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## THE HOLY COMMUNION (II)

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We begin our examination of what the classical Prayer Books call "the Order for the administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion", by dividing it in to two parts. The first of these, extending from the beginning of the service through the Prayer for the Church on p.74, is the rite called Ante-communion (that is, the service "before the communion"); the second, extending from the exhortation and confession of sin on p. 75 through to the end of the service, is the rite of Communion (although this term is also applied to the actually reception of the sacramental elements itself). In turn, the Ante-Communion may be subdivided into three main parts: (1) a penitential introduction, centered on the rehearsal of God's law, and concluding with the prayer known as the collect; (2) the ministry of the word, centered on the proclamation of the gospel; and (3) the offertory, which comprises the offering of alms, oblations, and prayers for the church.

In this threefold division of the Ante-communion, we perceive the same three-fold pattern that shapes the services of Morning and Evening Prayer. Following J. I. Packer, its logic may be summarized in terms of "sin, grace, faith". In the penitential introduction, our awareness of our sin, and our need for God's grace, is stirred up. Then, in the ministry of the Word, we hear and by faith receive the promises of God's grace. Thirdly, in the Offertory we respond to this grace, and exercise our faith, in acts of hope and charity. In this threefold pattern there is a general preparation of the soul in the dispositions required for fruitful participation in Communion, and it is within its terms that we make sense of the individual elements of the service.

The first of these, although often omitted in practice, is the Lord's Prayer, said by the priest alone – a beginning not only in time, but also in theological principle. The memorial of the Lord begins with the Lord's own teaching and example of prayer. The priest then says the prayer known as the "Collect for Purity": a petition that God, by his Holy Spirit, would purify "the thoughts of our hearts", so we might be able to love him perfectly and magnify (praise) his name worthily (that is, in accordance with his worth). In these two prayers, the Church invokes the Word and Spirit of God, apart from whose grace our worship is not acceptable to God. If we do not begin from God, the teaching of his Word, the purification of his Spirit, we cannot attain to

God. We see then that worship is the work of God. We also see that the external actions of the liturgy done in the body express and shape the inner motions of the heart and mind. This emphasis on interiority on worship "in spirit and in truth" is a hallmark of the Protestant Reformation, yet the Collect for Purity has been used in the western liturgy since at least the 8th century, when it was either written or collected by Charlemagne's religious advisor, the English monk Alcuin. As so often in the Prayer Book, at the very moment when we encounter something distinctively Protestant, we bump up against something unimpeachably Catholic.

After the Collect for Purity the priest rehearses the Law of God – either the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) or the Lord's Summary of the Law (an alternative that derives from the liturgy of the Scottish Episcopal Church). In either case, the congregation responds with a troped version of the ancient litany known by its ancient Greek name as the Kyrie eleison (pronounced: kee-ree-ay ay-lay-ee-zahn), meaning "Lord, have mercy". The rubric (instructions printed in italics) just before the Ten Commandments explains the purpose of this rehearsal: "the People...shall...ask God mercy for their transgressions for the time past, and grace to keep the law for the time to come" (Page 67). Here we discern the influence of Martin Luther's distinctive teaching about the Law, as the means whereby human sin is exposed and condemned, and the greatness of our need for the grace and mercy of God revealed. Yet we also discern the positive use of the law, as the divinely-given pattern for the righteous and holy life of God's people. As the summary of the law makes explicit, what is demanded of men by God, is in the final analysis, nothing else than love of God and neighbour; it is only through love of God and neighbour that man is able to keep the law. Here therefore at the outset of the service it is clear that nothing less is sought in it than the renewal of the heart, and its power to love.

The renewal of the heart by divine grace is the theme of the last element in the first part of the Ante-Communion, the brief prayer known as the Collect of the Day (emphasis on the first syllable). Each Sunday and holy day has its own proper collect - most of them dating back as far as the 5th century, others newly composed for the Prayer Book in the 16th or 17th centuries. Every collect comprises three parts (1) an opening address to God (often with a relative clause stating some attribute of his nature of manifestation of his mind and will as grounds for our petition); (2) the petition itself (often following with the good result to be expected to ensue when the petition is granted); and (3) a concluding formula of mediation: "through Jesus Christ our Lord". In its fullest form, this formula spells out more fully the grounds of our hope in a doxology framed in these or similar words "who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end." The form is brief, even terse: yet in those few words of each collect there is a wealth of theology—the collects constitute a treatise on grace – and of ardent desire for God. They make a fitting transition to the ministry of the Word, in which the promises of grace to which they appeal will be more fully set forth.

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