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Influence of the Book of Common Prayer on Samuel Johnson's Spirituality as Manifested in His Prayers and Meditations

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INFLUENCE OF THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER ON SAMUEL JOHNSON'S SPIRITUALITY AS MANIFESTED IN HIS PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

BY

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VITA AUCTORIS

John J. Miday, S.J., was born in Canton, Ohio on December 11, 1919. His elementary education was received at St. Joseph Grade School from 1924 to 1930, and at St. John Grade School from 1930 to 1933. He was graduated from St. John the Baptist High School in Canton, Ohio in June, 1937.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Doctor Samuel Johnson, LL.D.--what a name to conjure with! Visions rise up before our mind's eye of the Great Bear ...the Great Moralist; the Lichfield prodigy...the unsuccessful schoolmaster; the literary dictator...the conversational despot; the ethical essayist...the pessimistic satirist; the observant traveller...the harmless drudge; the ponderous lexicographer...the sesquipedalian stylist; the melancholy pietist...the Tory dogmatist; the unmusical artist...the conservative critic; the unlyrical poet...the unmoving dramatist; the drinker of tea...the frequenter of taverns; the companion of bishops...the intimate of rakes; the biographer of poets...the reporter of Parliament; the friend of sincerity...the enemy of pretense; the composer of prayers...the fearer of death.

His opinions have been exalted and criticized, his works held in esteem and consigned to oblivion, his social manners censured and excused, his intellect admired and deprecated, his appearance called grotesque and intriguing, his attitudes termed tolerant and despotic, his criticism classed as sound and prejudiced. Versions of his qualities and productions have varied widely, yet friends and critics alike agree that Doctor Johnson was a powerful figure--a man whose integrity of character was based on the sincerity of his religious beliefs and practices.
The religion into which he was baptized as a child and in which he grew up and lived (despite a temporary indifference) was that of the Church of England. Though his recorded conversations and writings show occasional toleration or even approval of Roman Catholic doctrines and Methodist practices, he professed the Anglican faith and received the Anglican Communion until his death.

Externally his religious practices were those of an orthodox member of the Church of England. He attended church services with fair regularity, and made a point of receiving Communion annually at Easter from his wife's death in 1752 to the year of his own death, 1784. Privately he seems to have attempted a more than ordinary practice of spiritual improvement. He often went to church on days other than Sunday, attending Morning and Evening Prayer services. He made a sort of private retreat each year at Easter time, reading the Bible and some religious treatise, examining his past life, meditating, and resolving for the days to come. He practised private devotions throughout the year, at least in the evening before retiring. And he was accustomed to observe such occasions as New Year's, Easter, his birthday, the anniversary of his wife's death, and the beginning of new enterprises by composing personal prayers to God.

It is this last activity of Johnson that occasioned the present thesis. The divergently-portrayed character of this eighteenth-century moralist and litterateur has long intrigued
this writer. The exterior character, the intellectual, moral, and political opinions, the literary works and criticism, the social habits of Doctor Johnson have been familiar to the reading public of the world since long before his death. Generalizations have been made about his religion, his piety, his many idiosyncrasies. But what was the wellspring of his inner life? Where did Samuel Johnson reveal the hopes and fears, the desires and aversions which helped shape his spiritual character?

It is known that shortly before his death, Johnson precipitately burned many personal records, probably including a two volume autobiography which was supposed to contain a most particular account of his life. All that remains to us as evidence of his inward life are the judgments of Johnson's friends and critics, the interpretations of some remarks in his moral and biographical writings, and the personal testimony of the Doctor's own meditations and prayers.

These latter writings were posthumously published by Dr. George Strahan, who thus explains them in his prefatory remarks:

During many years of his life, he stated-ly observed certain days with a religious solemnity; on which, and other occasions, it was his custom to compose suitable Prayers and Meditations; committing them to writing for his own use, without any view to their publication. But being last summer on a visit at Oxford to the Reverend Dr. Adams, and that gentleman urging him repeatedly to engage in some work of this kind, he then first conceived a design to revise these pious effusions, and bequeathed them with enlargements, to the use and benefits of others.
Infirmities, however, now growing fast upon him, he at length changed this design, and determined to give the manuscripts, without revision, in charge to me, as I had long shared his intimacy, and was at this time his daily attendant. Accordingly, one morning, on my visiting him by desire at an early hour, he put these papers into my hands, with instructions for committing them to the press, and with a promise to prepare a sketch of his own life to accompany them. But the performance of this promise also was prevented, partly by his hasty destruction of some private memoirs, which he afterwards lamented, and partly by that incurable sickness, which soon ended in his dissolution.

Dr. Strahan's prudence in publishing these papers substantially as Johnson had given them to him has been questioned at times. Many critics have felt that Johnson certainly would have excised many of the diary notes contained therein, and would have revised many of the prayers. But as the Prayers and Meditations now stand, they give powerful testimony of Johnson's inner character. From them we can deduce some of the spiritual influences that helped shape his religious personality. Two major streams of influence can be singled out of the volume.

First, there is the influence of the religious works and writers mentioned by Johnson in several places. Fiddes' Body of Divinity, Hammond's Notes, Pococke's Commentary, Vossius' De Baptismo, the Duty of Man, and Dr. Clarke's Sermons, in particular

those on Faith, on the Humiliation of our Saviour, and on the death of our Lord—these, with the Bible, are specifically noted as reading material for Johnson's Easter retreats. In addition, an article by Stuart G. Brown has pointed out the influence of the works of William Law, Clarke, Grotius, and Pearson upon the religious ideas of Johnson.2

Secondly, there is the influence of the doctrines and the services of the Church of England, as embodied in the Book of Common Prayer. It should be noted that these two streams of influence are really in different categories. For the writers mentioned above helped form Johnson's ideas about the Christian religion, in particular about the truth and evidences of Christianity. That is all Mr. Brown's article endeavored to show. The Anglican doctrines and services, however, guided the formation of Johnson's spiritual character and molded the forms in which he was to express the hopes and fears, desires and aversions of his troubled soul. That, at least, is the contention which this study will endeavor to prove.

The version of the Book of Common Prayer which Johnson used was that authorized in 1662, for no substantial alteration has been made in the Prayer Book since 1662, and no change at all appears until 1859, long after Johnson's death. The text used

2 Stuart G. Brown, "Dr. Johnson and the Religious Problem," English Studies, XX (1938), 1-17.
in this thesis was printed in 1892 as an exact reproduction from the original manuscript attached to the Act of Uniformity of 1662 and now preserved in the House of Lords. The original spelling has been modernized in this paper.

The text of Johnson's Prayers and Meditations here used is that of the fourth edition published by Dr. George Strahan in 1789 and included in the edition of Johnson's works published by Arthur Murphy in 1823. It does not contain five prayers and four diary entries which a recent edition has added by authority of their appearance in Boswell's Life.

