinguish them from editorial comments. Foreign languages such as Greek, Hebrew, and Latin (which Owen knew and used extensively) have been translated into modern English, with the original languages retained in footnotes for scholarly reference (also followed by "—Owen"). If Goold omitted parts of the original text in his edition, we have restored them to their rightful place. Additionally, we have attempted to regularize the numbering system Owen employed, which

was often imprecise and inconsistent; our order is 1, (1), [1], {1}, and 1st. We have also included various features to aid readers' comprehension of Owen's writings, including extensive introductions and outlines by established scholars in the field today, new paragraph breaks marked by a pilcrow (¶), chapter titles and appropriate headings (either entirely new or adapted from Goold), and explanatory footnotes that define archaic or obscure words and point out scriptural and other allusions in the text. On the rare occasions when we have added words to the text for readability, we have clearly marked them using square brackets. Having a team of experts involved, along with the benefit of modern online database technology, has also enabled us to make the prodigious effort to identify sources and citations in Owen that Russell and Goold deliberately avoided or were unable to locate for their editions.

Owen did not use only one English translation of the Bible. At various times, he employed the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Authorized Version (KJV), and his own paraphrases and translations from the original languages. We have not sought to harmonize his biblical quotations to any single version. Similarly, we have left his Hebrew and Greek quotations exactly as he recorded them, including the unpointed Hebrew text. When it appears that he has misspelled the Hebrew or Greek, we have acknowledged that in a footnote with reference to either *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

This new edition presents fresh translations of Owen's works that were originally published in Latin, such as his *Θεολογούμενα Παντοδαπά* (1661) and *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (which Goold published in an amended eighteenth-century translation). It also includes certain shorter works that have never before been collected in one place, such as Owen's prefaces to other people's works and many of his letters, with an extensive index to the whole set.

Our hope and prayer in presenting this new edition of John Owen's complete works is that it will equip and enable new generations of readers to appreciate the spiritual insights he accumulated over the course of his remarkable life. Those with a merely historical interest will find here a testimony to the exceptional labors of one extraordinary figure from a tumultuous age, in a modern and usable critical edition. Those who seek to learn from Owen about the God he worshiped and served will, we trust, find even greater riches in his doctrine of salvation, his passion for evangelism and missions, his Christ-centered vision of all reality, his realistic pursuit of holiness, his belief that theology matters, his concern for right worship and religious freedom, and his careful exegetical engagement with the text of God's word. We echo the words of the apostle Paul that Owen inscribed on the title page of his book *Χριστολογία*

(1679), “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:8).

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Editor's Introduction

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FOR A FULL INTRODUCTION to volumes 7 and 8, see the introduction to volume 7. The following introduces key features of volume 8 in particular.

OWEN'S TREATISES

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer (1682)¹

Owen's treatise on prayer is an attack on set forms of prayer and an argument for free (unwritten and unmemorized) prayer. As previously noted, Owen felt compelled to write on the subject in response to Hugh Cressy's rather abrasive dismissal of the Reformed Protestant position in his *The Church-History of Brittany*. But Owen's project is larger than merely an apologetic against the Church of Rome and its false worship flowing from its composed prayers. Two ideas dominate. Prayers of human composure in the national Restoration Church of England's Book of Common Prayer and the neglect of prayer among other churches are Owen's twin concerns.

Owen begins by asserting the necessity, benefit, and use of prayer in general. This goes without saying, in fact. No true religion exists without prayer. All religion consists principally in prayer. And so the design of his discourse, in Owen's own words, is that when it comes to prayer, "nothing more requisite in our religion than that true apprehensions of its nature and use be preserved in the minds of men, the declaration and defense of them, when they are opposed and unduly traduced, is not only justifiable but necessary also."

¹ This was published by Nathaniel Ponder, who published several of Owen's works and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Owen, in fact, may have introduced Ponder to Bunyan. See N. H. Keeble, "Bunyan's Literary Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18.

Owen understands prayer according to the Spirit to be under attack by the imposition of liturgical forms.

The questions Owen seeks to answer include the nature of the work of the Spirit in aiding and assisting believers in their praying according to the mind of God and the effects and fruit of that work. The sum of what he pleads, from Scripture and experience, is this:

*Whereas God has graciously promised his Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of grace and supplications, unto them that do believe, enabling them to pray according to his mind and will, in all the circumstances and capacities wherein they are, or which they may be called unto, it is the duty of them who are enlightened with the truth hereof to expect those promised aids and assistances in and unto their prayers, and to pray according to the ability which they receive thereby.*²

After summarizing his claim, he lays out eight general principles, which warrant enumerating, since they serve as a foundation for the treatise as a whole:

1. It is the duty of every person to pray for himself or herself. The existence of God simply demands it.
2. It is the duty of some to pray for others. Here, Owen is thinking of fathers, husbands, pastors, and the like.
3. Whoever prays is obligated to pray as well as possible.
4. And the best prayer includes intense, sincere actings of our minds through the greatest assistance we can attain.
5. The duty of prayer is achievable with the aid of God himself.
6. God expressly commands his people to pray, but not to compose written prayers for themselves, much less others.
7. Assistance is promised to believers to enable them to pray according to the will of God. However, at the same time, no help is promised for composing prayers for others.
8. Prayers given in Scripture have everlasting use but give no warrant for compositions unto the same end. This final principle leads Owen to the dominant topic in his preface, an earnest plea against set forms of prayer.

Owen stops short of determining set forms of prayer as inherently sinful, absolutely unlawful, or entirely vitiating of acceptable worship, but neither

² All italics in quotations from Owen appear in the original.

does he have anything positive to say about them. Taking the Missal (or Roman Catholic Mass book) as a case study, he highlights the abuses and corruptions engendered by liturgical forms. While the Missal's development was slow, it eventually imposed worship of human composure as divine and brought with it several unfortunate results. One was the doctrines of the Mass and transubstantiation. The Church of Rome came to believe what it first admitted in prayer. This theology of the Lord's Supper could not have conceivably developed without enforceable set forms of prayer. Another disastrous result was the rise of arbitrary ceremonies that came to adorn the devised prayer forms, leading to superstition and idolatrous practices. A third calamitous outcome was the imposition of the Missal, enforced at times even to the point of death. These consequences further served as catalysts for the cessation of true spiritual and ministerial gifts.

Owen proceeds to build upon the foundation laid in his preface in three movements. In chapters 1–3, he details the biblical evidence for true prayer. Chapters 4–7 exposit the nature of the Spirit's work. And then chapters 8–9 draw out the duties associated with the Spirit's gift of prayer. Owen concludes the treatise with two separate discussions, one on what he calls “mental prayer” and one on prescribed forms, in chapters 10–11, which are significant for historical context and will be handled briefly in turn.

Chapter 1: The Use of Prayer, and the Work of the Holy Spirit Therein

In chapter 1, Owen reasserts the duty of prayer, narrows his subject to the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in prayer, and argues for the significant relevance of the topic. He observes that the great animosity between different groups on the issue of prayer arises from the fact that prayer is the hinge on which all other differences concerning worship depend. By looking in detail at two passages of Scripture, Owen evinces “that there is promised and actually granted a special work of the Spirit of God in the prayers or praises of believers under the New Testament.”

Chapter 2: Zechariah 12:10 Opened and Vindicated

Zechariah 12:10 is the passage upon which Owen's treatise is built. The manner of the fulfillment of what is promised—namely, “the Spirit of grace and supplications”—is expressed by “I will pour out.” The pouring out of God's Spirit will be plentiful in the days of the gospel. The promise is addressed to the whole church. The Spirit is efficiently the Spirit of supplication in two ways. One, “by working gracious inclinations and dispositions in us unto this duty.” Two, “by giving a gracious ability for the discharge of it in a due

manner." For Owen, Zechariah 12:10, properly understood, proves "*that God has promised under the New Testament to give unto believers, in a plentiful manner or measure, the Spirit of grace and of supplications, or his own Holy Spirit, enabling them to pray according to his mind and will.*" Next, Owen turns his attention to the witness of the New Testament.

Chapter 3: Galatians 4:6 Opened and Vindicated

Galatians 4:6 reports the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise and expresses the nature of the Spirit's work in prayer. Believers are the subjects of the bestowal of the Spirit's gift, which is the enabling of adopted sons and daughters to act like just that, children of God. What Owen claims from this passage is this: The Spirit "does actually incline, dispose, and enable them to cry 'Abba, Father,' or to call upon God in prayer as their Father by Jesus Christ." Having exegetically underpinned the reality of the Spirit's role in legitimate prayer, Owen turns to a detailed exposition of the nature of the Spirit's work.

Chapter 4: The Nature of Prayer

In chapter 4, Owen outlines human deficiency with regard to the practice of prayer, explaining Romans 8:26. He begins with a definition of prayer, which he articulates as "a gift, ability, or spiritual faculty of exercising faith, love, reverence, fear, delight, and other graces, in a way of vocal requests, supplications, and praises unto God." The fact is, the Spirit supplies and furnishes the mind with what ought to be prayed for in general and in particular. Moreover, without the special aid of the Holy Spirit, none of us knows what to properly pray for. We do not have any accurate estimation of what we need, no conception of the promises of God, which are the measure of prayer, no grasp of the end, goal, or purpose of prayer. The Spirit must supply both the matter and the manner of prayer.

Chapter 5: The Work of the Holy Spirit as to the Matter of Prayer

Owen describes the Spirit's resource of the matter of prayer in chapter 5. In short, "he alone does, and he alone is able to give us such an understanding of our own wants as that we may be able to make our thoughts about them known unto God in prayer and supplication." According to Owen, the principal matter concerns faith and unbelief. Human beings have no conception of either the deprivation of their nature or the grace of God apart from the work of the Spirit. Regarding humanity's perception of this deprivation of nature and the grace of God, Owen memorably states, "Nature is blind, and

cannot see them; it is proud, and will not own them; stupid, and is senseless of them." The Spirit acquaints us not only with an impression of our needs but also with the grace and mercy prepared in the promises of God for our relief. These are the measure of prayer, the boundaries within which we pray. Owen argues, "We must pray with our understanding, that is, understand what we pray for. And these things are no other but what God has promised, which if we are not regulated by in our supplications, we ask amiss." Finally, the Spirit supplies the end of prayer. In other words, he guides and directs believers to petition from the right motivations and for proper purposes—namely, the glory of God and the improvement of holiness. In sum, the Spirit teaches believers what to pray for as they ought by furnishing and filling their minds with the matter of prayer.

Chapter 6: The Due Manner of Prayer, Wherein It Does Consist

After supplying the matter of prayer, the Spirit works the manner of prayer in the believer. This consists in the realm of the will and affections. The two are inseparable, for prayer by definition is the obedient acting of the whole soul toward God. The Spirit again does what individuals are unable to do themselves. He conforms the will and works affection in believers suitable for what they are praying about; therefore, he is the fountain of inexpressible fervency and delight. Delight in God as the object of prayer consists in three main things. First, the sight or prospect of God on his throne of grace, ready through Jesus Christ to dispense mercy to supplicant sinners. Second, a sense of God's relation unto us as Father. Third, the boldness and confidence that we have in our access to God in the act of prayer. Delight also flows from a focus on Christ, our access to the Father, the only way and means of our acceptance with God. The Spirit is as much behind how the Christian prays as he is the source of the content of those prayers.

Chapter 7: The Nature of Prayer in General, with Respect unto Forms of Prayer and Vocal Prayer

Chapter 7 concludes Owen's section on the nature of prayer with a discussion of Ephesians 6:18. Here, Paul does not reference praying by an extraordinary or miraculous gift; rather, praying in the Spirit is the constant duty of all believers, which also illegitimizes set forms of prayer. Answering the question "how they are enabled to pray in whose minds the Holy Ghost does thus work as a Spirit of grace and supplication" speaks to both of these faulty notions of prayer. Owen answers the question in brief this

way: "Those who are thus affected by him do never want a gracious ability of making their addresses unto God in vocal prayer, so far as is needful unto them in their circumstances, callings, states, and conditions." As a result, set forms are absolutely unnecessary for the believer. And as for the argument that set forms benefit the unregenerate, Owen has another answer: Those unregenerate persons who are given over to sin cry out only when they are in distress. For these people, set forms serve like a charm. Others who attend to prayer out of duty, if their desire becomes sincere, would be hindered by set forms. In all cases, "it cannot be denied but that the constant and unvaried use of set forms of prayer may become a great occasion of quenching the Spirit, and hindering all progress or growth in gifts or graces," just as "those who will never enter the water but with flags or bladders under them will scarce ever learn to swim." Owen will return to prescribed prayer forms in the final chapter of his treatise, but his flow of argument at this point moves from the reality and nature of true prayer to the resulting duties.

Chapter 8: The Duty of External Prayer by Virtue of a Spiritual Gift Explained and Vindicated

Having expressed the internal, spiritual nature of the duty already, and the exercise of the Spirit's grace therein, Owen transitions to prayer's external performance in chapter 8. His point is this:

There is a spiritual ability given unto men by the Holy Ghost, whereby they are enabled to express the matter of prayer, as taught and revealed in the manner before described, in words fitted and suited to lead on their own minds and the minds of others unto a holy communion in the duty, to the honor of God and their own edification.

So even the words prayed are from the Spirit and therefore are unprescribed. The argument proceeds this way: All people are obligated to pray as they are able, according to their condition, relations, occasion, and duty. All examples of prayer in Scripture are unprescribed. Every command in Scripture to pray is according to one's abilities. And ability includes the conscientious, diligent use of all means—involving the searching of both the heart and the Scriptures—which God has ordained to improve prayer. Abilities also include natural talents of invention, memory, and elocution. Yet external prayer is a gift. Words and expression are an adjunct of the internal gift discussed thus far in Owen's treatise.

Chapter 9: Duties Inferred from the Preceding Discourse

The expression of prayer is a gift inseparable from the internal work of the Spirit. Owen, however, combats the claim that everyone with the grace therefore has the gift, and vice versa. It is true that “all those in whom the Spirit of God does graciously act faith, love, delight, desire, in a way of prayer unto God, have an ability from him to express themselves in vocal prayer.” Though it does not follow that everyone who appears to have the gift also has the grace. For instance, the unregenerate can publicly pray unto the edification of others. Interestingly, Owen does explicitly allow for unvocal prayer, but insists that even this must still be expressed in words in the mind. The significance of this point becomes apparent in chapter 10. Like all other spiritual duties, we need the Spirit in prayer’s faithful completion, otherwise nothing would exist to separate the regenerate and unregenerate exercise of it. Further, the effects of prayer are so great that it would be impious not to attribute it to God. Prayer is a gift from God from beginning to end.

