

The Church Guardian

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Special Notice.

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CALENDAR FOR JUNE.

- JUNE 1st—
" 3rd— } EMBER DAYS.
" 4th— }
" 5th—Trinity Sunday.—(Athana. Creed
Pr. Pref. in Com. Notice of St.
Barnabas.)
" 11th—St. Barnabas, A. & M.
" 12th—1st Sunday after Trinity.
" 19th—2nd Sunday after Trinity. (Notice
of St. John Baptist.)
" 20th—Queen's Accession, 1837.
" 24th—Nativity of St. John Baptist. (Atha.
Creed.)
" 26th—3rd Sunday after Trinity. (Notice
of St. Peter.)
" 29th—St. Peter. A. & M.)

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY FOR A FORM OF PRAYER.

By the Rev. George T. Stokes, M. A.,
Incumbent of Newtown Park Co. Dublin.

(Church Tracts No. 7.)—(Continued.)

Let us now see what testimony the New Testament gives on this point:

First: We find that *Christ sanctioned the use of liturgies by His presence at the synagogues.* A great many persons—I should say, judging from my own experience—confound the synagogue with the temple worship; they regard synagogues somewhat in the light of inferior temples scattered throughout the smaller towns of Palestine, and are not aware that a very broad line of distinction subsisted between these two kinds of worship. I shall, therefore, trace in a very few words the origin of the synagogue worship as distinguished from that of the temple. After the Babylonish captivity when the Jews began to spread abroad beyond the borders of Canaan, and to form settlements in heathen lands, it was found totally impossible to conform to the demands of the Mosaic law, which required the presence of every Jew three times a year at the great festivals held at Jerusalem. These festivals appear to have been the great means, under the older Dispensation, of keeping up the knowledge of the true God, as no provision seems to have been originally made for stated weekly public worship. When it was found impossible, I say, to fulfil the law's requirements in this respect, the Jews devised the plan of establishing synagogues wherever they abode, whereby the knowledge of Jehovah was kept up in their ordinary Sabbath services, and the people were effectually preserved from their former great snare—the worship of false gods. The synagogue worship consisted in reading the law

and the prophets, a sermon, and the reading of set forms of prayer,* but no sacrifices of any kind were offered up in them; as they, by God's own direction, could only be offered at Jerusalem. These synagogues spread by degrees throughout every place where the nation resided; and, mark, though the worship of God was there conducted by fixed forms of prayer, yet our Lord most regularly attended the synagogues (see Luke iv. 16), and thus, by His presence, sanctioned their use, which most certainly He would not have done if such forms were unlawful and wrong.

Again we find, that not only did our Lord sanction the use of forms of prayer by His presence, but that in the words of the text. *He formally lays down and sanctions the general principle on which all liturgies are constructed.* The construction of a liturgy proceeds on this principle—that it is most expedient for all, both ministers and people, that they should be agreed beforehand as to the petitions they are to offer, so that none be presented to God, which might be indecent, or irrelevant, or about which perfect unanimity did not exist among all parties. This is a point which I hope to develop at greater length in tract No. 8; I will merely say here, that our Lord in this passage, lays down this agreement beforehand touching the requests to be made as one of the necessary conditions of true public prayer: "If two of you," said Christ, "shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father, which is in Heaven." How this agreement can be secured without a liturgy, I cannot see, unless minister and people were to meet before each service, and fix upon the matter, if not the very words of their petitions—a course, which, if it be possible, has never yet been adopted.