The contention of this thesis will be advanced in two steps. First will be shown the influence of the Book of Common Prayer upon the form and content of Johnson's prayers. The evidence for this will be gathered from a judicious comparison of the corresponding use of prayer structure and matter, as well as from Johnson's own words in the diary and meditation entries of his Prayers and Meditations regarding the use he made of the Anglican prayer book.

The second step in the thesis, corresponding to the third chapter, will be the demonstration, through the similarity of form, content, themes, and attitudes, of the influence of the Book of Common Prayer upon Doctor Johnson's spiritual character as it is manifested in his prayers and meditation notes. The judgment of this influence will be guided by the intent of the
Anglican prayers and exhortations and the resultant expression which they occasioned in Doctor Johnson’s Prayers and Meditations. By way of conclusion will be presented a brief portrait of Doctor Johnson's spiritual character as it is manifested in his Prayers and Meditations.
CHAPTER II

INFLUENCE ON THE FORM AND CONTENT OF THE PRAYERS

The conscious or subconscious influence of a written form and subject matter upon a writer's works presupposes that the writer had some knowledge of the force influencing him. At the close of this chapter will be given Doctor Johnson's words which mention his use and adaptation of the Anglican Collects. As for his knowledge of those prayers,

That Johnson was so familiar with the Book of Common Prayer as to have it almost a daily part of his mind is hardly to be questioned. 'When he was a child in petticoats, his mother set him a collect to commit to memory, and he had it by the time she had gone upstairs.' Hawkins tells us that he began translating collects into Latin in his early years and continued through life, and to corroborate this testimony we have among Johnson's Poemata four such verse translations.\textsuperscript{1}

To get a general idea of the Collects and of Johnson's modifications and expansion in his translation and in a typical prayer, it will be helpful to see an example of each. For the twenty-first Sunday after Trinity Sunday the Collect reads:

Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1941, 157.
\textsuperscript{2}The Book of Common Prayer, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1892, 199.
Johnson's translation is a free expansion of the Collect:

Pater benigne, summa semper lenitas,
Crimine gravatam plurimo mentem leva:
Concede veram poenitentiam, precor,
Concede agendam legibus vitam tuis.
Sacri vagantes luminis gressus face
Rege, et tuere, quae nocent pellens procul;
Veniam petenti, summe da veniam, pater:
Veniaeque sancta pacis adde gaudia:
Sceleris ut expers, omni et vacuus metu,
Te, mente pure, mente tranquilla colam:
Mihi dona morte haec impetret Christus sua.3

Johnson echoes these thoughts in a typical Easter prayer thus:

Almighty and most merciful Father...who knowest my frailties and infirmities, strengthen and support me; grant me thy Holy Spirit, that, after all my lapses, I may now continue steadfast in obedience, that, after long habits of negligence and sin, I may, at last, work out my salvation with diligence and constancy; purify my thoughts from pollutions, and fix my affections on things eternal. Much of my time past has been lost in sloth; let not what remains, O Lord, be given me in vain; but let me, from this time, lead a better life, and serve Thee with a quiet mind through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.4

A closer investigation of the ninety-three prayers contained in Doctor Johnson's Prayers and Meditations reveals their remarkable similarity of structure. This similarity is present in the four main parts comprising each of the prayers. Because the composition and the conjunction of these four parts of each prayer bear an understandable resemblance to the four parts of

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4 Samuel Johnson, Prayers and Meditations, in The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., IX, 482.
the prayers which are called Collects in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, they may be designated, for the sake of this discussion, by the names given to the four parts of the Collect prayer.

Since the Anglican Collects are, for the most part, merely English versions of the Latin Collects of the Roman Catholic Mass, we may use the names which Doctor Nicholas Gihr, a noted theologian and an authority on the Mass, applies to the Collect parts when he states:

...petitions are for us in our present state the most important and necessary mode of prayer. Hence petition also forms the peculiar essence of the Collects. But by what other acts is this petition usually accompanied? St. Paul mentions...supplications (urgent entreaty, to which a powerful motive is added, that the prayer may be heard the sooner), prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings. These four methods of prayer...are, for the most part, combined in each Collect, and form these acts into a perfect and most effectual prayer of petition.5

Besides their names as general modes of prayer, these four components of the Collect gain particular designations according to the function they perform in the Collect prayer. Thus Doctor Gihr explains:

The person praying must approach God, draw nigh unto God, elevate himself to God (oratio); and then present his petitions (postulatio), and to obtain more speedily what is

asked for, he joins to it his motives: one of which is on the part of the petitioner gratitude or thanksgiving (gratiarum actio); for in so far as we are grateful for benefits received, do we obtain graces yet more plentifully;—but the most efficient means for having our petitions granted, is to beg them of God by the merits and intercession of Jesus Christ; hence the concluding words "through Christ our Lord," words which express the entreaty (obsecratio).  

Translating the Latin words above, Doctor Gihr gives us these names of the four parts of the Collect prayer: elevation of the soul, thanksgiving, petition, and supplication. Each of these divisions appears in nearly every one of Johnson's prayers, though, of course, not always in the same verbal expression. And their presence is the first intimation that the form and content of Johnson's prayers were dictated, or at least influenced, by the form and content of the Collect appearing in the services of the Church of England and contained in the Book of Common Prayer.

We have now to investigate more fully the meaning of the elevation of soul, thanksgiving, petition, and supplication; to see how they are expressed in Johnson's prayers; and, finally, to discover whether these parts of Johnson's prayers correspond in structure and idea to the common Collects of the Book of Common Prayer.

6 Ibid., 420.
7 Ibid., 420.
The elevation of soul, which consists in the raising of the mind and heart to God, is usually expressed in the opening words of a prayer such as Johnson's or a Collect. These words comprise the nominative of address by which the supplicant reminds himself that he is addressing God. They aid him in fixing the attention of his mind and heart on the Divine Person to Whom he is offering his prayer. Obviously, it also corresponds to the polite mode of mentioning a person's name when addressing him. All ninety-three of Johnson's prayers contain this elevation of soul in the form of some nominative of address applied to God, as we shall see in detail shortly.

The position of the elevation of soul in a prayer is not of primary importance, but it has been noted that ordinarily it occupies the place of the opening words. Since these words are ones of salutation, it is but to be expected that they should be placed first. In thirteen of the Collects in the Book of Common Prayer, however, the elevation of soul is preceded by several words of the petition itself. This situation occurs twice in Johnson's prayers.