The duties that follow from Owen’s conception of prayer add up to glorifying God for the great privilege the Spirit of grace and supplication brings and its diligent use. Owen describes the appropriate exercise of prayer and divides the topic into three parts. First, it is our duty to use the gift to the inestimable advantage for our own souls. Second, the duty includes our natural faculties. Owen states that prayer “is freely bestowed, but it is carefully to be preserved. It is a gospel talent given to be traded with, and thereby to be increased.” This includes constant consideration and observation of ourselves and the Scripture, which serves as a mirror, presenting both what we are and what we ought to be. It entails meditation on God’s glorious excellencies and the mediation and intercession of Christ. It requires frequency in exercise and constant fervency and intention of mind and spirit. Third, it is our duty to use prayer unto the ends for which it is bestowed by God. Prayer is a means to stir up faith, love, delight, joy, and the like, as well as to benefit others, specifically our families, churches, and societies. With this exhortation to faithfulness in the duties of prayer, Owen concludes his unified argument regarding the Spirit’s role in prayer to focus on two parentheses, mental and prescribed forms of prayer.

*Chapter 10: Of Mental Prayer as Pretended
Unto by Some in the Church of Rome*

Owen sets his sights in chapter 10 pointedly on mental prayer as it exists in the Church of Rome. Cressy’s definition of mental prayer, in *The*

Church-History of Brittany, the work that inspired Owen's treatise, is "pure spiritual prayer, or a quiet repose of contemplation; that which excludes all images of the fancy, and in time all perceptible actuations of the understanding, and is exercised in signal elevations of the will, without any force at all, yet with admirable efficacy." It requires "an entire calmness and even death of the passions, a perfect purity in the spiritual affections of the will, and an entire abstraction from all creatures."³ In opposition to this concept, Owen insists on the use of the intellect. The experience of true prayer is through the faculties of the soul; it does not circumvent them. It is not as if we can pray in our "will and its affections without any actings of the mind or understanding." Further, so-called mental prayer is impossible to verify, given that it brings no benefit or edification to the church or any member of it. Owen warns, "The use of words is necessary in this duty, from the nature of the duty itself, the command of God, and the edification of the church." Whatever mental prayer is, in Owen's estimation, it is not true prayer.

Chapter 11: Prescribed Forms of Prayer Examined

In his final chapter, Owen handles prescribed forms of prayer, attending to their origin, supposed advantages, and lawfulness. The origin of prescribed forms is clearly human, for the Spirit is not promised to assist in their composition. As to the claimed advantages, for those who have the gift of free prayer by the Spirit, there is none. For those with a comparably low ability to pray for themselves, there is also no benefit, for set forms will only keep them from maturing. For those who do not yet have a desire to pray, other means are at their disposal, including the sincere consideration of themselves and Scripture and the ordinary means of grace. For those that claim personal experience of spiritual advantage, Owen refrains from disputing this, but points rather to God's gracious blessing of his children, even when they fail to order everything according to his word. As to the lawfulness of prescribed forms, Owen comes short of condemning them as unlawful in themselves, at which point he only alludes to the regulative principle of worship but does not pursue it. Owen leaves room for the lawful private use of prescribed forms, though he is suspicious of the benefit even in this setting, while he would prefer their exclusion from public worship.

3 Serenus Cressy, *The Church-History of Brittany, or England, from the Beginning of Christianity to the Norman Conquest* (Rouen, 1668), preface, paras. 42–43; quoted in Owen.

The Holy Spirit as a Comforter (1693)

In his treatise *The Holy Spirit as a Comforter*, Owen handles the signally Puritan topic of assurance. Owen is concerned to offer the believer the comfort in life and in death that can come only from the Spirit himself. At the same time, he elevates ordinary believers through his discussion of the anointing of the Spirit, a conspicuously Protestant motif. This treatise perhaps also best illustrates, in this volume, Owen as expositor of Scripture, as he carefully exegetes what Scripture means in reference to the Spirit as unction, seal, and earnest.

Chapter 1: The Holy Ghost the Comforter of the Church by Way of Office

Owen's work on the Holy Spirit as comforter proceeds in three stages. He first defines the office, then discusses its discharge, and then follows with a description of its effects.

Chapter 1 handles the office, working through the four things that constitute any office. First, there is the trust. The Spirit has the comfort, consolation, and support of believers entrusted to him. Christ's ascension did not mean that he stopped loving and caring for his disciples. He had to go to make intercession for them, which was part of his work that remained toward God. The other part of his remaining work respects the church and individual believers, which he gave to the Spirit. While the Spirit did not commence being comforter when Jesus left, he was at that time promised to be the comforter. Regenerate people were unaware of his ministry or dispensation beforehand. So Christ is still comforter, but by his Spirit.

A mission, name, and work are the three other elements constituting an office. The Spirit's special mission consists of his commissioning to be comforter by the Father and Son. His special name is Paraclete, found first in John 14:16. It is not distinctive with respect to his person, but denominative with respect to his work, used by Jesus as a proper name with respect to his office. The concept of comforter is principally ascribed to the Spirit in this name. The whole context of the promise in John 14–16 verifies this. As our "advocate," as the word is often rendered, he offers consolation—not, of course, as an advocate with God, but for the church in, with, and against the world. The Spirit serves as our advocate by undertaking our protection and defense. And he does so in three primary ways. First, by suggesting and supplying pleas and arguments to witnesses resulting in the conviction of their opponents. Second, in and by his communication of spiritual gifts, both extraordinary and ordinary, with their effects visible to the world. Third, by the internal efficacy of the preached word—namely, conviction, which effects either belief

or rejection. The final aspect of an office is a special work. For the Spirit as comforter, this is “to support, cherish, relieve, and comfort the church, in all trials and distresses.” This will be more fully expressed in Owen’s discussion of particular effects of the office.

Chapter 2: General Adjuncts or Properties of the Office of a Comforter, as Exercised by the Holy Spirit

In chapter 2, Owen treats the discharge of this office, which includes four primary features. One of the properties of the office is infinite condescension. The Spirit’s work as comforter is on behalf of men and women, individual human beings, sinful individuals at that. Another property is unspeakable love, as he works by tenderness and compassion. This is fitting given Trinitarian relations:

In all the actings of the Holy Ghost toward us, and especially in this of his susception of an office on the behalf of the church, which is the foundation of them all, his love is principally to be considered, and that he chooses this way of acting and working toward us to express his peculiar, personal character, as he is the eternal love of the Father and the Son.

Benefits, gifts, or kindnesses bring comfort or consolation only if they proceed from love. And there was indeed infinite love in the acceptance of this office by the Spirit.⁴ A third property is power, infinite power as the foundation for unshakable consolation. Only divine power can alleviate consciences and bring full assurance, driving away the disconsolations believers face. Only omnipotence can overcome the opposition from Satan. Finally, an unchangeable dispensation is a feature of the office of comforter. To whom the Spirit is given, he abides with forever, which is true both for individuals and the church unto the consummation of all things.

Chapter 3: Unto Whom the Holy Spirit Is Promised and Given as a Comforter; or the Object of His Acting in This Office

Chapters 3 and 4 transition to the effects of the Spirit’s role as comforter with an assertion about whom the Spirit is given to and an explanation of his inhabitation of recipients. Chapter 3 argues that only believers are given the Spirit. Owen says it this way: “All his actings and effects as a comforter

4 For a discussion and critique of this Augustinian conception of the Spirit, see Colin Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays, 1972–1995* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), chap. 7.

are confined unto them that believe, and do all suppose saving faith as antecedent unto them." This is not the first saving work, however. Regeneration precedes it, for "he comforts none but those whom he has before sanctified."

Chapter 4: Inhabitation of the Spirit the First Thing Promised

Inhabitation, or indwelling, is the great foundational privilege upon which all others depend. Owen carefully distinguishes what the indwelling of the Spirit is from what it is not. This inhabitation is not the Spirit's essential omnipresence, or an expression of the cause for the effect, or a hypostatic union. Neither is it a union or relation immediately between the Spirit and believers, who are related in such a way to Christ. Rather, it is the actual person of the Holy Spirit who is promised to believers. The fact that he inhabits so many at one time illustriously demonstrates his eternal glory. This indwelling is the spring of his gracious operations in us; it is "the hidden spring and cause of that inexpressible distance and difference that is between believers and the rest of the world." The person of the Spirit inhabits believers as the promised comforter.

Chapter 5: Particular Actings of the Holy Spirit as a Comforter

The final three chapters of Owen's treatise describe three particular ways the Spirit comforts—as an unction, a seal, and an earnest. The Spirit as unction, or the Spirit's anointing, is the first in natural order. Owen constructs a biblical argument for what this anointing consists in, contrasting this with arguments that the anointing is the doctrine of the gospel, the testimony of the Spirit to the truth of the gospel, or the chrism (anointing in the rites of baptism, confirmation, and holy orders) and extreme unction (anointing the sick and dying) of the Church of Rome. Owen provides a biblical theology of anointing, beginning with the claim that all things dedicated or consecrated in the Old Testament were anointed with oil. All such types were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the anointed one, whose anointing was with the Spirit. The unction of Christ consisted in the full communication of the Spirit in all his graces and gifts needed in Christ's human nature and for his work. Though this was essentially a single work, it was carried out, of course, in degrees. Believers have their unction immediately from Christ, consisting in the communication of the Spirit. It is like Christ's, but to an inferior degree. The Spirit's "first, peculiar, special effect as an unction"—and here Owen references his previous treatises *The Reason of Faith* and *Causes, Ways, and Means*—"is his teaching of us the truths and mysteries of the gospel by saving illumination." This anointing also dedicates believers as kings and priests, a dedication unto

God, resulting in special privilege. From 1 John 2:20, 27, Owen concludes that the principal benefit of the Spirit as unction is the stability of belief. This anointing is "an effectual means of their preservation, when a trial of their stability in the truth shall befall them." Further, "nothing will give stability in all seasons but the wisdom and knowledge which are the effects of this teaching," teaching which includes "all things," or the whole life of faith, including joy and consolation.

Chapter 6: The Spirit a Seal, and How

Owen is not entirely satisfied with comparisons to human sealing in attempting to understand the Spirit as a seal. For example, discussions of the Spirit putting forth his power in the preservation of believers, as in something highly valuable being sealed up for safety and inviolability, fall short of the rich meaning of sealing. Rather, Owen compares the sealing of believers with the sealing of Christ, which demonstrated God's owning of him, his approbation of him, and manifested that God the Father would take care of Christ and preserve him. He summarizes,

This sealing of the Son is the communication of the Holy Spirit in all fullness unto him, authorizing him unto, and acting his divine power in, all the acts and duties of his office, so as to evidence the presence of God with him, and his approbation of him, as the only person that was to distribute the spiritual food of their souls unto men.

Owen then defines the Spirit's sealing of believers as God's "gracious communication of the Holy Ghost unto them, so to act his divine power in them as to enable them unto all the duties of their holy calling, evidencing them to be accepted with him both unto themselves and others, and asserting their preservation unto eternal salvation." In both the case of Christ and believers, the sealing is the communication of the Spirit unto them, and the effects are the gracious operations of the Spirit, enabling them to live according to their radical callings. For believers specifically, God, by the sealing of the Spirit, gives testimony that they are his, assurance of that relationship, and evidence to the world, while also protecting them unto final consummation.

Chapter 7: The Spirit an Earnest, and How

When discussing the Spirit as an earnest, Owen is again unsatisfied with human illustrations, this time with transactional language. The Spirit is really neither a pledge or collateral, nor an earnest or down payment, as if God is

somehow in anyone's debt or as if a business deal has been struck. Giving security to something future is as far as the metaphor goes. In God's case, he is unilaterally bestowing grace. Believers are given a foretaste of the future now by the Holy Spirit, who also guarantees that future. The Spirit is an "earnest," Owen's preferred term, of our inheritance, which, under forfeiture, needed to be purchased for us by Christ. "The way whereby we come to have an interest in Christ, and thereby a right unto the inheritance, is by the participation of the Spirit of Christ," argues Owen. By communication of the Spirit, we are made joint heirs with Christ; therefore, he is the earnest of our inheritance. He is the firstfruits of the full harvest to come, a spiritual and eternal redemption. In Owen's estimation, nothing could be more comforting.

A Discourse of Spiritual Gifts (1693)

In Owen's analysis of spiritual gifts, he has two primary aims. First, to explain what spiritual gifts are, distinguishing the ordinary from the extraordinary gifts, the latter being no longer operative. And second, to elevate the ordinary gifts as the God-given, sufficient means for building the church. These purposes arose out of the enthusiasm found in the seventeenth-century religious sects, as well as the prevalent charismatic manifestations. They also explain the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, for it was the neglect of the ordinary gifts that resulted in that sacramental institution. And it was the misguided grasping at the extraordinary gifts that occasioned superstition and endless miracle accounts there. As Owen completes his objectives, he protects the balance between the inward and outward call to ministry and insists that the ministry of the gospel cannot be done in human power.

Chapter 1: Spiritual Gifts, Their Names and Significations

Owen's examination of spiritual gifts consists of brief discussions of their name and nature, followed by a treatment of their distribution as both extraordinary and ordinary, which forms the body of the treatise. The definition Owen provides is this: spiritual gifts "are free and undeserved effects of divine bounty." From the human perspective, they are spiritual powers aimed at a certain end. But most basically, they are undeserved gifts. To get at the nature of spiritual gifts, Owen enumerates the similarities and differences with saving graces. The commonalities are three. First, both spiritual gifts and saving graces are purchased by Christ for his church. Christ distributes gifts as the only legitimate weapons of the warfare that consists in the establishing and edifying of the church. Second, they share the same immediate efficient cause. They both are wrought by the power of

the Holy Spirit. Third, they both are designed unto the good, benefit, ornament, and glory of the church. Grace gives the church an invisible life; gifts give it a visible profession. In Owen's words, "That profession which renders a church visible according to the mind of Christ, is the orderly exercise of the spiritual gifts bestowed on it, in a conversation evidencing the invisible principle of saving grace."