Further still, I would remark that Christ not only sanctioned the principle on which forms of prayer are constructed, but that *He actually gave a form to His disciples for their own use.* The proof of this statement is short and simple. We find from Luke xi. 1, that as Christ was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us how to pray, as John also taught His disciples, and He said unto them, when ye pray say, "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, &c." In this passage, I maintain, Christ lays down a form of prayer for His disciples. Such is the opinion which any plain unprejudiced mind, unused to the subtle distinctions of controversial literature, would naturally form concerning it; and yet, some persons have objected, that this does not constitute a form of prayer at all; that it is merely a general directory, a bare outline as to what constitutes the objects of prayer, demanded by, and given to, persons previously in ignorance as to how and for what they were to pray. Such an objection, however plausible it may at first sight appear, will not stand a close scrutiny, for it proceeds upon a presumption, which is clearly untenable, that previously to this time the disciples of Christ—men who had been brought up as faithful Jews, over one of whom Christ Himself had previously to this pronounced the eulogium—"Behold an Israelite, indeed, in whom is no guile"—that they were sunk in such a state of gross ignorance in regard to Divine things, that they did not know how, and with what requests to approach their Heavenly Father's throne. It is on the contrary, quite evident that the disciples knowing right well, as every well instructed Jew did, how to approach God in prayer, asked Christ in these words to give them a form, which should be a peculiar and distinguishing mark of their brotherhood; even as John and the other leading religious teachers of the time, were accustomed to deliver to their disciples a form of prayer, which should be the peculiar and distinguishing mark of their own followers.

The persons who urge this plea, when it has failed them, usually object that we cannot draw any argument from the Lord's Prayer, as it should not be used under the New Dispensation—Christ's name not being once mentioned in it. This objection, however, has nothing to say to my argument. Supposing it for a moment to be the case, that the Lord's Prayer should not be used at present—supposing that the want of Christ's name was a sufficient reason for not now using that peculiar form, yet such an objection does not explain how it was that Christ gave a form at all; and offers no valid reason why Christ having given this form of prayer—the Apostles having used this form of prayer, we should be debarred from the use of any forms at all. And in the second place, this objection to the use of the Lord's Prayer, because Christ's name is wanting in it, is *evidently frivolous*, for we do not find the name of Christ once mentioned in the prayer used at the ordination of Matthias, and yet that prayer was offered up under the New Dispensation—was offered up by the Apostles themselves, and was accepted and answered by God.* In addition, when Christ commanded His people to offer up their prayers in His name, He did not mean that the duty would be fulfilled by a mere mechanical repetition of it, but that their prayers should be offered without self-confidence—in a spirit of humility and self-distrust, and of profound reliance upon the mercy of God through Jesus Christ—through whom alone the naturally sin-tainted and impure prayers of man are presented a sweet-smelling incense before the eternal throne. Thus it is that the prayers of a Cornelius were accepted, because offered up in this spirit, though not literally in the name of Christ, of whom he had not heard; while those of many a professing Christian are rejected, because, though nominally presented in the name of Christ, they are wholly devoid of His spirit, and partake rather of Pharisaical pride and presumption. And finally, to complete our vindication of the present use of the Lord's Prayer, I would remind you, that *this prayer is really offered up in Christ's name, inasmuch as it is clearly implied, though not literally expressed, in its first words, when we address God as "Our Father, which art in heaven;"* our Father, not indeed in the mere sense in which He is the Father of all created things, as being the author of their existence, but our Father in the higher and grander sense; that we are all God's children, reconciled through Christ, through whom alone his people can call Him Abba, Father.

Now you will remember how far I have conducted the argument derived from the teaching and the example of Christ. I have shown you, 1st. That Christ sanctioned the use of forms by His presence. 2nd. That He lays down in the words at the head of this tract the general principle on which all liturgies are constructed; and 3rd. That He actually gave a form of prayer to His disciples. And yet, though all these arguments are drawn from the New Testament, and from His words and example, who was the founder and head of the New Dispensation, the same ever-recurring cry is urged as a sufficient reply to all these arguments—"That was the Old Dispensation, Christ had not yet died for man;" one would imagine from the constancy with which this objection is repeated, that there was one way of salvation for man under the Old Dispensation, and another under the New; and that every institution and practice which obtained under the former should be abolished or reversed under the latter; whereas in truth the New Dispensation is but a development of the Old, the eternal elements of faith and practice which existed in the one being retained and purified and exalted in the other.

(To be continued.)

*See on this subject, "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible." Art. Synagogue.

*Again the Prayer of the Apostles recorded in Acts iv. is not couched in the form usual with us.