In the ninety-three prayers composed by Johnson thirty different elevations of soul are used, ranging from the direct

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8 The Book of Common Prayer, 93, 119, 121, 122, 149, 163, 178, 183, 185, 199, 205, 214, 224.
9 Johnson, Prayers and Meditations, 521, 566.
"O God," to more circumstantial ones such as "O God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Father of all mercies," which begins the first solemn prayer of which Johnson retained a copy. For the purposes of this study, however, these thirty modes of addressing God may be grouped into six main classes, according to the opening words of each. Thus there are forty instances of "Almighty God," twenty-seven of "Almighty and most merciful Father," nine of "O Lord," nine of "O God," five of "Almighty and everlasting God," and three of "O Lord God."

Opening salutations or elevations of soul corresponding to those used by Johnson in his prayers are to be found in the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer. In the eighty-eight Collects used in the church services for the various Sundays and holydays of the year are included twenty-seven instances of the salutation, "Almighty God," which was the elevation of soul

10 Ibid., 477.
11 Ibid., 468.
12 Ibid., 469.
15 Ibid., 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 478, 508, 566, 569.
16 Ibid., 468, 477, 480, 489, 494, 502, 534, 537, 574.
17 Ibid., 469, 478, 483, 512, 517.
18 Ibid., 479, 521, 573.
most frequently used by Johnson. There are also twenty-two instances of "O Lord," 20 fifteen of "O God," 21 eleven of the phrase, "Almighty and everlasting God," 22 and two of "O Lord God," 23 besides eleven other combinations of these phrases. 24 Thus, the correspondence of the structure and matter of the first element, elevation of soul, between Johnson's prayers and the Collects is quite apparent and serves to enforce the thesis that the form and content of Johnson's prayers were strongly and consistently influenced by the form and content of the Collects in the Book of Common Prayer.

However, an important omission is noted in the foregoing list of elevations of soul used in the Collects. Nowhere among the Proper Collects, not even in the eleven unclassified ones mentioned above, does there appear the opening words, "Almighty and most merciful Father." Yet that very salutation seems to have been one of Johnson's favorites, for he used it to begin twenty seven of his prayers, so it is found in the second largest group of his elevations of soul. What was the inspiration for this introductory phrase?

22 Ibid., 103, 104, 115, 124, 145, 170, 187, 190, 208, 211, 225.
23 Ibid., 111, 219.
24 Ibid., 88, 89, 94, 145, 157, 181, 189, 198, 199, 224, 228.
To answer that question, one need but turn in the Book of Common Prayer to the other prayers which are constructed according to the norms of the Collects but are used for different purposes. Of the forty-eight such prayers, there are only two in the whole book which begin with the phrase, "Almighty and most merciful Father." Those two prayers, significantly enough, are the prayers of General Confession in the morning and the evening prayer service. The influence of these General Confession prayers on Johnson will be treated more fully in the following chapter concerning the themes of the prayers. Now it will be sufficient to note that, of the twenty-seven prayers in which Johnson used the salutation of the confessional prayer, twenty-two of them were composed for occasions which required prayers of an especially penitential and confessional nature.

Thus, nine of these prayers were written after Johnson's examination of conscience before communicating at Easter, seven were composed for his birthday when he reviewed his past life and faults, four were results of his New Year's examen of conscience, and two were professedly penitential prayers asking for forgiveness. Since, consciously or subconsciously, on

25 Ibid., 47.
26 Ibid., 61.
27 Johnson, Prayers and Meditations, 482, 483, 489, 493, 496, 515, 528, 540, 545.
28 Ibid., 481, 483, 499, 505, 507, 543, 560.
29 Ibid., 470, 498, 500, 506.
30 Ibid., 570, 574.
these confessional occasions Johnson elevated his mind to God in the very words commonly associated only with the prayer of General Confession in the Church of England service, the influence of the Book of Common Prayer upon the form and content of his prayers seems quite apparent as regards the initial phrases containing the elevation of soul.

Thanksgiving, the second of the four elements of prayer to be considered, has been defined by an Anglican writer as a "dutiful gratitude for benefits received." 31 The expression in prayer of gratitude varies according to the particular benefits contemplated at the time, or according to the individual or group recital of the prayer, or even according to the changes of the ecclesiastical seasons. Often this phrase of gratitude embodies not the actual benefits received, but rather the divine quality or attribute related to the particular graces or gifts under consideration. In some prayers this gratitude for some divine quality amounts to praise or adoration of God under the aspect of possessor of that quality. Sometimes the composer of a prayer concentrates on the petitions to be made to the virtual exclusion of an expressed thanksgiving. This formula is found in eighteen of the Collects 32 and in seven of Johnson's pleas. 33 Even in these prayers, however, gratitude is implied.

32 The Book of Common Prayer, 86, 90, 93, 94, 101, 104, 107, 110, 119, 121, 178, 185, 190, 194, 195, 199, 201, 205.
33 Johnson, 477, 488, 498, 502, 545, 566, 571.
A study of Johnson's ninety-three prayers reveals five major themes about which his thanksgiving revolve. Most prominent is his gratitude to God for the creation and preservation of his life and health, as he expresses thanks for this in fifty-three of his prayers. He is also grateful for God's providence and mercy towards all sinners, as thirteen prayers attest. In thirteen others he thanks God for His gifts of Wisdom and of all good things. Four prayers render thanks for the Redemption, and three for God's omniscient knowledge of men's needs.

Corresponding thanksgiving themes are found in the Book of Common Prayer Collects. Ten Collects mention gratitude for God's creation and preservation of life, nine for His gifts of Wisdom and all good things, six for the Redemption, seven for God's providence and mercy towards sinners, and five for His knowledge of man's necessities. As would be expected in

36 Ibid., 471, 473, 475, 497, 499, 504, 508, 521, 537, 555, 559, 573.
37 Ibid., 489, 515, 526, 566.
38 Ibid., 478, 504, 540.
40 Ibid., 88, 96, 122, 161, 176, 180, 199, 202, 217.
41 Ibid., 144, 149, 151, 152, 155, 157.
42 Ibid., 115, 145, 182, 186, 187, 193, 203.
43 Ibid., 106, 111, 118, 183, 191.
prayers following the cycle of the ecclesiastical year, the remaining thirty-one Collects are concerned with the thanksgiving theme of the life and teachings of Christ and the saints.\textsuperscript{44} For this there is no equivalent in Johnson's prayers, since his were composed only on special occasions.