Chapter 2: Differences between Spiritual Gifts and Saving Grace

The differences between spiritual gifts and saving graces are seven. Graces are the fruit of the Spirit; gifts are the effects of his operation. Graces proceed from electing love, gifts from temporary election. Graces are the essential effects of the covenant; gifts are part of the outward administration. Graces proceed from the priestly office of Christ, gifts from his kingly office. Graces cannot be lost, though they can decay, while gifts can be taken away. Graces are bestowed primarily for the individual's good, gifts for the benefit of others. Principally, graces possess the whole soul, whereas gifts are present in the mind or theoretical intellect, meaning that while grace necessarily transforms the soul and its presence guarantees that one belongs to Christ, the same cannot be said of gifts. Here Owen protects the distinction between the invisible and visible church and makes sense of false professors of Christianity who appear to be saved.

Chapter 3: Of Gifts and Offices Extraordinary; and First of Offices

Transitioning to extraordinary spiritual gifts, Owen explains first extraordinary offices, then the gifts themselves and their origin, duration, use, and end. Offices in general exist whenever there is power and a duty to be performed by it. Extraordinary offices include also an extraordinary call and the bestowal of extraordinary power. The three extraordinary offices are apostle, evangelist, and prophet. Owen explains the special calling and exceptional power attached to each office.

Chapter 4: Of Extraordinary Spiritual Gifts

The extraordinary gifts themselves are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. At the outset of the discussion of this list, Owen distinguishes between gifts that exceed the whole power and faculties of humanity, including miracles and healings, and endowments and improvements of the faculties of the minds of men, such as wisdom, knowledge, and utterance. This distinction is significant because the latter gifts differ only in degree from the ordinary gifts continually dispensed throughout the history of the church. The first

gift in Paul's list is word of wisdom. Owen understands this as wisdom itself, specifically the wisdom promised to the apostles in the face of adversaries. It also includes special wisdom for the management of gospel truths for the edification of the church. Word of knowledge is "such a peculiar and special insight into the mysteries of the gospel, as whereby those in whom it was were enabled to teach and instruct others." This was initially needed in the church by immediate revelation. Faith, often understood in the context of troubles and trials or suffering, is "a peculiar confidence, boldness, and assurance of mind in the profession of the gospel and the administration of its ordinances." Gifts of healing are referenced in the plural because of their free communication unto many persons. They are distinct from miracles for several reasons. They are a sign unto believers, rather than unbelievers. There is a peculiar goodness and relief toward mankind in them. The kindness, love, and compassion demonstrated in them results in appreciation and obedience flowing from gratitude. Miracles are an immediate effect of divine power exceeding all created abilities. In the context of the early church, Owen claims, "this gift of miracles was exceedingly useful, and necessary unto the propagation of the gospel, the vindication of the truth, and the establishment of them that did believe." Prophecy refers to both the faculty of prediction and the ability to declare the mind of God from the word by the special and immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit. Discerning of spirits was the ability to judge between the Spirit's work and Satan's plagiarized counterfeits. Finally, in reference to tongues and their interpretation, Owen asserts that tongues were sometimes understood by the speakers and the church and at other times not. While tongues were effectual for the propagation of the gospel to unbelievers, interpretation was added that the church might be edified by the gift.

*Chapter 5: Of the Origin, Duration, Use, and
End of Extraordinary Spiritual Gifts*

The extraordinary gifts and extraordinary offices ended together, coinciding with the establishment of the early church. However, Owen does not rule out the possibility of God continuing to work miraculously. He says, "It is not unlikely but that God might on some occasions, for a longer season, put forth his power in some miraculous operations, and so he yet may do, and perhaps does sometimes." When the extraordinary gifts were operative, they were the glory, honor, and beauty of the church. They were aimed at setting up, planting, advancing, and propagating the kingdom of Christ in the establishment of the church. Those chosen and

called for this purpose were enabled by these gifts. Such persons were of course insufficient in themselves, as God purposed the gospel to suffer every disadvantage humanly speaking. It was by the gifts that preaching was rendered effectual. Miracles filled the world with an apprehension of the divine power accompanying the gospel and its preachers. The extraordinary spiritual gifts left no doubt that Christ and the message of his apostles were divine revelation.

Chapter 6: Of Ordinary Gifts of the Spirit

Owen initiates his discussion of the ordinary gifts of the Spirit in the context of the continuation of the ministry of the church. The designation of ordinary must not be understood as in any way pejorative or diminishing. Ordinary simply separates these gifts from the miraculous gifts. They differ only in degree from what the extraordinary office holders possessed. The term also designates the continued supply of gifts throughout the continuation of the ordinary state of the church. Before addressing the gifts themselves, Owen dissects the ministry itself. The ministry is itself Christ's gift to the church, acquired by his humiliation and death, distributed when he ascended unto his exaltation, and consisting in spiritual gifts. The ministerial office continues as the spiritual gifts are continually dispensed and recognized by the church in its calling of ministers. The aim of the ministry is the edification of the church, through protection and the service of the word. The gifts of the Spirit enable ministers to discharge their responsibilities.

Chapter 7: Of Spiritual Gifts Enabling the Ministry to the Exercise and Discharge of Their Trust and Office

The ordinary spiritual gifts are much more than mere natural abilities, and they are antecedently necessary to legitimate a minister. In other words, they come from God, and therefore the outward call of the church alone, though essential, is insufficient. Owen's main claim is this:

There is a special dispensation and work of the Holy Ghost in providing able ministers of the New Testament for the edification of the church, wherein the continuance of the ministry and being of the church, as to its outward order, does depend; and that herein he does exert his power and exercise his authority in the communication of spiritual gifts unto men, without a participation whereof no man has de jure, any lot or portion in this ministration.

Owen supports this claim with an argument of eight propositions:

1. Christ has promised to be present with his church.
2. This promised presence is by his Spirit.
3. It is secured by an everlasting, unchangeable covenant.
4. The gospel is called the ministration of the Spirit and ministers of it the ministers of the Spirit.
5. The end for which the Spirit is promised is the preservation of the church in the world.
6. The communication of gifts is the means to this end.
7. As such, they are indispensable for gospel administrations.
8. And all of this is demonstrably true in the experience of the church in any age.

But what of the actual ordinary gifts of the Spirit?

Chapter 8: Of the Gifts of the Spirit with Respect unto Doctrine, Worship, and Rule

Owen concludes his treatise with a taxonomy of ministerial gifts. There are three categories, gifts that pertain to the doctrine, worship, and rule of the church.

First, gifts concerning doctrine help accomplish the primary duty of the ministry—namely, the dispensation of the doctrine of the gospel to the church through preaching. The Spirit gives wisdom, knowledge, or understanding—all designations of the same concept—of the mysteries of the gospel. These can be distinguished, but all speak to acquaintance with and comprehension of doctrine necessary for preaching. In short, the Spirit provides

such a comprehension of the scope and end of the Scripture, of the revelation of God therein, such an acquaintance with the systems of particular doctrinal truths, in their rise, tendency, and use, such a habit of mind in judging of spiritual things, and comparing them one with another, such a distinct insight into the springs and course of the mystery of the love, grace, and will of God in Christ, as enables them in whom it is to declare the counsel of God, to make known the way of life, of faith and obedience unto others, and to instruct them in their whole duty to God and man thereon.

The Spirit also gives skill in dividing the word properly, in culling doctrines from the biblical text and applying them. To do this aright, the minister must

be well acquainted with his flock and aware of how God's grace operates on minds and hearts, the nature of temptation and the obstacles to faith and obedience, and spiritual diseases and remedies. The last gift concerning preaching is the gift of utterance. Far from natural speaking ability, the gift of utterance is freedom in the declaration of truth—holy confidence, authority, and gravity in expression.

The remaining ministerial gifts are those touching worship and the rule of the church. The gifts concerning worship can be summarized under the heading "prayer," which includes confession, supplication, thanks, and praise. Owen does not treat this in any length but rather points the reader to his *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*. Gifts concerning the rule of the church are spiritual, with nothing in common with the administration of the powers of the world. They consist in the "humble, holy, spiritual application of the word of God or rules of the gospel" to the church.

The ministry gifts that fall into these three categories are dispensed to church members at large as well. When gifts are attached to duties rather than offices, as in the case of ministers, they are to be exercised in the building up of the body. The gifts are not communicated by extraordinary infusion. They are not attainable in people's diligence alone. But means are ordinarily used in their realization and growth. The gifts ought to be prepared for through the inculcation of humility, meekness, and teachability. They ought to be prayed for and faithfully exercised when granted. Ministry, true ministry, the kind that does in fact build the church and further the cause of the gospel, cannot be done in human power.

A DISCOURSE OF THE
WORK OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT IN PRAYER

*With a Brief Inquiry into
the Nature and Use of Mental
Prayer and Forms.*

By John Owen, D.D.

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The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer

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Preface to the Reader

IT IS ALTOGETHER NEEDLESS to premise anything in this place concerning the necessity, benefit, and use of prayer in general. All men will readily acknowledge that as without it there can be no religion at all, so the life and exercise of all religion does principally consist therein. Wherefore, that way and profession in religion which gives the best directions for it, with the most effectual motives unto it, and most abounds in its observance, has therein the advantage of all others. Hence also it follows, that as all errors which either pervert its nature or countenance a neglect of a due attendance unto it are pernicious in religion; so differences in opinion, and disputes about any of its vital concerns, cannot but be dangerous and of evil consequence. For on each hand these pretend unto an immediate regulation of Christian practice in a matter of the highest importance unto the glory of God and the salvation of the souls of men. Whereas, therefore, there is nothing more requisite in our religion than that true apprehensions of its nature and use be preserved in the minds of men, the declaration and defense of them, when they are opposed or unduly traduced,¹ is not only justifiable but necessary also.

This is the design of the ensuing discourse. There is in the Scripture a promise of the Holy Ghost to be given unto the church as “a Spirit of grace and of supplications.”² As such, also, there are particular operations ascribed unto him. Mention is likewise frequently made of the aids and assistances which he affords unto believers in and unto their prayers. Hence, they are said to “pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”³ Of the want of these aids and assistances to enable them to pray according to the mind of God some do profess that they have experience, as also of their efficacy unto

1 I.e., shamed or blamed falsely.

2 Zech. 12:10.

3 Eph. 6:18.

that end when they are received. Accordingly, these regulate themselves in this whole duty in the expectation or improvement of them. And there are those who, being accommodated with other aids of another nature, to the same purpose, which they esteem sufficient for them, do look on the former profession and plea of an ability to pray by the aids and assistances of the Holy Spirit to be a mere empty pretense.

And in the management of these different apprehensions, those at variance seem to be almost barbarians one to another, the one being not able to understand what the other do vehemently affirm. For they are determined in their minds, not merely by notions of truth and falsehood, but by the experience which they have of the things themselves, a sense and understanding whereof they can by no means communicate unto one another. For whereas spiritual experience of truth is above all other demonstrations unto them that do enjoy it, so it cannot be made an argument for the enlightening and conviction of others. Hence those who plead for prayer by virtue of supplies of gifts and grace from the Holy Spirit do admire that the use or necessity of them herein should be contradicted. Nor can they understand what they intend who seem to deny that it is every man's duty, in all his circumstances, to pray as well as he can, and to make use in his so doing of the assistance of the Spirit of God. And by "prayer" they mean that which the most eminent and only proper signification of the word does denote, namely, that which is vocal. Some, on the other side, are so far from the understanding of these things, or a conviction of their reality, that with the highest confidence they despise and reproach the pretense of them. To "pray in the Spirit" is used as a notable expression of scorn, the thing signified being esteemed fond and contemptible.

Moreover, in such cases as this, men are apt to run into excesses in things and ways which they judge expedient, either to countenance their own opinions or to depress and decry those of them from whom they differ. And no instances can be given in this kind of greater extravagances than in that under consideration. For hence it is that some do ascribe the origin of free prayer among us, by the assistance of the Spirit of God, unto an invention of the Jesuits, which is no doubt to make them the authors of the Bible. And others do avow that all forms of prayer used among us in public worship are mere traductions⁴ from the Roman Breviaries and Missal.⁵ But these things will be afterward spoken unto. They

⁴ I.e., acts of defamation or slander.

⁵ Breviaries were books of the Latin liturgical rites of the Roman Catholic Church. The Missal was the book containing the prescribed prayers, chants, and instructions for the Catholic celebration of the Mass.

are here mentioned only to evince⁶ the use of a sedate⁷ inquiry into the truth or the mind of God in this matter, which is the design of the ensuing discourse.

EXPERIENCE REGULATED BY SCRIPTURE

That which should principally guide us in the management of this inquiry is, that it be done unto spiritual advantage and edification, without strife or contention. Now, this cannot be without a diligent and constant attendance unto the two sole rules of judgment herein, namely, Scripture revelation and the experience of them that do believe. For although the latter is to be regulated by the former, yet where it is so, it is a safe rule unto them in whom it is. And in this case, as in water, face answers unto face, so do Scripture revelation and spiritual experience unto one another. All other reasonings, from customs, traditions, and feigned consequences, are here of no use. The inquiries before us are concerning the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the aids and assistances which he gives unto believers in and unto their prayers, according unto the mind of God, as also what are the effects and fruits of that work of his, or what are the spiritual abilities which are communicated unto them thereby. Antecedently hereunto it should be inquired whether indeed there be any such thing or not, or whether they are only vainly pretended unto by some that are deceived. But the determination hereof depending absolutely on the foregoing inquiries, it may be handled jointly with them, and needs no distinct consideration. He that would not deceive nor be deceived in his inquiry after these things must diligently attend unto the two forementioned rules of Scripture testimony and experience. Other safe guides he has none. Yet will it also be granted that from the light of nature, from whence⁸ this duty springs, wherein it is founded, from whence as unto its essence it cannot vary, as also from generally received principles of religion suited thereunto,⁹ with the uncorrupted practice of the church of God in former ages, much direction may be given unto the understanding of those testimonies and examination of that experience.

Wherefore, the foundation of the whole ensuing discourse is laid in the consideration and exposition of some of those texts of Scripture wherein these things are expressly revealed and proposed unto us, for to insist on them all were endless. This we principally labor in, as that whereby not only must the controversy be finally determined, but the persons that manage it

6 I.e., provide evidence for.

7 I.e., calm.

8 I.e., where.

9 I.e., in order for this to occur.

be eternally judged. What is added concerning the experience of them that do believe the truth herein claims no more of argument unto them that have it not than it has evidence of proceeding from and being suited unto those divine testimonies. But whereas the things that belong unto it are of great moment unto them who do enjoy it, as containing the principal acts, ways, and means of our intercourse and communion with God by Christ Jesus, they are here somewhat at large, on all occasions, insisted on, for the edification of those whose concern lies only in the practice of the duty itself. Unless, therefore, it can be proved that the testimonies of the Scripture produced and insisted on do not contain that sense and understanding which the words do determinately express, for that only is pleaded, or that some have not an experience of the truth and power of that sense of them, enabling them to live unto God in this duty according to it, all other contests about this matter are vain and useless.

But yet there is no such work of the Holy Spirit pleaded herein as should be absolutely inconsistent with or condemnatory of all those outward aids of prayer by set composed forms which are almost everywhere made use of. For the device being ancient, and in some degree or measure received generally in the Christian world, though a no less general apostasy in many things from the rule of truth at the same time, in the same persons and places, cannot be denied, I shall not judge of what advantage it may be or has been unto the souls of men, nor what acceptance they have found therein, where it is not too much abused. The substance of what we plead from Scripture and experience is only this, that whereas *God has graciously promised his Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of grace and supplications, unto them that do believe, enabling them to pray according to his mind and will, in all the circumstances and capacities wherein they are, or which they may be called unto, it is the duty of them who are enlightened with the truth hereof to expect those promised aids and assistances in and unto their prayers, and to pray according to the ability which they receive thereby.*¹⁰ To deny this to be their duty, or to deprive them of their liberty to discharge it on all occasions, rises up in direct opposition unto the divine instruction of the sacred word.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

But, moreover, as was before intimated, there are some generally allowed principles, which, though not always duly considered, yet cannot at any time

¹⁰ Italics in this treatise are in the original.

be modestly denied, that give direction toward the right performance of our duty herein. And they are these that follow.

1. It is the duty of every man to pray for himself. The light of nature, multiplied divine commands, with our necessary dependence on God and subjection unto him, give life and light unto this principle. To own a Divine Being is to own that which is to be prayed unto, and that it is our duty so to do.

2. It is the duty of some, by virtue of natural relation or of office, to pray with and for others also. So is it the duty of parents and masters of families to pray with and for their children and households. This also derives from those great principles of natural light that God is to be worshiped in all societies of his own erection, and that those in the relations mentioned are obliged to seek the chiefest good of them that are committed unto their care; and so is it frequently enjoined in the Scripture. In like manner, it is the duty of ministers to pray with and for their flocks, by virtue of special institution. These things cannot be, nor, so far as I know of are, questioned by any; but practically the most of men live in an open neglect of their duty herein. Were this but diligently attended unto, from the first instance of natural and moral relations unto the instituted offices of ministers and public teachers, we should have less contests about the nature and manner of praying than at present we have. It is holy practice that must reconcile differences in religion, or they will never be reconciled in this world.

3. Everyone who prays, either by himself and for himself, or with others and for them, is obliged, as unto all the uses, properties, and circumstances of prayer, to pray as well as he is able. For by the light of nature everyone is obliged in all instances to serve God with his best. The confirmation and exemplification hereof was one end of the institution of sacrifices under the Old Testament. For it was ordained in them that the chief and best of every thing was to be offered unto God. Neither the nature of God nor our own duty toward him will admit that we should expect any acceptance with him, unless our design be to serve him with the best that we have, both for matter and manner. So is the mind of God himself declared in the prophet:

“If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? [. . .] Ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; should I accept this of your hand?” saith the Lord. “But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.” (Mal. 1:8, 13–14)

4. In our reasonable service, the best wherewith¹¹ we can serve God consists in the intense, sincere actings of the faculties and affections of our minds, according unto their respective powers, through the use of the best assistances we can attain. And if we omit or forego, in any instance, the exercise of them according to the utmost of our present ability, we offer unto God the sick and the lame. If men can take it on themselves, in the sight of God, that the invention and use of set forms of prayer, and other the like outward modes of divine worship, are the best that he has endowed them with for his service, they are free from the force of this consideration.

5. There is no man but, in the use of the aids which God has prepared for that purpose, is able to pray according to the will of God, and as he is in duty obliged, whether he pray by himself and for himself, or with others and for them also. There is not by these means perfection attainable in the performance of any duty, neither can all attain the same measure and degree as unto the usefulness of prayer and manner of praying; but everyone may attain unto that wherein he shall be accepted with God, and according unto the duty whereunto he is obliged, whether personally or by virtue of any relation wherein he stands unto others. To suppose that God requires duties of men which they cannot perform in an acceptable manner, by virtue and in the use of those aids which he has prepared and promised unto that end, is to reflect dishonor on his goodness and wisdom in his commands. Wherefore, no man is obliged to pray, in any circumstances, by virtue of any relation or office, but he is able so to do according unto what is required of him; and what he is not able for he is not called unto.

6. We are expressly commanded to pray, but are nowhere commanded to make prayers for ourselves, much less for others. This is superadded,¹² for a supposed conveniency, unto the light of nature and Scripture institution.

7. There is assistance promised unto believers to enable them to pray according unto the will of God; there is no assistance promised to enable any to make prayers for others. The former part of this assertion is explained and proved in the ensuing discourse, and the latter cannot be disproved. And if it should be granted that the work of composing prayers for others is a good work, falling under the general aids of the Holy Spirit necessary unto every good work whatever, yet are not those aids of the same kind and nature with his actual assistances in and unto prayer as he is the Spirit of grace and supplications. For in the use of those assistances by grace and gifts, every man

¹¹ I.e., by which.

¹² I.e., increased in a compounding way.

that uses them does actually pray, nor are they otherwise to be used; but men do not pray in the making and composing forms of prayer, though they may do so in the reading of them afterward.

8. Whatever forms of prayer were given out unto the use of the church by divine authority and inspiration, as the Lord's Prayer and the psalms or prayers of David, they are to have their everlasting use therein, according unto what they were designed unto. And be their end and use what it will, they can give no more warranty for human compositions unto the same end, and the injunction of their use, than for other human writings to be added unto the Scripture.

SET FORMS OF PRAYER: THE BURDEN OF THE MISSAL

These and the like principles, which are evident in their own light and truth, will be of use to direct us in the argument in hand, so far as our present design is concerned therein. For it is the vindication of our own principles and practice that is principally designed, and not an opposition unto those of other men. Wherefore, as was before intimated, neither these principles nor the divine testimonies, which we shall more largely insist upon, are engaged to condemn all use of set forms of prayers as sinful in themselves, or absolutely unlawful, or such as so vitiate¹³ the worship of God as to render it wholly unacceptable in them that choose so to worship him. For God will accept the persons of those who sincerely seek him, though, through invincible ignorance, they may mistake in sundry things as unto the way and manner of his worship. And how far, as unto particular instances of miscarriage, this rule may extend, he only knows, and of men, whatever they pretend, not one. And where any do worship God in Christ with an evidence of holy fear and sincerity, and walk in a conversation answerable unto the rule of the gospel, though they have manifold corruptions in the way of their worship, I shall never judge severely either of their present acceptance with God or of their future eternal condition. This is a safe rule with respect unto others; our own is, to attend with all diligence unto what God has revealed concerning his worship, and absolutely comply therewith, without which we can neither please him nor come to the enjoyment of him.

I do acknowledge, also, that the general prevalency of the use of set forms of prayer of human invention in Christian assemblies for many ages, more than any other argument that is urged for their necessity, requires a tenderness

¹³ I.e., impair.

in judgment as unto the whole nature of them, and the acceptance of their persons in the duty of prayer by whom they are used. Yet no consideration of this usage, seeing it is not warranted by the Scriptures, nor is of apostolic example, nor is countenanced by the practice of the primitive churches, ought to hinder us from discerning and judging of the evils and inconveniences that have ensued thereon,¹⁴ nor from discovering how far they are unwarrantable as unto their imposition. And these evils may be here a little considered.

The beginnings of the introduction of the use of set forms of prayer of human composition into the worship of the church are altogether uncertain, but that the reception of them was progressive, by new additions from time to time, is known to all. For neither Rome nor the present Roman Missal were built in a day. In that and the Breviaries did the whole worship of the church issue, at least in these parts of the world. No man is so fond as to suppose that they were of one entire composition, the work of one age, of one man, or any assembly of men at the same time, unless they be so brutishly devout as to suppose that the Massbook was brought from heaven unto the pope by an angel, as the Alcoran¹⁵ was to Mohammed. It is evident, indeed, that common people, at least of the communion of the papal Church, do believe it to be as much of a divine origin as the Scripture, and that on the same grounds of the proposal of it unto them, as the only means of divine worship, by their Church. Hence is it unto them an idol. But it is well enough known how from small beginnings, by various accessions, it increased unto its present form and station. And this progress, in the reception of devised forms of prayer in the worship of the church carried along with it sundry pernicious concomitants,¹⁶ which we may briefly consider.

Transubstantiation and the Mass

In and by the additions made unto the first received forms, the superstitious and corrupt doctrines of the apostasy in several ages were insinuated into the worship of the church. That such superstitious and corrupt doctrines were gradually introduced into the church is acknowledged by all Protestants, and is sufficiently known; the supposition of it is the sole foundation of the Reformation. And by this artifice of new additions to received forms, they were from time to time admitted into and stated in the worship of the church, by which principally to this very day they preserve their station in the minds

¹⁴ I.e., as a result.

¹⁵ I.e., Koran.

¹⁶ I.e., accompaniments.

of men. Were that foundation of them taken away, they would quickly fall to the ground.¶¹⁷

By this means did those abominations of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass both leaven and poison the whole worship of the public assemblies, and imposed themselves on the credulity of the people.¹⁸ The disputes of speculative men, superstitious and subtle, about these things, had never infected the minds of the common people of Christians, nor ever been the means of that idolatry which at length spread itself over the whole visible church of these parts of the world, had not this device of prescribed forms of prayer, wherein those abominations were not only expressed but graphically represented and acted, so violently affecting the carnal minds of men superstitious and ignorant, imposed them on their practice, which gradually hardened them with an obdurate credulity. For although they saw no ground or reason doctrinally to believe what was proposed unto them about transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass, and might easily have seen that they were contradictory unto all the conductive¹⁹ principles of men and Christians, namely, faith, reason, and sense, yet they deceived themselves into an obstinate pretense of believing in the notion of truth of what they had admitted in practice. Men, I say, of corrupt minds might have disputed long enough about vagrant forms, accidents without subjects, transmutation of substances without accidents, sacrifices bloody and unbloody, before they had vitiated the whole worship of the church with gross idolatry, had not this engine been made use of for its introduction, and the minds of men by this means been inveigled²⁰ with the practice of it. But when the whole matter and means of it was gradually insinuated into, and at length comprised in, those forms of prayer which they were obliged continually to use in divine service, their whole souls became leavened and tainted with a confidence in and love unto these abominations.

Hence it was that the doctrines concerning the sacraments, and the whole worship of God in the church, as they became gradually corrupted, were not at once objectively and doctrinally proposed to the minds and considerations

¹⁷ The ¶ symbol indicates that a paragraph break has been added to Owen's original text.

¹⁸ Transubstantiation is the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist that teaches that the elements of the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus. Using Aristotelian categories, the elements change in their "substance," but not in their "accidents," when the priest consecrates them and sacrifices Christ anew. So they are really changed, but the change is imperceptible. This teaching was officially adopted at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and reasserted at the Council of Trent (1545–1563).

¹⁹ I.e., productive or efficient.

²⁰ I.e., enticed.

of men, to be received or rejected, according to the evidence they had of their truth or error, a method due to the constitution of our nature, but gradually insinuated into their practice by additional forms of prayer, which they esteemed themselves obliged to use and observe. This was the gilding of the poisonous pill, whose operation, when it was swallowed, was to bereave men of their sense, reason, and faith, and make them madly avow that to be true which was contrary unto them all.

Besides, as was before intimated, the things themselves that were the groundwork of idolatry, namely, transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass, were so acted and represented in those forms of worship as to take great impression on the minds of carnal men, until they were mad on their idols. For when all religion and devotion is let into the soul by fancy and imagination, excited by outward spectacles, they will make mad work in the world, as they have done, and yet continue to do. But hereof I shall speak in the next place.

It had, therefore, been utterly impossible that an idolatrous worship should have been introduced into the church in general, had not the opinion of the necessity of devised forms of prayer been first universally received. At least it had not been so introduced and so established as to procure and cause the shedding of the blood of thousands of holy persons for not complying with it. By this means alone was brought in that fatal engine of the church's ruin, from whose murderous efficacy few escaped with their lives or souls. Had all churches continued in the liberty wherein they were placed and left by our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles,²¹ it is possible that many irregularities might have prevailed in some of them, and many mistakes been admitted in their practice; yet this monster of the Mass, devouring the souls of the most, and drinking the blood of many, had never been conceived nor brought forth, at least not nourished into that terrible form and power wherein it appeared and acted for many ages in the world. And upon the account thereof it is not without cause that the Jews say that the Christians received their Tephilloth, or prayer books, from Armilus—that is, Antichrist.

It is true, that when the doctrine of religion is determined and established by civil laws, the laws of the nation where it is professed, as the rule of all outward advantages, liturgies composed in compliance therewith are not so subject to this mischief. But this arises from that external cause alone. Otherwise, wherever those who have the ordering of these things do deviate

²¹ Here Owen is implying his Congregationalism, his church polity that gave local churches autonomy.

from the truth once received, as it is common for the most so to do, forms of prayers answerable unto those deviations would quickly be insinuated. And the present various liturgies that are among the several sorts of Christians in the world are of little other use than to establish their minds in their peculiar errors, which by this means they adhere unto as articles of their faith.