Besides the similarity in themes of the thanksgiving elements, correspondence of actual wording indicates the influence exercised on Johnson's prayers by the Collects of the \textit{Book of Common Prayer}. Seven major instances of such imitation may be cited, involving twelve of the Collects and forty-six of Johnson's prayers. The Collect for the second Sunday in Lent calls on God, "who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves."\textsuperscript{45} In a prayer dated Lent 2, presumably the second Sunday in Lent, Johnson invokes God, "who seest that I have no power of myself to help myself."\textsuperscript{46}

The Collect for Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is addressed to God, "who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent,"\textsuperscript{47} while the third Collect for Good Friday thanks God who "hateth nothing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 89, 91, 97, 98, 100, 108, 113, 116, 124, 158, 159, 163, 164, 165, 167, 169, 170, 206, 208, 209, 211, 213, 214, 216, 219, 220, 222, 224, 225, 226, 229, 230, 232.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 118.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Johnson, 504.
\item \textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Book of Common Prayer}, 115.
\end{itemize}
that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted, and live."48 Johnson's prayers echo this invocation in several similar expressions thus: "who hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor desirest the death of a sinner,"49 "who desirest not the death of a sinner,"50 "who hast no pleasure in the death of a sinner,"51 "who hatest nothing that thou hast made,"52 "who hatest nothing that thou hast made, but wouldest that all should be saved."53

In the first Collect for Good Friday it is stated that "our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross,"54 and Easter week Collects thank God, "who through thine only begotten son Jesus Christ hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life,"55 "who hast given thine only son to die for our sins."56 Correspondingly, in Passion week Johnson prays to the Father, "who by thy son Jesus Christ hast redeemed us from sin and death,"57 to commemorate "the redemption of the world by our Lord and Saviour thy son Jesus

48 Ibid., 145.
49 Johnson, 496.
50 Ibid., 481.
51 Ibid., 517.
52 Ibid., 521.
53 Ibid., 530.
54 The Book of Common Prayer, 144-145.
55 Ibid., 151, 152, 155.
56 Ibid., 157.
57 Johnson, 489.
Christ,"58 "the death of my Redeemer,"59 "thy love in the redemption of the world,"60 "my redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ,"61 and to "bless Thee for my...redemption."62

In the first Collect for the fourth Sunday after Easter is praise and thanksgiving for God, "who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men."63 In undated words Johnson addresses God, "in whose hands are the wills and affections of men,"64 "in whose hands are all the powers of man."65

On the fifth Sunday after the Collect calls upon the Lord, "from whom all good things do come,"66 while in June we find Johnson speaking to God, "from whom proceedeth all good,"67 "who art the giver of all good,"68 "the giver of all good things."69

The Collect for grace, said daily at the morning prayer service, thanks God, "who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day."70 Since two-thirds of Johnson's prayers were

58 Ibid., 515.
59 Ibid., 526.
60 Ibid., 536.
61 Ibid., 566.
62 Ibid., 468.
63 The Book of Common Prayer, 160.
64 Johnson, 573.
65 Ibid., 475.
67 Johnson, 553.
68 Ibid., 559.
69 Ibid., 471.
70 The Book of Common Prayer, 57.
composed for annual anniversaries, adaptations of this chosen clause frequently appear, as in his New Year's prayers: "who hast brought me to the beginning of another year,"71 "Thou hast suffered me to see the beginning of another year,"72 "who hast continued my life from year to year,"73 "by whose mercy I am permitted to behold the beginning of another year,"74 "who hast permitted me to see the beginning of another year,"75 "by whose mercy my life has been prolonged to another year,"76 "who hath granted me such continuance of life, that I now see the beginning of another year,"77 "who hath granted to me the beginning of another year."78 On his birthdays Johnson thanked the Father, "by whose providence my life has been prolonged, and who hath granted me now to begin another year of probation,"79 "who... hath now granted me to begin another year,"80 "who hath continued my life to another year,"81 "who hath granted me to prolong my life to another year,"82 "who hath brought me to the beginning of another year,"83 "who hath permitted me to begin another year."84

71 Johnson, 480.
72 Ibid., 500.
73 Ibid., 506.
74 Ibid., 509.
75 Ibid., 518, 535.
76 Ibid., 523, 552.
77 Ibid., 555.
78 Ibid., 547.
79 Ibid., 481.
80 Ibid., 483.
81 Ibid., 487.
82 Ibid., 499.
83 Ibid., 543.
84 Ibid., 554.
The Collect or prayer for all conditions of men, to be said at Morning Prayer on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, praises and thanks God, "the Creator and Preserver of all mankind." In his prayers Johnson sometimes follows this wording exactly, sometimes personalizes it by writing "my (our) Creator and Preserver," but more often vivifies it by invoking God, "by whose will all things were created, and by whose providence they are sustained," "by whose will I was created, and by whose providence I have been sustained," "who hast created me to love and to serve Thee," "giver and preserver of all life," "who hast created and preserved me," "who hast preserved me, by thy fatherly care, through all the years of my past life," "by whom all things were created and are sustained," "who hast preserved me, by thy tender forbearance."

The listing of the parallel quotations in the preceding seven paragraphs may seem overly prolonged, but it contributes powerful testimony to the similarity of the themes and constructions used in the thanksgiving elements of Johnson's prayers and the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer. Just as the corres-

85 The Book of Common Prayer, 82.
86 Johnson, 468, 505.
87 Ibid., 552, 553, 554.
88 Ibid., 469.
89 Ibid., 470.
90 Ibid., 482.
91 Ibid., 489.
92 Ibid., 493.
93 Ibid., 512.
94 Ibid., 534.
95 Ibid., 536.
ponding expression of the invocations or elevations of soul indicated the influence upon Johnson of the Church prayers he heard and repeated so devoutly, do the many similarities of the thanksgiving element attest to the influence consciously or perhaps subconsciously felt by Johnson as he composed his prayers.

Petition, the third of the four elements of a Collect-like prayer, is really the essential part, for

The Collects are prayers of petition, in which the Church by the mouth of the priest presents to God her maternal desires and interests in order to obtain for her children the special gifts and graces corresponding to the different feasts and times of the holy year.96

That petition belongs particularly to the Collect is clear from Doctor Gihr's explanation, since the Collect

...is considered, namely, as a prayer which in comprehensive brevity (compendiosa brevitate) embodies the most important petitions, that is, the sum or idea of all that we, in consideration of the day's celebration, especially seek to obtain from God.97

Because the petition element expresses the chief content of the Collect prayer, it is difficult to establish its form, for its protean expression is of its nature, as Doctor Gihr comments:

The Collects are prayers of petition: the numberless needs and necessities of soul and body form the substance of the supplications therein expressed. In them we seek to obtain all manner of favors and blessings, and implore the

96 Gihr, 408.
97 Ibid., 409-410.
averting of every evil. The Collects indeed ask of God no more than what is petitioned for in the Lord's Prayer; but the object of these petitions is presented in the most copious and varied expressions.98

In view of the aforementioned difficulties only a few brief observations can be made on the form and content of the petition in Johnson's prayers and in the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer. Since it concerns the thoughts and fears and hopes and desires of the supplicant, the petition element must await fuller treatment in the following chapter concerning the themes of the prayers. Here we may note that among the many forms of petitioning God for favors a constantly recurring formula is this one: grant us (this particular favor) in order that we may perform (some general or particular good), and so may obtain everlasting life.