And hereby did God suffer contempt to be cast upon the supposed wisdom of men about his worship and the ways of it. They would not trust unto his institutions and his care of them, but did first put the ark into a cart, and then, like Uzzah, put forth a hand of force to hold it when it seemed to shake. For it is certain that, if not the first invention, yet the first public recommendation and prescription, of devised forms of prayer unto the practice of the churches, were designed to prevent the insinuation of false opinions and corrupt modes of worship into the public administrations. This was feared from persons infected with heresy that might creep into the ministry. So, the orthodox and the Arians composed prayers, hymns, and doxologies, the one against the other, inserting in them passages confirming their own profession and condemning that of their adversaries.²² Now, however this invention might be approved while it kept within bounds, yet it proved the Trojan horse that brought in all evils into the city of God in its belly. For he who was then at work in the mystery of iniquity laid hold on the engine and occasion to corrupt those prayers, which, by the constitution of them who had obtained power in them, the churches were obliged and confined unto. And this took place effectually in the constitution of the worship of the second race of Christians,²³ or the nations that were converted unto the Christian faith after they had destroyed the western Roman empire.²⁴

To speak briefly and plainly, it was by this means alone, namely, of the necessary use of devised forms of prayer in the assemblies of the church, and of them alone, that the Mass, with its transubstantiation and sacrifice, and all the idolatrous worship wherewith they are accompanied, were introduced, until the world, inflamed with those idols, drenched itself in the blood of the saints and martyrs of Christ, for their testimony against these abominations. And if it had been sooner discovered that no church was entrusted with power from Christ to frame and impose such devised forms of worship as are not warranted by the Scripture, innumerable evils might have been prevented.

22 This took place during the fourth-century Trinitarian controversies. Arians were followers of the heretic Arius (ca. 250–336), who denied the divinity of Christ.

23 Owen is here referring to New Testament Christians or the church, as distinct from believing Jews in the Old Testament.

24 Rome officially fell in AD 476.

For that there were no liturgies composed, no imposed use of them, in the primitive churches for some ages, is demonstratively proved with the very same arguments whereby we prove that they had neither the Mass nor the use of images in their worship. For besides the utter silence of them in the apostolical writings, and those of the next ensuing ages, which is sufficient to discard their pretense unto any such antiquity, there are such descriptions given of the practice of the churches in their worship as are inconsistent with them and exclusive of them; besides, they give such a new face to divine worship, so different from the portraiture of it delivered in the Scripture, as is hardly reconcilable thereunto, and so not quickly embraced in the church.

I do not say that this fatal consequence of the introduction of humanly devised set forms of prayer in the worship of the church, in the horrible abuse made of it, is sufficient to condemn them as absolutely unlawful. For where the opinions leading unto such idolatrous practices are openly rejected and condemned, as was before intimated, there all the causes, means, and occasions of that idolatry may be taken out of them and separated from them, as it is in the liturgies of the Reformed churches, whether imposed or left free. But it is sufficient to lay in the balance against that veneration which their general observance in many ages may invite or procure. And it is so also to warrant the disciples of Christ to stand fast in the liberty wherewith he has made them free.

Arbitrary Ceremonies

Another evil, which either accompanied or closely followed on the introduction of devised forms of prayer into the church, was a supposed necessity of adorning the observance of them with sundry arbitrary ceremonies. And this also in the end, as is confessed among all Protestants, increased superstition in its worship, with various practices leading unto idolatry. It is evident that the use of free prayer in church administrations can admit of no ceremonies but such as are either of divine institution, or are natural circumstances of the actions wherein the duties of worship do materially consist. Divine institution and natural light are the rules of all that order and decency which is needful unto it.²⁵ But when these devised forms were introduced, with a supposition of their necessity, and sole use in the church in all acts of immediate worship, men quickly found that it was needful to set them off with adventitious²⁶

²⁵ Owen is here defending the regulative principle of worship, the Reformed doctrine that teaches that Scripture has positively prescribed the worship of God, not merely indicated what must be excluded. See the Westminster Confession of Faith (chap. 21) and Savoy Declaration (chap. 22).

²⁶ I.e., accidental; not essential.

ornaments. Hereon there was gradually found out, and prescribed unto constant observation, so many outward postures and gestures, with attires, music, bowings, cringes, crossings, venerationes, censings, altars, images, crucifixes, responds,²⁷ alternatives, and such a rabble of other ceremonies, as rendered the whole worship of the church ludicrous, burdensome, and superstitious. And hereon it came to pass that he who is to officiate in divine service is obliged to learn and practice so many turnings and windings of himself, eastward and westward, to the altar, to the wall, to the people, so many gestures and postures, in kneeling, rising, standings, bowings, less and profound, secret and loud speakings, in a due observance of the interposition of crossings, with removals from one place to another, with provision of attires, in their variety of colors and respect to all the furniture of their altars, as are difficult to learn, and foolishly antic in their practice, above all the preparations of players for the stage. Injunctions for these and the like observances are the subject of the rubric of the Missal and the cautels²⁸ of the Mass.

That these things have not only no affinity with the purity, simplicity, and spirituality of evangelical worship, but were invented utterly to exclude it out of the church and the minds of men, needs no proof unto any who ever read the Scripture with due consideration. Nor is the office of the ministry less corrupted and destroyed by it. For besides a sorry cunning in this practice, and the reading of some forms of words in an accommodation unto these rites, there was little more than an easy good intention to do what he does, and not the quite contrary, required to make any one man or woman, as it once at least fell out, to administer in all sacred worship.

Having utterly lost the Spirit of grace and supplications, neglecting at best all his aids and assistances, and being void of all experience in their minds of the power and efficacy of prayer by virtue of them, they found it necessary by these means to set off and recommend their dead forms. For the lifeless carcass of their forms merely alone were no more meet²⁹ to be esteemed prayer than a tree or a log was to be esteemed a god, before it was shaped, fashioned, gilded, and adorned. By this means they taught the image of prayer, which they had made, to speak and act a part to the satisfaction of the spectators. For the bare reading of a form of words, especially as it was ordered in an unknown tongue, could never have given the least contentment unto the multitude, had it not been set off with this variety of ceremonies, composed to make an appearance of devotion and sacred veneration. Yet, when they had

²⁷ I.e., responses.

²⁸ I.e., tricks or trickeries.

²⁹ I.e., fitting; proper.

done their utmost, they could never equal the ceremonies and rites of the old temple worship, in beauty, glory, and order; nor yet those of the heathen, in their sacred Eleusinian Mysteries,³⁰ for number, solemnity, gravity, and appearance of devotion. Rejecting the true glory of gospel worship, which the apostle expressly declares to consist in the “administration of the Spirit,”³¹ they substituted that in the room thereof which debased the profession of Christian religion beneath that of the Jews and Pagans, especially considering that the most of their ceremonies were borrowed of them or stolen from them. ¶

But I shall never believe that their conversion of the holy prayers of the church, by an open contempt of the whole work of the Spirit of God in them, into a theatrical, pompous observance of ludicrous rites and ceremonies, can give so much as present satisfaction unto any who are not given up to strong delusions to believe a lie. The exercise of engrafted prevalent superstition will appease a natural conscience; outward forms and representations of things believed will please the fancy, and exercise the imagination; variety, and frequent changes of modes, gestures, and postures, with a sort of prayer always beginning and always ending, will entertain present thoughts and outward senses, so that men, finding themselves by these means greatly affected, may suppose that they pray very well when they do nothing less. For prayer, consisting in a holy exercise of faith, love, trust, and delight in God, acting themselves in the representation of our wills and desires unto him, through the aid and assistance of the Holy Ghost, may be absent, where all these are most effectually present.

This also produced all the pretended ornaments of their temples, chapels, and oratories, by crucifixes, images, a multiplication of altars, with relics, tapers, vestments, and other utensils.

None of these things, whereby Christian religion is corrupted and debased, would ever have come into the minds of men, had not a necessity of their invention been introduced by the establishment of set forms of prayer, as the only way and means of divine worship. And wherever they are retained, proportionably unto the principles of the doctrine which men profess, some such ceremonies must be retained also. I will not, therefore, deny but that here lies the foundation of all our present differences about the manner of divine worship. Suppose a necessity of confining the solemn worship of the church unto set forms of prayer, and I will grant that sundry rituals and ceremonies may be well judged necessary to accompany their observance. For without them they will quickly grow obsolete and unsatisfactory. And

³⁰ The Eleusinian Mysteries were the annual rites performed by the ancient Greeks at the village of Eleusis near Athens in honor of their gods, Demeter and Persephone.

³¹ 2 Cor. 3:8.

if, on the other hand, free prayer in the church be allowed, it is evident that nothing but the grace and gifts of the Holy Ghost, with a due regard unto the decency of natural circumstances, is required in divine service, or can be admitted therein.

Neither yet is this consequent, how inseparable soever it seems from the sole public use of set forms of prayer in sacred administrations, pleaded to prove them either in themselves or their use to be unlawful. The design of this consideration is only to show that they have been so far abused, that they are so subject to be abused, and do so always stand in need to be abused, that they may attain the ends aimed at by them, as much weakens the plea of the necessity of their imposition.

Imposition

For this also is another evil that has attended their invention. The guides of the church, after a while, were not contented to make use of humanly devised forms of prayer, confining themselves unto their use alone in all public administrations, but, moreover, they judged it meet to impose the same practice on all whom they esteemed to be under their power. And this at length they thought lawful, yea, necessary to do on penalties, ecclesiastical and civil, and in the issue capital.³² When this injunction first found a prevalent entertainment is very uncertain. For the first two or three centuries there were no systems of composed forms of prayer used in any church whatever, as has been proved. Afterward, when they began to be generally received, on such grounds and for such reasons as I shall not here insist on, but may do so in a declaration of the nature and use of spiritual gifts, with their continuance in the church, and an inquiry into the causes of their decay, the authority of some great persons did recommend the use of their compositions unto other churches, even such as had a mind to make use of them, as they saw good.¶

But as unto this device of their imposition, confining churches not only unto the necessary use of them in general, but unto a certain composition and collection of them, we are beholden for all the advantage received thereby unto the popes of Rome alone, among the churches of the second edition.³³ For, from their own good inclination, and by their own authority, without the advice of councils or pretense of traditions, the two Gorgons' heads,³⁴

³² This is a reference to capital penalties or execution.

³³ "Second edition" is a reference to the churches in the second stage of imposition he is discussing.

³⁴ "The two Gorgons' heads" is an idiomatic description of "councils" and "traditions," indicating they are too horrible to behold. In Greek mythology, Medusa, whose hair was made of snakes the beholding of which would turn one to stone, was the Gorgon killed by Perseus.

whereby in other cases they frighten poor mortals, and turn them into stones, by various degrees they obtained a right to impose them, and did it accordingly. For when the use and benefit of them had been for a while pleaded, and thence a progress made unto their necessity, it was judged needful that they should be imposed on all churches and Christians by their ecclesiastical authority. But when afterward they had insinuated into them, and lodged in their bowels, the two great idols of transubstantiation and the unbloody sacrifice, not only mulcts³⁵ personal and pecuniary, but capital punishments, were enacted and executed to enforce their observance. This brought fire and fagot³⁶ into Christian religion, making havoc of the true church of Christ, and shedding the blood of thousands. For the martyrdom of all that have suffered death in the world for their testimony against the idolatries of the Mass derives originally from this spring alone of the necessary imposition of complete liturgical forms of prayer. For this is the sole foundation of the Roman Breviary and Missal, which have been the Abaddons³⁷ of the church of Christ in these parts of the world, and are ready once more to be so again. Take away this foundation, and they all fall to the ground. And it is worth consideration of what kind that principle is, which was naturally improved unto such pernicious effects, which quickly was found to be a meet and effectual engine in the hand of Satan to destroy and murder the servants of Christ.

Had the churches of Christ been left unto their primitive liberty under the enjoined duties of reading and expounding the Scripture, of singing psalms unto the praise of God, of the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and of diligent preaching the word, all of them with prayer, according unto the abilities and spiritual gifts of them who did preside in them, as it is evident that they were for some ages, it is impossible for any man to imagine what evils would have ensued thereon that might be of any consideration, in comparison of those enormous mischiefs which followed on the contrary practice. And as unto all the inconveniences which, as it is pretended, might ensue on this liberty, there is sufficient evangelical provision for their prevention or cure made in the gospel constitution and communion of all the true churches of Christ.

But this was not the whole of the evil that attended this imposition, for by this means all spiritual ministerial gifts were caused to cease in the church. For as they are talents given to trade with, or manifestations of the Spirit

³⁵ I.e., fines or penalties.

³⁶ I.e., a bundle of sticks; kindling.

³⁷ The Hebrew term *Abaddon* in the Bible refers to the place of destruction and also the angel of death or the abyss.

given to profit or edify the church, they will not reside in any subject, they will not abide, if they are by any received, if they are not improved by continual exercise. We see every day what effects the contempt or neglect of them does produce. Wherefore, this exercise of them being restrained and excluded by this imposition, they were utterly lost in the church, so that it was looked on as a rare thing for anyone to be able to pray in the administration of divine worship, yea, the pretense of such an ability was esteemed a crime, and the exercise of it a sin scarce to be pardoned; yet do I not find it in any of the ancient canons reckoned among the faults for which a bishop or a presbyter was to be deposed. But that hereon arose, in those who were called to officiate in public assemblies, as unto the gifts which they had received for the edification of the church in divine administrations, that neglect which has given a fatal wound unto the light and holiness of it, is openly evident. For when the generality of men of that order had provision of prayers made for them, which they purchased at an easy rate, or had them provided for them at the charge of the people, they were contented to be at rest, freed from that labor and travail of mind which are required unto the constant exercise and improvement of spiritual gifts. This imposition was the grave wherein they were buried. For at length, as it is manifest in the event, our Lord Jesus Christ being provoked with their sloth and unbelief, did withhold the communication of such gifts from the generality of those who did officiate in divine worship. And hereby they lost, also, one great evidence of the continuance of his mediatory life in heaven for the preservation of the church.

It is known that this was and is the state of things in the Roman church with reference unto their whole worship in their public assemblies. And, therefore, although they have indulged divers enthusiasts, whose revelations and actings, pretended from the Holy Spirit, have tended to the confirmation of their superstitions, and some of them have ventured at notions about mental prayer which they understand not themselves, yet as unto free prayer by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, in the church assemblies or otherwise, they were the first, and continue to be the fiercest opposers of it; and it is their interest so to be. For shake this foundation of the imposition of an entire system of humanly devised prayers for the only way and means of the worship of the church, and the whole fabric of the Mass, with all the weight of their religion, if vanity and imagination may be said to have any weight, which is laid thereon, will tumble into the pit from whence it came. And, therefore, I must here acquaint the reader that the first occasion of writing this discourse was the perusal of Mr. Cressy's preface to his *Church-History*, wherein, out of a design to advance the pretended mental prayer of some of

his enthusiasts, he reflects with much contumely³⁸ and reproach upon that free praying by the aids of the Spirit of God which we plead for.³⁹ And he will find that all his pretenses are examined in the latter part of this discourse.

But notwithstanding these things, those of the Roman church do at this day boast themselves of their devotions in their prayers private and public, and have prevailed thereby on many, disposed unto a compliance with them by their own guilt, ignorance, and superstition. The vanity of their pretense has been well detected, by evincing the idolatry whereby all or the most of their devotions are vitiated and rendered unacceptable. But this also is of weight with me, that the provision of the system and order of their whole devotion, and its exercise, are apparently composed and fitted unto the exclusion of the whole work of the Spirit of God in prayer. And yet do they continue under such an incredible delusion as to oppose, revile, and condemn the prayers of others who are not of their communion, on this consideration, that those who make them have not the Holy Spirit nor his aids, which are all confined unto their Church. But if any society of men in the world maintaining the outward profession of Christian religion can do more to exclude the Holy Ghost and all his operations, in prayer and divine worship, than their church has done, I shall acknowledge myself greatly mistaken. It is nothing but ignorance of him and his whole work, with all the ends for which he is promised unto the church, that I say, not a hatred and detestation of them, that causes any to embrace their ways of devotion.

CONCLUSION

But to return. The things pleaded for may be reduced unto the ensuing heads.

1. No persons, no churches, are obliged, by virtue of any divine constitution, precept, or approved example, to confine themselves, in their public or private worship, unto set or humanly devised forms of prayer. If any such constitution, precept, or example can be produced, which hitherto has not been done, it ought to be complied with. And while others are left unto their liberty in their use, this is sufficient to enervate⁴⁰ all pleas for their imposition.

2. There is a promise in the Scripture, there are many promises, made and belonging unto the church unto the end of the world, of the communication

³⁸ I.e., harsh treatment; contempt.

³⁹ Hugh Paulinus Cressy (1605–1674) was an English convert to Roman Catholicism who became a Benedictine monk. He is remembered for his *The Church-History of Brittany, or England, from the Beginning of Christianity to the Norman Conquest* (Rouen, 1668). No modern edition exists.

⁴⁰ I.e., weaken.

of the Holy Spirit unto it, as unto peculiar aids and assistances in prayer. To deny this, is to overthrow the foundation of the holiness and comfort of all believers, and to bring present ruin to the souls of men in distress.

3. It is the duty of believers to look after, to pray for, those promised aids and assistances in prayer. Without this all those promises are despised, and looked on as a flourish of words, without truth, power, or efficacy in them. But,

4. This they are commanded to do, and have blessed experience of success therein. The former is plain in the Scripture, and the latter must be left unto their own testimony living and dying.

5. Beyond the divine institution of all the ordinances of worship in the church, with the determination of the matter and form which are essential unto them, contained in the Scripture, and a due attendance unto natural light in outward circumstances, there is nothing needful unto the due and orderly celebration of all public worship in its assembly. If any such thing be pretended, it is what Christ never appointed, nor the apostles ever practiced, nor the first churches after them, nor has it any promise of acceptance.

6. For the preservation of the unity of faith, and the communion of churches among themselves therein, they may express an agreement, as in doctrine by a joint confession of faith, so in a declaration of the material and substantial parts of worship, with the order and method thereof; on which foundation they may in all things communicate with each other as churches, and in the practice of their members.

7. Whereas the differences about prayer under consideration concern Christian practice in the vitals of religion, great respect is to be had unto the experience of them that do believe, where it is not obstructed and clouded by prejudices, sloth, or adverse principles and opinions. Therefore, the substance of the greatest part of the ensuing discourse consists principally in the declaration of those concerns of prayer which relate unto practice and experience. And hence it follows,

8. That the best expedient to compose these differences among us, is for everyone to stir up the gift and grace of God that is in him, and all of us to give up ourselves unto that diligence, frequency, fervency, and perseverance in prayer which God requires of us, especially in such a season as that wherein we live. A time wherein they, whoever they be, who trouble others may, for aught⁴¹ they know, be near unto trouble themselves. This will be the most effectual means to lead us all unto the acknowledgment of the truth, and without which an agreement in notions is of little use or value.

41 I.e., everything.

But, I confess, hopes are weak concerning the due application of this remedy unto any of our evils or distempers. The opinions of those who deny all internal, real, efficacious operations of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men, and deride all their effects, have so far diffused and rivetted themselves into the minds of many that little is to be expected from a retreat unto those aids and reliefs. This evil in the profession of religion was reserved for these latter ages. For although the work and grace of the Holy Spirit in divine worship was much neglected and lost in the world, yet no instances can be given in ages past of such contempt cast upon all his internal grace and operations as now abounds in the world. If the Pelagians,⁴² who were most guilty, did fall into any such excesses, they have escaped the records and monuments that remain of their department. Bold efforts they are of atheistical inclinations in men openly avowing their own ignorance and utter want of all experience in things spiritual and heavenly. Neither does the person of Christ or his office meet with better entertainment among many; and by some they have been treated with scurrility⁴³ and blasphemy. In the meantime, the contests about communion with churches are great and fierce. But where these things are received and approved, those who live not on a traditionary faith will not forsake Christ and the gospel, or renounce faith and experience, for the communion of any church in the world.

But all flesh almost has corrupted its way. The power of religion, and the experience of it in the souls of men, being generally lost, the profession of it is of no great use, nor will long abide. Yea, multitudes, all the world over, seem to be weary of the religion which themselves profess, so far as it is pleaded to be of divine revelation, be it true or false, unless it be where they have great secular advantages by their profession of it. There is no greater pretense of a flourishing state in religion than that of some churches of the Roman communion, especially one at this day. But if the account which is given us from among themselves concerning it be true, it is not much to be gloried in. For set aside the multitude of atheists, antiscriturists, and avowed disbelievers of the supernatural mysteries of the gospel, and the herd that remains influenced into a hatred and persecution of the truth by a combination of men upholding themselves and their way by extravagant secular interests and advantages, is not very highly considerable. Yea, their present height seems to be on a precipice. What inroads in other places, bold

⁴² Pelagians are those who hold to the heterodox teachings of Pelagius (ca. 354–418), who denied original sin and believed that human beings had the free will to achieve perfection without the aid of divine grace.

⁴³ I.e., coarse language; vulgarity.

opinions concerning the authority of Scripture and the demonstration of it, the person and office of Christ, the Holy Spirit and all his operations, with the advancement of a pretense of morality in opposition to evangelical grace in its nature and efficacy, are made every day is known unto all who consider these things. And although the effects of this poison discover themselves daily, in the decays of piety, the increase of immoralities of all sorts, and the abounding of flagitious⁴⁴ sins, exposing nations unto the high displeasure of God, yet the security of most in this state of things proclaims itself in various fruits of it, and can never be sufficiently deplored.

Whereas, therefore, one means of the preservation of the church, and its deliverance out of these evils, is a due attendance unto the discharge of this duty of prayer, the declaration of its nature, with a vindication of the springs and causes from whence it derives its efficacy, which are attempted in the ensuing discourse, may, I hope, through the blessing of God, be of some use unto such whose minds are sincere in their inquiries after truth.

44 I.e., villainous.

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer
as the Spirit of Grace and Supplications,
and the Duty of Believers Therein

*With a Brief Inquiry into the Nature
and Use of Mental Prayer and Forms*

The Use of Prayer, and the Work of the Holy Spirit Therein

THE WORKS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD toward believers are either general, and not confined with a respect unto any one duty more than another, or particular, with respect unto some special duty. Of the first sort are regeneration and sanctification, which, being common unto them all, are the general principles of all actings of grace or particular duties in them. But there are, moreover, sundry special works or operations of this Holy Spirit in and toward the disciples of Christ, which, although they may be reduced unto the general head of sanctification, yet they fall under a special consideration proper unto themselves; of this sort is the aid or assistance which he gives unto us in our prayers and supplications.

I suppose it will be granted that prayer, in the whole compass and extent of it, as comprising meditation, supplication, praise, and thanksgiving, is one of the most signal duties of religion. The light of nature in its most pregnant notions, with its practical language in the consciences of mankind, concurs in its suffrage with the Scripture in this matter. For they both of them jointly witness that it is not only an important duty in religion, but also that without it there neither is nor can be the exercise of any religion in the world. Never any persons lived in the acknowledgment of a deity, but under the conduct of the same apprehension they thought the duty of vows, prayers, and praises, incumbent on them, as they found occasion. Yea, although they found out external, ceremonious ways of solemnizing their devotions, yet it was this duty of prayer alone which was their natural, necessary, fundamental acknowledgment of that divine being which they did own. Neither are there any considerable stories extant recording the monuments of the ancient heathen

nations of the world, wherein, to the shame of degenerate Christianity it may be spoken, there are not more frequent accounts given of their sacred invocations and supplications unto their supposed gods than are to be found in any of the historical monuments and stories concerning the actions of Christian nations in these latter ages. This, therefore, is the most natural and most eminent way and means of our converse with God, without which converse we have no present advantage above the beasts that perish but such as will turn unto our eternal disadvantage in that misery whereof they are incapable. This is the way whereby we exercise toward him all that grace which we do receive from him, and render him an acceptable acknowledgment of that homage and revenue of glory which we are never able to exhibit in their due kind and measure. Of what use and advantage the due performance of this duty is unto ourselves no man is able fully to express; everyone can add somewhat of his own experience. But we need not insist on the commendation of prayer, for it will be said, "By whom was it ever discommended?"

And I wish I saw reason to acquiesce¹ in that reply. For not only the practice of the most, but the declared opinions of many, do evidence that neither the excellency of this duty nor its necessity does find such acceptance and esteem in the minds of men as is pretended. But this being not my present design, I shall not farther insist upon it.

For my purpose is not to treat of the nature, necessity, properties, uses, effects, and advantages of this gracious duty, as it is the vital breath of our spiritual life unto God. Its origin in the law of nature, as the first and principal means of the acknowledgment of a divine power, whereof the neglect is a sufficient evidence of practical atheism, for he that prays not says in his heart, "There is no God,"² its direction in the Scripture, as to the rule, manner, and proper object of it, the necessity of its constant use and practice, both from special commands and our state in this world, with the whole variety of inward and outward occasions that may befall us, or we may be exercised with, arguments, motives, and encouragements unto constancy, fervency, and perseverance in the performance of the duty of it, with known examples of its mighty efficacy and marvelous success, the certain advantages which the souls of believers do receive thereby, in spiritual aids and supplies of strength, with peace and consolation, with sundry other of its concerns, although much treated of already by many, might yet be further considered and improved. But none of these is my present design. The interest of the Holy Spirit of God by his gracious operations in it is that alone which I shall inquire into.

1 I.e., accept; comply.

2 Ps. 14:1.

And it cannot be denied but that the work and actings of the Spirit of grace in and toward believers with respect unto the duty of prayer are more frequently and expressly asserted in the Scripture than his operations with respect unto any other particular grace or duty whatever. If this should be called into question, the ensuing discourse, I hope, will sufficiently vindicate and confirm its truth. But hereby believers are instructed, as in the importance of the duty itself, so in the use and necessity of the aid and assistance of the Spirit of God in and unto the right discharge or performance of it. For where frequent plain revelations concur, in multiplied commands and directions, with continual experience, as it is with them in this case, their instruction is firm, and in a way of being fixed on their minds. As this renders an inquiry hereinto both necessary and seasonable, for what can be more so than that wherein the spiritual life and comfort of believers are so highly concerned, and which exhibits unto us so gracious a condescension of divine love and goodness? So, moreover, the opposition that is made in the world against the work of the Spirit of God herein, above all other [of] his operations, requires that something be spoken in the vindication of it.

But the enmity hereunto seems to be peculiar unto these latter ages, I mean among such as pretend unto any acquaintance with these things from the Scripture. It will be hard to find an instance in former ages of any unto whom the Spirit of God, as a Spirit of grace and supplication, was a reproach. But as now the contradiction herein is great and fierce; so is there not any difference concerning any practical duty of religion wherein parties at variance are more confident and satisfied in and about their own apprehensions than they are who dissent about the work of the Spirit of God in our prayers and supplications. For those who oppose what is ascribed by others unto him herein are not content to deny and reject it, and to refuse a communion in the faith and practice of the work so ascribed unto him, but, moreover, such is the confidence they have in their conceptions, that they revile and speak evil contemptuously and despitefully of what they do oppose. Hence ability to pray, as is pleaded, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, is so far from being allowed to be a gift, or a grace, or a duty, or any way useful among men, that it is derided and scorned as a paltry faculty, fit to be exploded from among Christians. And at length it is traduced as an invention and artifice of the Jesuits, to the surprise and offence of many sober persons; the unadvisedness of which insinuation the ensuing discourse will manifest.