Johnson used this "grant me" formula in sixty-seven of his ninety-three prayers, while it also occurs in sixty-seven of the prayers in the Book of Common Prayer. The final petition for everlasting life is found in seventy-six of Johnson's prayers, and in thirty-eight of the church service prayers. Additional emphasis is placed on a petition for the help of the Holy Spirit in Johnson's prayers, for he begs this of God in sixty-four instances, while the Book of Common Prayer asks this fifteen times.

98 Ibid., 418.
These fragmentary facts about the expression of the petitions do not provide much basis for a satisfactory conclusion regarding the influence of the Collects on Johnson in this element of the prayers. But it has been pointed out previously that the numberless needs of soul and body form the substance of the petitions of the Collects. Hence, an individual supplicant like Doctor Johnson would be expected to embody his personal petitions in forms which fitted his individual needs and desires. And, as we shall see in detail in the next chapter, the bulk of Johnson's prayer expression is concerned with penitential and forgiveness petitions tailored to fit the needs of his tender conscience. Therefore, they are more particularized than even those Collects which petition for special graces, help, or forgiveness. The slight similarity of general structure and purpose demonstrated above gives us merely a hint as to the inspiration of the form and content of Johnson's petitions.

The fourth part of a Collect-like prayer has been termed supplication. This concluding element is the most regular of the four, not only in prayers in general, but in both the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer and Johnson's prayers as well. It is not very difficult to discover the reason for this. While the elevation of soul may be addressed to any of the three Divine Persons under countless aspects, while thanksgiving phrases may

99 Ibid., 418.
be composed for various benefits, and while petitions may be made for multitudinous favors, the supplication is uniform in its purpose and means.

The purpose, of course, is to try to ensure the granting of our petition, and "the most efficient means for having our petitions granted is to beg them of God by the merits and intercession of Jesus Christ." The reason for this being true is connected with the fact that the Collects, Doctor Gihr tells us,

...are now usually addressed to the Father.

Inasmuch as the Church when praying has usually recourse to the Father, she in this respect follows not merely the example but, moreover, the teaching of Christ, who said to His Apostles: "Amen, amen I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you." (John 16, 23) In this a further reason is indicated why the Collects, for the most part, are addressed to the Father. Our petitions should be presented "in the name of Jesus." Jesus is the Mediator through whom all our prayers and supplications ascend to Heaven, and through whom as well do all graces and merits descend upon earth; hence for the sake of the Son we pray to the Father who sent Him, by concluding the Collects with these words, "through our Lord Jesus Christ." 101

It is true that the phrase, "through our Lord Jesus Christ," or its Anglican equivalent, "through Jesus Christ our Lord," together with slightly varying forms, composes the great majority of the supplications in the Book of Common Prayer: in

100 Ibid., 420.
101 Ibid., 421-422.
sixty-six of the eighty-eight Proper Collects102 and in thirty-two of the forty-eight Ordinary Collects.103 Still, there are other forms of supplications found there. With minor variations included, "through the merits (and mediation) of thy son Jesus Christ our Lord" concludes nine Proper Collects104 and ten of the Ordinary Collects.105 Three of the Proper Collects106 and six of the Ordinary Collects107 contain this or a similar supplication: "Grant this for Jesus Christ's sake." Too, there are nine Proper Collects108 addressed to Christ or mainly about Christ, which conclude merely with the form, "who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, etc."

The same expressions of supplication appear in Johnson's prayers, with the exception of the last form noted above. The latter does not appear because Johnson did not address any of his prayers directly to Christ. The supplication, "through Jesus Christ our Lord," is found in twenty of his prayers.109 Two of

103 Ibid., 48, 57, 58, 62, 77, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 235, 238, 248, 253, 254, 255, 256.
104 Ibid., 90, 149, 157, 165, 167, 169, 188, 189, 229.
105 Ibid., 57, 58, 68, 69, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 255.
106 Ibid., 113, 177, 203.
his prayers entreat "through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ." Surprising, perhaps, the supplication, "for Jesus Christ's sake," or "for the sake of Jesus Christ," concludes seventy-one of Johnson's prayers. It may be interesting to discover a reason for the preponderance of this phrase, which appeared only nine times in the whole Book of Common Prayer.

Let us see in just which Collects this supplication was used. In the Proper Collects it appears on Quinquagesima Sunday, the last before Lent, and on the fourth and the twenty-third Sundays after Trinity Sunday. Turning to the Prayers and Meditations of Johnson, we read among a list of resolutions dated Easter, April 7, about three in the morning, 1765:

At Church I purpose...at intervals to use the Collects of the Fourth after Trinity, and...to meditate. This was done, as I purposed, but with some distraction.

In the Ordinary Collects the supplication, "for Jesus Christ's sake," or a similar construction, is used at the Communion service in Collects for the King and for the Church militant.

110 Ibid., 469, 489.
112 The Book of Common Prayer, 113.
113 Ibid., 177.
114 Ibid., 203.
115 Johnson, 496.
116 The Book of Common Prayer, 238.
117 Ibid., 243.
At Morning and Evening Prayer this phrase appears in the Collect for all conditions of men and, significantly, in the daily prayer of General Confession.

Since the confessional vein of Johnson's prayers is so similar to the General Confession prayer; since his frequent examinations of conscience before communicating give testimony of the impressiveness he felt at the Communion service; and since he has referred to frequent use of Collects containing the words, "for Jesus Christ's sake," it does not seem too far-fetched to infer some influence exerted in this instance by the type of supplication used in the Book of Common Prayer.

Besides constructing the four parts of his prayers in a fashion similar to that of the Book of Common Prayer, Johnson makes twenty-nine references in his Prayers and Meditations to his devotional use of the Collects and to his adaptations of them to fit his needs in private prayer. Thus, in three places in his notes he mentions adapting or improvising the third Collect for grace from the morning prayer service, while quoting phrases from the same Collect in six other places in meditation notes or following his own prayers. This Collect for grace contains the thanksgiving phrase, "who hast safely brought us to

118 Ibid., 83.
119 Ibid., 48, 62.
120 Johnson, 494, 555, 572.
121 Ibid., 500, 505, 508, 517, 518, 530.
the beginning of this day,"¹²² which Johnson incorporated into sixteen of his New Year's and birthday prayers, as was noted previously.¹²³ The impression made on Doctor Johnson by this daily Collect is quite apparent.