Others, again, profess that of all the privileges whereof they are made partakers in this world, of all the aids, assistances, or gifts which they receive from or by the Spirit of God, that which he communicates and helps them with in

their prayers and supplications is the most excellent and inestimable. And herein they have, living and dying, in all troubles, distresses, temptations, and persecutions, such assurance and satisfaction in their minds, as that they are not in the least moved with all the scorn and contempt that are cast upon their profession and practice in the exercise of the gift which they have received, but rather judge that they contract the guilt of great sin to themselves by whom this work of the Spirit is reproached. Hence, I know not any difference about religious things that is managed with greater animosities in the minds of men and worse consequents than this which is about the work of the Spirit of God in prayer, which, indeed, is the hinge on which all other differences about divine worship do turn and depend. It may, therefore, be well worth our while, yea, it is our duty, sedately and diligently to inquire into what the Scripture teaches us in this matter, wherein we must acquiesce, and whereby all experiences on the one side or the other must be tried and regulated. ¶

Two things, therefore, I do propose unto myself in the ensuing discourse, concerning both which I shall plainly and briefly endeavor the satisfaction of indifferent and unprejudiced readers. And these are, first, to evince *that there is promised and actually granted a special work of the Spirit of God in the prayers or praises of believers under the New Testament*; secondly, to declare *the nature of that work, wherein it does consist*, or the manner of the operation of the Holy Spirit therein. And if in these things no impression can be made on the minds of men possessed with those mighty prejudices which reject their very proposal and all consideration of them with contempt, yet it may be of use unto them who, being not biased with the undue love or hatred of parties of men, nor elated with high valuations of their own conceptions above those of others, whom they think they have reason if not to hate, yet to scorn, do sincerely desire to live unto God, and to prefer the performance of their duty unto all other considerations, endeavoring to subdue their inclinations and affections thereunto. Nor do I desire more of any reader but that he will grant that he is herein conversant about things which will have an influence into his everlasting account.

Zechariah 12:10 Opened and Vindicated

THE SPECIAL PROMISE of the administration of the Spirit of God unto the end under consideration is that which I shall lay as the foundation of the ensuing discourse. “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications” (Zech. 12:10). The Spirit here promised is the Spirit of God, “the Holy Spirit,” with respect unto the special end for which he is promised. And the manner of his administration in the accomplishment of the promise is expressed by *ושפכתי*, “I will pour out.” The same word is used to the same purpose (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28), as are also other words of the same importance, which we render by “pouring out” (as Prov. 1:23; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; 52:15).

EXEGETICAL POINTS

1. Two things have been elsewhere declared concerning this expression, applied unto the communication of the Holy Ghost.¹ (1) That a plentiful dispensation of him unto the end for which he is promised, with respect unto a singular and eminent degree in his operations, is intended therein. The apostle expresses this word, or the accomplishment of what is promised in it, by *ἐξέχεεν πλουσίως*, “he has richly,” or abundantly, “poured out his Spirit” (Titus 3:6). Not, therefore, a mere grant and communication of the Spirit, but a plentiful effusion of him, is intended; which must have some

¹ *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love Grace, and Consolation; or, The Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded* (1657), pt. 3, chap. 3.

eminent effects as pledges and tokens thereof. For it is absurd to speak of a “plentiful, abundant effusion,” with degrees above what was before granted, and yet there be no certain ways or means whereby it may be evidenced and demonstrated. The Spirit, therefore, is so promised in this place as to produce some notable and peculiar effects of his communication. (2) That this promise is peculiar unto the days of the gospel; I mean, every promise is so where mention is made of pouring out the Spirit on men; which may be evinced by the consideration of every place where this expression is used. But in this place, it is most unquestionable, the immediate effect of it being a looking unto Christ as he was pierced. And it may be yet further observed, that there is a tacit comparison in it with some other time or season, or some other act of God, wherein or whereby he gave his Spirit before, but not in that way, manner, or measure that he now promises to bestow him. Of the whole of these observations, Didymus gives us a brief account: “Now the expression ‘pouring forth’ indicates a lavish gift of great bounty and abundance. And so, whenever one or two receive the Holy Spirit anywhere [in the Scriptures], ‘I will pour forth of my Spirit’ is not said. For this is only said when the gift of the Holy Spirit is given in abundance to all nations.”²

2. Those unto whom he is thus promised are “the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” that is, the whole church, expressed in a distribution into the ruling family and the body of the people under their rule. And the family of David, which was then in supreme power among the people in the person of Zerubbabel, is expressly mentioned for three reasons: (1) Because the faithfulness of God in his promises was concerned in the preservation of that family, whereof the Messiah was to spring, Christ himself being thereby, in the rule of the church, typed out in a special manner. (2) Because all the promises in a peculiar manner were first to be fulfilled in the person of Christ, so typed by David and his house. On him the Spirit, under the New Testament, was first to be poured out in all fullness,

2 In the text: *Significat autem effusionis verbum, largam, et divitem muneris abundantiam; itaque cum unus quis alicubi, aut duo Spiritum Sanctum accipiunt, non dicitur, ‘Effundam de Spiritu meo,’ sed tunc, quando in universas gentes munus Spiritus Sancti redundaverit (De Spir. Sanc. i. 1).*—Owen. For the Latin text, see Louis Doutreleau, *Didyme l’Aveugle, traité du Saint-Esprit: Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index*, Sources Chrétiennes 386 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 192. For the English translation, see *Works on the Holy Spirit: Athanasius the Great and Didymus the Blind*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres, Popular Patristics 43 (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 159. Didymus (ca. 313–398) was an Alexandrian theologian and defender of Trinitarianism. His *On the Holy Spirit* is an orthodox defense of the divinity of the third person of the Godhead.

and from him to be communicated unto others. (3) It may be to denote the special gifts and graces that should be communicated unto them who were to be employed in the rule and conduct of the church under him, the king and head thereof. And “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” is a phrase expressive of the whole church, because that was the seat of all their public ordinances of worship (see Ps. 122). Wherefore, the whole spiritual church of God, all believers, are the object of this promise, as represented in the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

3. The special qualifications of the promised Spirit are two: for (1) He is to be רוח חן, a “Spirit of grace.” חן which the Greek constantly renders χάρις, and we from the Latin *gratia*, “grace,” is derived from חנן, as is also the following word, which signifies to “have mercy,” or “compassion,” to be “gracious,” as all the words whereby God’s gracious dealings with sinners in the Hebrew do include the signification of pity, compassion, free goodness, and bounty. And it is variously used in the Scripture. Sometimes for the grace and favor of God, as it is the fountain of all gracious and merciful effects toward us (Rom. 1:7; 4:16; 5:2, 15, 20; 6:1; 11:5; 1 Cor. 1:3; and in other places innumerable) and sometimes for the principal effect thereof, or the gracious favor of God whereby he accepts us in Christ (Eph. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:12), which is the grace the apostle prays for in the behalf of the church (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23). And sometimes it is applied unto the favor of men, and acceptance with them, called the “finding grace” or “favour” in the sight of any (Gen. 39:4, 21; 1 Sam. 2:26; Rom. 15:11; Est. 2:15, 17; 5:2; Luke 2:52; Acts 4:33). And sometimes for the free effectual efficacy of grace in those in whom it is (Acts 14:26; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9). And sometimes for our justification and salvation by the free grace or favor of God in Christ (John 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:13). For the gospel itself, as the instrument of the declaration and communication of the grace of God (2 Cor. 6:1; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:6; Titus 2:11). For the free donation of the grace and gifts of the Spirit (John 1:16; Eph. 4:7). And many other significations it has, which belong not unto our purpose.

Three things may be intended in this adjunct of grace: [1] A respect of the sovereign cause of his dispensation, which is no other but the mere grace of God. He may be called a “Spirit of grace,” because his donation is an effect of grace, without the least respect unto any desert in those unto whom he is given. This reason of the appellation is declared (Titus 3:4–7). The sole cause and reason, in opposition unto our own works or deservings, of the pouring out of the Spirit upon us, is the love and kindness of God in Jesus Christ; whence he may be justly called a “Spirit of grace.” [2] Because he is

the author of all grace in and unto them on whom he is poured out; so God is called the “God of all grace,”³ because he is the fountain and author of it. And that the Holy Spirit is the immediate efficient cause of all grace in us has been elsewhere proved, both in general and in the principal instances of regeneration and sanctification, and it shall be yet further confirmed in what does ensue.⁴ [3] חַן is commonly used for that grace or favor which one has with another: “Let me find grace in thy sight,” as in the instances before quoted. And so, the Spirit also may be called a “Spirit of grace,” because those on whom he is poured out have grace and favor with God; they are gracious with him, as being “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). Whereas, therefore, all these concur wherever this Spirit is communicated, I know no reason why we may not judge them all here included, though that in the second place be specially intended. The Spirit is promised to work grace and holiness in all on whom he is bestowed.

(2) He is, as thus poured out, a Spirit תְּחִנּוּנִים, “of supplications,” that is, of prayer for grace and mercy. The word is formed from חָנַן, as the other, to be gracious or merciful; and, expressing our act toward God, it is prayer for grace—supplication. And the original is never used but to express vocal prayer, either in the assemblies of the people of God or by private persons. “Hearken to the voice of my supplications,” is rendered by the apostle Paul ἰκετηρίας (Heb. 5:7), in which place alone in the Scripture that word is used. Originally it signifies a bough or olive branch wrapped about with wool or bays, or something of the like nature, which those carried in their hands and lifted up, who were suppliants unto others for the obtaining of peace or the averting of their displeasure. Hence came the phrase of *velamenta praeferre*, “to hold out such covered branches.” So, *Ramos oleae, ac velamenta alia supplicantium porrigentes, orare, ut reciperent sese*—“Holding forth olive-branches, and other covered tokens used by suppliants, they prayed that they might be received” into grace and favor.⁵ Which custom Virgil declares in his *Aeneas* addressing himself to Evander:

³ 1 Pet. 5:10.

⁴ *Πνευματολογία, or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit: Wherein an Account Is Given of His Name, Nature, Personality, Dispensation, Operations, and Effects; His Whole Work in the Old and New Creation Is Explained; the Doctrine concerning It Vindicated from Oppositions and Reproaches. The Nature Also and Necessity of Gospel Holiness; the Difference between Grace and Morality, or a Spiritual Life unto God in Evangelical Obedience and a Course of Moral Virtues, Are Stated and Declared* (1674), bk. 3.

⁵ In the text: (Livy, *De Bel. Punic.*, lib. Xxiv. Cap. 30).—Owen. This quote is drawn from Livy’s *History of Rome*, a monumental and influential history of the city and empire, from its mythical founding through the reign of Livy’s contemporary, Augustus. For the Latin text and English

Noblest of the sons of Greece, to whom Fortune has willed that I make
 my prayer,
 and offer boughs decked with fillets⁶

And they called them ἱκετηρίας θαλλοὺς, “branches of supplication,” or prayer. And they constantly called those prayers which they made solemnly unto their gods, *supplicia* and *supplications*: “In that year were many portents, to avert which the senate decreed supplications for two days.”⁷ A form of which kind of prayer we have in Cato: “Father Mars, I pray and beseech you so that calamities . . .”⁸

Some render תַּחֲנוּנִים by “miserationes” or “lamentationes,” and interpret it of men’s bemoaning themselves in their prayers for grace and mercy, which in the issue varies not from the sense insisted on. But whereas it is derived from חָנַן, which signifies to be “merciful” or “gracious,” and expresses an act of ours toward God, it can properly signify nothing but supplications for mercy and grace, nor is it otherwise used in the Scripture (see Job 41:3; Prov. 18:23; Dan. 9:3; Jer. 31:9; 2 Chron. 6:21; Jer. 3:21; Pss. 28:2, 6; 31:22; 116:1; 130:2; 140:6; 143:1; Dan. 9:18, 23; Ps. 86:6), which are all the places, besides this, where the word is used; in all which it denotes deprecation of evil and supplication for grace, constantly in the plural number, to denote the earnestness of men.

תַּחֲנוּנִים, therefore, are properly supplications for grace and mercy, for freedom and deliverance from evil, put by a synecdoche⁹ for all sorts of prayer whatever. We may, therefore, inquire in what sense the Holy Spirit of God is called a “Spirit of supplications,” or what is the reason of this attribution unto

translation, see Livy, *History of Rome*, vol. 6, *Books 23–25*, trans. Frank Gardner Moore, Loeb Classical Library 355 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 272–73.

6 In the text: *Optime Grajugenûm, cui me fortuna precari, Et vittâ comptos voluit praetendere ramos* (Virg. Aen. viii. 127).—Owen. These lines come from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, a first-century BC epic poem that addresses the founding of Rome. For the Latin text and English translation, see Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 7–12. Appendix Vergiliana*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 64 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 68–69.

7 In the text: *Eo anno prodigia multa fuerunt: quorum averruncandorum causa supplicationes in biduum senatus decrevit* (Liv., lib. x. cap. 23).—Owen. For the Latin text and English translation, see Livy, *History of Rome*, vol. 4, *Books 8–10*, trans. B. O. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 191 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 442–43.

8 In the text: *De Re Rustica*, cap. xiii, *Mars pater te precor quæsoque ut calamitates*.—Owen. Cato (234–149 BC) was a Roman soldier and statesman. Of his many influential writings, his *On Agriculture*, the earliest surviving work in Latin prose, from which the quoted prayer comes, is all that survives. The quotation is actually drawn from chap. 141. For Latin text and English translation, see Cato and Varro, *On Agriculture*, trans. W. D. Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash, Loeb Classical Library 283 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 120–23.

9 I.e., a figure of speech in which part of a whole is named as a substitute for the whole.

him. And he must be so either formally or efficiently, either because he is so in himself or unto us. If in the former way, then he is a Spirit who himself prays, and, according to the import of those Hebraisms, abounds in that duty. As a “man of wickedness” (Isa. 55:7), or a “man of blood,” is a man wholly given to wickedness and violence, so, on the other hand, a “Spirit of supplication” should be a Spirit abounding in prayer for mercy and the diverting of evil, as the word imports. Now, the Holy Ghost cannot be thus a Spirit of supplication, neither for himself nor us. No imagination of any such thing can be admitted with respect unto himself without the highest blasphemy. Nor can he in his own person make supplications for us. For besides that any such interposition in heaven on our behalf is in the Scripture wholly confined unto the priestly office of Christ and his intercession, all prayer, whether oral or interpretative only, is the act of a nature inferior unto that which is prayed unto. This the Spirit of God has not, he has no nature inferior unto that which is divine. We cannot, therefore, suppose him to be formally a Spirit of supplication, unless we deny his deity. He is so, therefore, efficiently with respect unto us, and as such he is promised unto us. Our inquiry, therefore, in general, is how or in what sense he is so. And there are but two ways conceivable whereby this may be affirmed of him. First, by working gracious inclinations and dispositions in us unto this duty. Second, by giving a gracious ability for the discharge of it in a due manner. These, therefore, must belong unto and do comprise his efficiency as a Spirit of supplication.

THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SPIRIT OF SUPPLICATION

Both of them are included in that of the apostle, “The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:26). Those who can put any other sense on this promise may do well to express it. Every one consistent with the analogy of faith¹⁰ shall be admitted, so that we do not judge the words to be void of sense and to have nothing in them. To deny the Spirit of God to be a Spirit of supplication in and unto believers is to reject the testimony of God himself.

By the ways mentioned we affirm that he is so, nor can any other way be assigned.

¹⁰ The “analogy of faith” is a general sense of the meaning of Scripture, constructed from the clear or unambiguous passages, used as the basis for interpreting difficult texts. For more on the analogy of faith, see Andrew S. Ballitch, *The Gloss and the Text: William Perkins on Interpreting Scripture with Scripture*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 66–68; Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 33.

1. He is so by working gracious inclinations and dispositions in us unto this duty. It is he who prepares, disposes, and inclines the hearts of believers unto the exercise thereof with delight and spiritual complacency. And where this is not, no prayer is acceptable unto God. He delights not in those cries which an unwilling mind is pressed or forced unto by earthly desires, distress, or misery (James 4:3). Of ourselves, naturally, we are averse from any converse and intercourse with God, as being alienated from living unto him by the ignorance and vanity of our minds.

And there is a secret alienation still working in us from all duties of immediate communion with him. It is he alone who works us unto that frame wherein we pray continually, as it is required of us; our hearts being kept ready and prepared for this duty on all occasions and opportunities, being in the meantime acted and steered under the conduct and influence of those graces which are to be exercised therein. This some call the “grace of prayer” that is given us by the Holy Ghost, as I suppose improperly, though I will not contend about it. For prayer absolutely and formally is not a peculiar grace distinct from all other graces that are exercised in it, but it is the way and manner whereby we are to exercise all other graces of faith, love, delight, fear, reverence, self-abasement, and the like, unto certain special ends. And I know no grace of prayer distinct or different from the exercise of these graces. It is, therefore, a holy commanded way of the exercise of other graces, but not a peculiar grace itself. Only, where any person is singularly disposed and devoted unto this duty, we may, if we please, though improperly, say that he is eminent in the grace of prayer. And I do suppose that this part of his work will not be denied by any, no, not that it is intended in the promise. If any are minded to stand at such a distance from other things which are ascribed unto him, or have such an abhorrency of allowing him part or interest in our supplications as that we may in any sense be said to pray in the Holy Ghost, that they will not admit of so much as the work of his grace, and that wrought in believers by virtue of this promise, they will manage an opposition unto his other actings at too dear a rate to be gainers by it.

2. He is so by giving an ability for prayer, or communicating a gift unto the minds of men, enabling them profitably unto themselves and others to exercise all his graces in that special way of prayer. It will be granted afterward that there may be a gift of prayer used where there is no grace in exercise, nor perhaps any to be exercised; that is, as some improperly express it, “the gift of prayer,” where the grace of prayer is not. But in declaring how the Spirit is a Spirit of supplication, we must take in the consideration of both. He both disposes us to pray, that is, to the exercise of grace in that special way, and

enables us thereunto. And where this ability is wholly and absolutely wanting, or where it is rejected or despised, although he may act and exercise those very graces which are to be exercised in prayer, and whose exercise in that way is commonly called the “grace of prayer,” yet this work of his belongs unto the general head of sanctification, wherein he preserves, excites, and acts all our graces, and not unto this special work of prayer, nor is he a Spirit of supplication therein. He is, therefore, only a Spirit of supplication, properly, as he communicates a gift or ability unto persons to exercise all his graces in the way and duty of prayer. This is that which he is here promised for, and promised to be poured out, for that is to be given in an abundant and plentiful manner. Wherever he is bestowed in the accomplishment of this promise, he both disposes the hearts of men to pray and enables them so to do. This ability, indeed, he communicates in great variety, as to the degrees of it and usefulness unto others in its exercise, but he does it unto everyone so far as is necessary unto his own spiritual concerns, or the discharge of his duty toward God and all others. But whereas this assertion contains the substance of what we plead for, the further confirmation of it must be the principal subject of the ensuing discourse.

That this is the sense of the place, and the mind of the Holy Ghost in the words, needs no other demonstration but that it is expressive of their proper signification, neither can any other sense tolerably be affixed on them. To deny the Holy Spirit to be denominated a Spirit of supplication, because he inclines, disposes, and enables them to pray unto whom he is promised, and on whom he is bestowed as such, is to use a little too much liberty in sacred things.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

A learned man of late, out of hatred unto the Spirit of prayer, or prayer as his gift, has endeavored to deprive the church of God of the whole benefit and comfort of this promise.¹¹ For he contends that it belongs not unto the Christian church, but unto the Jews only. Had he said it belonged unto the

¹¹ In the text: (Amyrald. Praefat. in Psal.).—Owen. This is a reference to the preface to Moïse Amyraut, *Paraphrasis in psalmos Davidis una cum annotationibus et argumentis* (Saumur: Desbordes, 1662). No modern edition exists. Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664) was a French Huguenot known for modifying the theology regarding the nature of Christ’s atonement into a view that took his name, Amyraldianism. Often called hypothetical universalism, this perspective understands the atonement as intended by God for all human beings, though its effectiveness for salvation depends on faith, a free gift of God given only to these whom God elected from eternity. See Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press,

Jews in the first place who should be converted unto Christ, he had not gone so wide from the truth nor from the sense of other expositors, though he had said more than he could prove. But to suppose that any grace, any mercy, any privilege by Jesus Christ, is promised unto the Jews, wherein Gentile believers shall be no sharers, that they should not partake of the same kind, whoever has the prerogative as to degrees, is fond and impious. For if they also are children of Abraham, if the blessing of faithful Abraham do come upon them also, if it is through them that he is the heir of the world, his spiritual seed inhabiting it by right in all places, then unto them do all the promises belong that are made unto him and his seed. And whereas most of the exceeding great and precious promises of the Old Testament are made to Jacob and Israel, to Jerusalem and Zion, it is but saying that they are all confined unto the Jews, and so at once to despoil the church of God of all right and title to them, which impious folly and sacrilege has been by some attempted. But whereas all the promises belong unto the same covenant, with all the grace contained in them and exhibited by them, whoever is interested by faith in that covenant is so in all the promises of God that belong thereunto, and has an equal right unto them with those unto whom they were first given.¶

To suppose, now that the Jews are rejected for their unbelief, that the promises of God made unto them while they stood by faith are ceased and of no use, is to overthrow the covenant of Abraham, and, indeed, the whole truth of the New Testament. But the apostle assures us that “all the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us”; that is, in their accomplishment in us and toward us (2 Cor. 1:20). So, also, he positively affirms that all believers have received those promises which originally were made unto Israel (2 Cor. 6:16–18; 7:1). And not only so, but he declares also that the promises which were made of old unto particular persons on special occasions, as to the grace, power, and love contained in them and intended by them, do yet belong unto all individual believers, and are applicable by them unto all their special occasions (Heb. 13:5–6). And their right unto or interest in all the promises of God is that which those who are concerned in the obedience of faith would not forgo for all that this world can supply them with. This, therefore, is only a particular instance of the work and effect of the Spirit, as he is in general promised in the covenant. And, as we have declared, the promises of him as a Spirit of grace and holiness in the covenant belong unto the believers of the Gentiles also. If they

1969); Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

do not, they have neither share nor interest in Christ, which is a better plea for the Jew than this peculiar instance will afford. But this promise is only a special declaration of what in one case this Spirit shall do, who is promised as a Spirit of grace and holiness in the covenant. And, therefore, the author of the evasion, suspecting that the fraud and sacrilege of it would be detected, betakes himself to other subterfuges,¹² which we shall afterward meet with, so far as we are concerned.

It may be more soberly objected, that the Spirit of grace and supplication was given unto believers under the Old Testament; and, therefore, if there be no more in it, if some extraordinary gift be not here intended, how comes it to be made a special promise with respect unto the times of the New Testament? It may, therefore, be supposed that not the ordinary grace or gift of prayer, which believers, and especially the officers of the church, do receive, but some extraordinary gift bestowed on the apostles and first converts to the church, is here intended. So, the prophecy concerning the effusion of the Spirit on all sorts of persons (Joel 2), is interpreted by Peter, and applied unto the sending of the Holy Ghost in miraculous gifts on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

First answer: I have elsewhere already in general obviated¹³ this objection by showing the prodigious folly of that imagination, that the dispensation of the Spirit is confined unto the first times of the gospel, whereof this objection is a branch, as enmity unto the matter treated of is the occasion of the whole.¹⁴ Second, we nowhere find grace and prayer, the things here promised, to be reckoned among the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit under the New Testament. Prayer, indeed, in an unknown tongue was so; but prayer itself was not so, no more than grace, which if it were, the whole present church is graceless. Third, the promise in Joel had express respect unto the extraordinary gifts of prophecy and visions, and therefore had its principal accomplishment on the day of Pentecost. This promise is quite of another nature. Fourth, that which is necessary for and the duty of all believers, and that always, is not an extraordinary gift, bestowed on a few for a season. Now, if there are any who think that grace and prayer are not necessary unto all believers, or that they may have abilities, and exercise them, without any aid of the Holy Spirit, I will not at present contend with them; for this is not a place to plead with those by whom the principles of the Christian faith are denied. Divine commands are the rule of our duty, not man's imaginations. Fifth, if this be not a special promise of the New Testament, because the matter of it, or grace

¹² I.e., deceptions.

¹³ I.e., anticipated; prevented.

¹⁴ *Πνευματολογία, or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit.*

promised, was in some degree and measure enjoyed under the Old, then is there no promise made with respect unto that season; for the saints under the Old Testament were really made partakers of all the same graces with those under the New. Wherefore, sixth, two things are intended in the promise with respect unto the times of the gospel. First, an ampliation¹⁵ and enlargement of this grace or favor, as unto the subjects of it extensively. It was under the Old Testament confined unto a few, but now it shall be communicated unto many, and diffused all the world over. It shall be so poured out as to be shed abroad, and imparted thereby unto many. That which before was but as the watering of a garden by a special hand is now as the clouds pouring themselves forth on the whole face of the earth. Second, an increase of the degrees of spiritual abilities for the performance of it (Titus 3:5–6). There is now a rich communication of the Spirit of grace and prayer granted unto believers in comparison of what was enjoyed under the Old Testament. This the very nature of the dispensation of the gospel, wherein we receive from Jesus Christ “grace for grace,”¹⁶ does evince and confirm. I suppose it needless to prove that, as unto all spiritual supplies of grace, there is brought in an abundant administration of it by Jesus Christ; the whole Scripture testifying unto it.

There were, indeed, under the Old Testament, prayers to and praises of God dictated by a Spirit of prophecy, and received by immediate divine revelation, containing mysteries for the instruction of the church in all ages. These prayers were not suggested unto them by the aid of the Spirit as a Spirit of supplication, but dictated in and to them by the Spirit as a Spirit of prophecy. Nor did they themselves comprehend the mind of the Holy Spirit in them fully, but inquired diligently thereinto, as into other prophecies given out by the Spirit of Christ which was in them (1 Pet. 1:10–12). An instance whereof we may have in Psalm 22. A prayer it is with thanksgiving from first to last. Now, although David, unto whom it was given by inspiration, might find in his own condition things that had some low and mean resemblance of what was intended in the words suggested unto him by the Holy Spirit, as he was a type of Christ, yet the depth of the mysteries contained therein, the principal scope and design of the Holy Ghost, was in a great measure concealed from him, and much more from others. Only it was given out unto the church by immediate inspiration, that believers might search and diligently inquire into what was signified and foretold therein, that so thereby they might be gradually led into the knowledge of the mysteries of God according as he was

¹⁵ I.e., amplification.

¹⁶ John 1:16.

pleased graciously to communicate of his saving light unto them. But withal it was revealed unto David and the other prophets, that in these things they did not minister unto themselves, but unto us, as having mysteries in them which they could not, which they were not, to comprehend. But as this gift is ceased under the New Testament, after the finishing of the canon of the Scripture, nor is it by any pretended unto, so was it confined of old unto a very few inspired persons, and belongs not unto our present inquiry; for we speak only of those things which are common unto all believers, and herein a preference must in all things be given unto those under the New Testament.

If, therefore, it could be proved, which I know it cannot be, that the generality of the church under the Old Testament made use of any forms of prayers, as mere forms of prayer, without any other end, use, or mystical instruction, all which concurred in their prophetic compositions, for the sole end of prayer, yet would it not, whatever any pretend or plead, therefore follow that believers under the New Testament may do the same, much less that they may be obliged always so to do. For there is now a more plentiful and rich effusion of the Spirit of grace and supplication upon them than was upon those of old. And as our duty is to be regulated by God's commands, so God's commands are suited unto the dispensation of his grace. For persons under the New Testament, who are commanded to pray, not to make use constantly in their so doing of the gifts, aids, and assistances of the Spirit, which are peculiarly dispensed and communicated therein, on pretense of what was done under the Old, is to reject the grace of the gospel, and to make themselves guilty of the highest ingratitude. Wherefore, although we may and ought to bear with them who, having not received anything of this promised grace and assistance, nor believing there is any such thing, do plead for the use of forms of prayer to be composed by some and read by others or themselves, and that only, in the discharge of this duty; yet such as have been made partakers of this grace, and who own it their duty constantly to use and improve the promised aids of the Spirit of God, will be careful not to admit of any such principles or practice as would plainly annihilate the promise.

Thus much, then, we may suppose ourselves to have obtained in the consideration of this testimony, *that God has promised under the New Testament to give unto believers, in a plentiful manner or measure, the Spirit of grace and of supplications, or his own Holy Spirit, enabling them to pray according to his mind and will.* The way and manner of his work therein shall be afterward declared. And it may suffice to oppose, in general, this one promise unto the open reproaches and bold contempts that are by many cast on the Spirit of

prayer, whose framers, unless they can blot this text out of the Scripture, will fail at last in their design. We shall not, therefore, need to plead any other testimony to the same purpose in the way of promises. Only we may observe, that this being expressly assigned as a part of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, as promised under the New Testament, there is no one promise to that purpose wherein this grace is not included; therefore, the known multiplication of them adds strength unto our argument.