In Johnson's *Prayers and Meditations* is listed a resolution "to use the Collects of Fourth after Trinity and First and Fourth after Epiphany"¹²⁴ during Easter services. At Easter times, too, he makes mention of using his prayer with the Easter Collects in six different years.¹²⁵ And twice on Easter he records praying over some Collects which he had chosen for his own meditation.¹²⁶

After one of his prayers¹²⁷ he lists four phrases which identify four Collects. "O God, who desirest not the death," is from the Absolution prayer of Morning and Evening Prayer.¹²⁸ "O Lord, grant us increase--" is from the Collect of the fourteenth Sunday after Trinity.¹²⁹ "O God--pardon and peace--" is found only in the Collect of the twenty-first Sunday following Trinity.¹³⁰ "O God, who knowest our necessities--" begins the

¹²² *The Book of Common Prayer*, 57.
¹²³ Vide supra, 20-21, nn. 70-84.
¹²⁴ Johnson, 496.
¹²⁵ Ibid., 497, 513, 514, 527, 537, 546.
¹²⁶ Ibid., 513, 526-527.
¹²⁷ Ibid., 502.
¹²⁹ Ibid., 190.
¹³⁰ Ibid., 199.
post-Offertory Collect in the Communion service.  

Evidently Doctor Johnson used these Collects together with his own prayer, thus revealing his familiarity with them.

After one Easter service Johnson recorded that at church he "returned thanks, by accommodating the General Thanksgiving; and used this Prayer again, with the Collects...." On Good Friday he relates: "This morning before I went to bed I enlarged my prayers, by adding some Collects with reference to the day." On a previous Good Friday he mentions "having prayed by the Collect for the right use of the Scriptures." This Collect is the one for the second Sunday in Advent. As a final reference written the Sunday after Easter, 1772, Johnson says, "Since Easter 1771, I have added a Collect to my evening devotion."

Thus, Doctor Johnson makes mention of his use of the Collects in twenty-nine instances contained in his quite fragmentary Prayers and Meditations. These references, together with the previously demonstrated parallel expression of his prayers and the Collects, thus far have been the bases for our conclusion that the structure and matter of Johnson's prayers were affected by the form and content of the Ordinary and Proper Collects of

131 Ibid., 255.
132 Johnson, 514.
133 Ibid., 543.
134 Ibid., 548.
135 The Book of Common Prayer, 88.
136 Johnson, 522.
the Book of Common Prayer. In addition, the translating of Collects into Latin verse, as was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, helped mould Johnson's prayer expression.

By way of completing the aims of this chapter, added interest may be derived from seeing several instances in which whole prayers composed by Doctor Johnson conform in structure and in content to particular Collects. The Collect for the second Sunday in Lent reads:

Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul, through Jesus Christ our Lord.137

Johnson's prayer, dated Lent 2, 1768, imitates it thus:

Almighty God, who seest that I have no power of myself to help myself; keep me both outwardly in my body, and inwardly in my soul, that I may be defended from all adversities that may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul, through Jesus Christ our Lord.138

The General Thanksgiving Collect for Morning and Evening Prayer contains the following:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving kindness to us.... We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and...redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,

137 The Book of Common Prayer, 118.
138 Johnson, 504.
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory...through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the holy Ghost be all honour and glory world without end.139

The first item in Johnson's Prayers and Meditations is a birthday prayer for September 18, 1738, reading in part:

O God...Father of all mercies, I, thine unworthy servant, do give Thee most humble thanks, for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to me. I bless Thee for my creation, preservation, and redemption, for the knowledge of thy Son Jesus Christ, for the means of grace and the hope of glory...through... Jesus Christ; to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and One God, be all honour and glory, world without end.140

139 The Book of Common Prayer, 83.
140 Johnson, 468-469.
CHAPTER III

INFLUENCE ON JOHNSON'S SPIRITUAL CHARACTER

The preceding chapter has presented some idea of the influence of the form and content of the prayers contained in the Book of Common Prayer upon the form and content of Samuel Johnson's prayers. As a further effect, we are now to investigate the results of that influence as it affected the spiritual character of Johnson manifested in his brief Prayers and Meditations.

Webster tells us that character is the aggregate of distinctive mental and moral qualities belonging to an individual. By spiritual character in this thesis we merely mean that complexus of Christian virtues fashioned by the will into the personality of a human being who is striving to model his life after that of Christ, the true example of ideal character.  

"Actions speak louder than words." This time-honored, if ungrammatical, axiom referring to the judgment of a man's character and intentions might appear to render useless the method of advancing the contention of this chapter. It is true that a person's spirituality should manifest itself externally in the propriety of his moral actions regarding God and himself and his neighbors. It is equally true that Doctor Johnson's prayers as

they are printed are merely words. But we must remember that they are words signifying the internal acts of his soul; they are the particular words of Johnson which manifest the movements of his soul in spiritual matters. And the moral acts of the soul shape a person's spiritual character. Hence, the prayers of Doctor Johnson do give us some idea, incomplete though it may be, of what his spiritual character was. In addition, the mere fact that Johnson adapted the words and ideas of the Anglican prayers to fit his personal needs shows how earnest and sincere are his prayers. He did not merely copy out the Collects; he chose what appealed to him and what fitted his spiritual needs.

The emphasis given to particular spiritual elements will reveal the spiritual values of a man's character. "For where thy treasure is, there thy heart also will be." (Matt. 6, 21.) Therefore, the themes which dominate the prayers of Johnson, together with the spirit in which he treated those themes, will indicate to some extent the phases of spiritual development upon which he placed most value. And if it can be shown that this hierarchy of values also obtains in the Collects and services of the Book of Common Prayer and that Johnson's impressions were drawn from their presentation there, then our conclusion will be warranted. Johnson's spirituality will have been shown as being influenced by the Book of Common Prayer.

Both Johnson's prayers and those of the Book of Common Prayer were composed and recited as duties of religion, for,
says the spiritual writer and theologian, Father Adolphe Tanquerey, "Religion is a moral, supernatural virtue that inclines the will to render to God the worship due Him by reason of His infinite excellence and of his sovereign dominion over us."²

Now, the acts to which religion inclines us are both interior and exterior. By the former, continues Father Tanquerey,

...we subject to God our soul, with its faculties, chiefly the intellect and will. 1) The first and most important of these acts is that of adoration, in which we abase our whole being before Him.... 2) Since He is the author of all the good that we possess, we offer Him our gratitude. 3) Remembering that we are sinners, we enter into sentiments of penitence, to atone for the offences committed against His infinite majesty. 4) Because we stand in continual need of His help to do good and attain our end, we address to Him our prayers or requests, thus acknowledging Him as the source of all good.³

The exterior acts of religion, which manifest the four interior acts, may be enumerated briefly as sacrifice and public or private prayer.⁴

The exterior acts of Johnson's private prayer and of the public prayer of the Collects manifested all those interior acts of adoration (in the elevation of soul), gratitude (in the words of thanksgiving), prayers or request (in the petitions), and

³ Ibid., 493.
⁴ Ibid., 493.
penitence (in penitential expressions combined with the supplication). Therefore, as we saw in the preceding chapter, both groups of prayers under consideration combined the prayer of worship (adoration, thanksgiving, and reparation or penitence) with the prayer of petition (requesting God's help in our natural and supernatural necessities). 5

The element of worship as presented in Johnson's prayers is a guide to his attitude toward, and his concept of his relationship to, God. For it is in his adoring, grateful or penitential worship of God that he reveals the habitual outlook of his soul as it addressed God. We must now investigate, as the first major theme of the prayers, the idea of man's relationship to God as expressed by Johnson and the Book of Common Prayer.

The survey made in the preceding chapter furnishes the material for discovering the types of relationship contained in the prayers. In the elevations of soul both Johnson and the Book of Common Prayer express these three conceptions of God: the all-powerful Creator of mankind, the Preserver and Governor of life, and the merciful Father.

The thanksgiving element in both groups of prayers shows gratitude to the Creator, the Preserver and Governor, the merciful Father, and in addition thank the Redeemer and omniscient

5 Ibid., 244-247.
Giver of all gifts. In the Collects there also appears gratefulness to God the Exemplar and Teacher by reason of Christ's life and teachings.

The Collects and Johnson send up petitions to the Creator, the Preserver and Governor, the merciful Father, the Redeemer, and the Giver of all God's gifts. These requests are supplicated for through the propitiatory satisfaction of the Redeemer and Mediator to the Creator, the provident Governor, and the merciful Father.

From this evidence we gather that the Collects and the prayers of Johnson expressed man's relationship to God in four main aspects: the powerless creature and his all-powerful Creator; the contingent subject and his sustaining Ruler; the sinful child and his Redeemer and merciful Father; the indigent beggar and his bountiful Benefactor.

It is worth noting that each of these relationships emphasizes the idea of the dependence of man upon God. For that is the keynote of worship, as Father Tanquerey has reminded us. It is also a keynote in Johnson's prayers and reveals to us one of the major effects of the influence of the Book of Common Prayer upon Johnson's spirituality.

His recognition of his dependence upon God in the four relationships of man to God was the basis of the true humility shown in his Prayers and Meditations. For humility, as defined
by Father Tanquerey, "is a supernatural virtue, which, through the self-knowledge it imparts, inclines us to reckon ourselves at our true worth and to seek self-effacement and contempt." And the Johnson who continually reminded himself in his prayers and meditations of his utter dependence on God was certainly a humble Johnson.

Johnson's humility was properly based on truth and on justice. "Truth causes us to know ourselves just as we are; justice inclines us to act upon that knowledge." So Johnson's consideration of himself as totally dependent on God was an act of justice. The truth of his self-knowledge, in agreement with the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, was founded on the fact that

...in homine duo possunt considerari, scilicet id quod est Dei, et id quod est hominis. Hominis autem est quidquid pertinet ad defectum; sed Dei est quidquid pertinet ad salutem et perfectionem.

The knowledge that whatever there was in him of evil proceeded from himself at times led Johnson near the brink of despair, as when he wrote in a meditation: "Every man naturally persuades himself that he can keep his resolutions, nor is he

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7 Ibid., 530-531.
8 Ibid., 531.
9 Thoma Aquinas, Summa Theologica, M. E. Marietti, Taurini, 1937, IV, II-II, q. 161, a. 3. These words are translated: ...in man two things may be considered: what there is of God, and what there is of man. Of man there is whatever points to defect; but of God, all that makes for salvation and perfection.
convinced of his imbecility but by length of time and frequency of experiment. 10

Yet he did not actually despair of amendment and improvement, as later entries read:

Of resolutions I have made so many, with so little effect, that I am almost weary, but by the help of God, am not yet hopeless. Good resolutions must be made and kept. 11

Surely I shall not spend my whole life with my own total disapprobation. Perhaps God may grant me now to begin a wiser and a better life. 12

...I have corrected no external habits, nor have kept any of the resolutions made in the beginning of the year; yet I hope still to be reformed, and not to lose my whole life in idle purposes. Many years are already gone irrevocably past, in useless misery; that what remains may be spent better, grant, O God. 13

The source of Johnson's thread of hope to which he clung all through his troubled life is revealed in his final prayer to his merciful Father, when he was

...about to commemorate, for the last time, the death of thy Son Jesus Christ our Saviour and Redeemer. Grant, O Lord, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits, and thy mercy.... 14

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11 Ibid., 549.
12 Ibid., 554.
13 Ibid., 557.
14 Ibid., 570.
Humility and hope, then, were the chief effects produced in Johnson's spiritual character by the influence of the prayer of worship contained in the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer. These virtues shine through all the pain-shadowed pleas of the great soul who piously inscribed the Prayers and Meditations.

Besides the prayer of worship, there is the prayer of petition. Now, there are many types of petition possible in a prayer, and a major theme of a prayer, or of a group of prayers taken as a whole, will be drawn from the general objects of the petitions. Following the standard of petition set in the perfect prayer, the Our Father, Father Tanquerey classifies the general objects as follows: a) the principal end--God's glory; b) the secondary end--the growth of God's Kingdom within us; c) the essential means to that twofold end--conformity to the Divine Will; then the secondary means: d) the positive means--the sustenance for body and soul to the perfection of each; e) the negative means: 1) the remission of sins and all elements of the Sacrament of Penance; 2) the removal of trials and temptations; 3) the removal of physical evils.15

A statistical survey of the petitions included in Doctor Johnson's ninety-three prayers and in the one hundred and thirty-six Proper and Ordinary Collects of the Book of Common Prayer

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15 Tanquerey, 250.
would reveal that all seven general objects listed by Father Tanquerey appear many times in both groups of prayers. But we are concerned only with the major themes of the requests. When certain petitions are made repeatedly, or are given special emphasis, they indicate the particular concerns of the supplicant and reveal the main themes of his prayers.

The general objects of the petitions of the Collects vary according to the holyday or season of the ecclesiastical year. Thus in the services in honor of the saints, Doctor Gihr says,

...the subject of the petition is in general, that, by their example and merit, by their doctrine and intercession, we may be raised to a spiritual life, make progress therein and attain eternal joys...imitate what they have done and obtain what they possess.16

As for the ecclesiastical seasons, we are told:

On the Sundays of Advent we implore the Lord "to arouse His power and come; that by His protection we may deserve to be freed from the imminent dangers of our sins, and be saved by his redeeming aid."

The Collects of the Lenten liturgy have reference almost always to the same subject; for they generally implore the grace to worthily and profitably employ this solemn time of penance, so as to make it available for the sincere practice and sanctification of fasting....17

During the Easter season we pray in the Collects that we

17 Ibid., 432.
may profit by the graces gained through the Redemption so as to overcome sinful habits and prepare for the final resurrection with Christ. The Easter season closes with the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.

The second half of the ecclesiastical year—the time from Pentecost to Advent—represents the pilgrimage of the children of God to their eternal home...Therefore in the Collects of this time, the Church prays that God, the strength of all that hope in Him, may send us the help of His grace, that, in the fulfilment of His commandments, we may please Him by thought and deed...that He may pardon what fills our conscience with dread....18

From these observations of Doctor Gihr, we conclude that the major themes of the objects of petitions in the Collects may be condensed into the five acts of the penitent in the Sacrament of Penance: contrition, confession, amendment, and satisfaction, presupposing the necessary examination of conscience. Let us see how these elements appeared elsewhere in the Book of Common Prayer and in Johnson's prayers.

As a matter of fact, the Book of Common Prayer explicitly instructed Johnson and all communicants to examine their conscience before partaking of the Communion. Thus, in the small "Catechism, that is to say, an instruction to be learned of every person before he be brought to be confirmed by the Bishop,"19

18 Ibid., 433.
the final query reads:

What is required of them who come to the Lord's Supper?

Answer

To examine themselves, whether they repent them truly of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life, have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death and be in charity with all men.20

This exhortation to examine one's conscience is repeated in an official instruction inserted in the Communion Office of the Book of Common Prayer and introduced by these words:

When the Minister giveth warning for the celebration of the holy Communion, which he shall do always upon the Sunday, or some holy day immediately preceding, after the sermon or homily ended, he shall read this exhortation following.21

The Communion exhortation said, regarding the examination:

My duty is to exhort you in the mean season to consider the dignity of that holy mystery, and the great peril of the unworthy receiving thereof, and so to search and examine your own consciences (and that not lightly, and after the manner of dissemblers with God;) but so that you may come holy and clean to such a heavenly feast...The way and means thereto is: First, to examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments.22

That Johnson, in heeding these warnings, was spiritually

20 Ibid., 288-289.
21 Ibid., 243.
22 Ibid., 243.
influenced by this examination of conscience is revealed not alone in the petitions of his prayers, which give evidence of a thorough soul-searching. It is also manifested in the notes of his Prayers and Meditations for thirty-five special occasions of New Year's, Easter, and his birthday.23 Before composing his prayer for these days, Johnson listed his faults and resolutions - weighty testimony of his scrupulous examination of conscience. In addition to these annual observances, he lists eight other examinations of conscience and subsequent resolutions.24

The second element of the Sacrament of Penance frequently used as the object of petitions in the Book of Common Prayer is contrition or sorrow for sin. This element, like the examinations from which it flows, was also urged upon the congregation in the pre-Communion exhortation already quoted from. Following the last words cited above, the minister was to say, "...and whereinsoever you shall perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness...."25

Johnson's prayers obeyed this exhortation to excite contrition for his sins. Indeed, so often do his petitions for

25 The Book of Common Prayer, 243-244.
genuine sorrow and his expressions of contrition occur that it is not possible to cite all the instances, even by reference, in this paper. It must suffice to say that he poured out freely his anguished soul's sorrow and repentance for all his sins and faults from the very first page of his Prayers and Meditations, which presents the plea: "Create in me a contrite heart, that I may worthily lament my sins and acknowledge my wickedness," to the last page of the book with this entreaty: "...make me earnestly to repent, and heartily to be sorry for all my misdoings; make the remembrance so burdensome and painful, that I may flee to Thee with a troubled spirit and a contrite heart...." The sense of sorrow and the spirit of repentance was engendered in his soul by the impressive exhortation of the Communion Office and by the incessant pleas of the daily and Sunday Collects. Johnson's possession of these two virtues is shown clearly in one of the major themes of his Prayers and Meditations.

That the contrition urged by the Book of Common Prayer was not meant to be a barren sorrow is seen from the next words of counsel of the Communion exhortation: "...and to confess yourselves to Almighty God." Later in the same Office appears an instruction concerning the manner and method of making this confession:

26 Johnson, 468.
27 Ibid., 574.
28 The Book of Common Prayer, 244.
...make your humble Confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees.

Then shall this general Confession be made in the name of all those that are minded to receive the holy Communion, by one of the ministers, both he and all the people kneeling humbly upon their knees, and saying: 29

There follows a confession prayer similar to the one prescribed for Morning and Evening Prayer, which will be quoted below. Thus, actual confession of one's sins was to result from the pre-Communion examination of conscience and sorrow for sin.

Besides the words of the Communion Office about confession and the phrases of the Collects which have been mentioned as pleading for forgiveness of sins, we find in the order for Morning and Evening Prayer "a General Confession to be said of the whole congregation, after the Minister, all kneeling." 30

Because of the apparent deep impression made on Doctor Johnson by this prayer, as shown in the preceding chapter, it may be interesting to see the whole act.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts; we have offended against thy holy laws; we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us: But thou, 0 Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders; spare thou them,

29 Ibid., 247.
30 Ibid., 47, 61.
O God, which confess their faults; restore thou them that are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind, in Christ Jesus our Lord: and grant 0 most merciful father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.\textsuperscript{31}

From this prayer, and from the theme of the others which were referred to above, it is evident that confession of sins was frequently counselled by the Book of Common Prayer. That these parts of the church services made a lasting impression upon Johnson's spirituality can be seen from the confessional tone of the majority of his prayers, in particular those composed after his examination of conscience on New Year's, his birthday, and especially before communicating at Easter. A striking phrase of Johnson's in his birthday notes, often said to express a major theme of his prayers, is this: "I went to church, prayed to be loosed from the chain of my sins."\textsuperscript{32} Its counterpart is found in an Ordinary Collect of Morning and Evening Prayer, and reads: "...though we be tied and bound with the chain of our sins, yet ...loose us...."\textsuperscript{33}

A few words about the Anglican doctrine of forgiveness of sins through confession are in order here, because of the far-reaching effect it seems to have had upon Doctor Johnson's whole

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 47-48, 61-62.
\textsuperscript{32} Johnson, 493.
\textsuperscript{33} The Book of Common Prayer, 81.
spiritual condition. An Anglican theologian, Canon E. Basil Redlich, in explaining the teaching of the Church of England in this matter, says,

The methods by which forgiveness may be obtained may be grouped in two classes: Those by which the individual seeks forgiveness direct from God, such as confession, public or private, with repentance and prayer, and those which the Church has set forward as means of grace.34

This Anglican confession may be either public or private; but while public confession by its very nature can only be in quite general terms, as in the daily offices of the Book of Common Prayer, and in Holy Communion, a private confession can be more detailed. It may be made to a minister or to a friend, but no Church, according to Canon Redlich, can completely compel its members to accept the principle of private confession to a minister. Though it is not forbidden, private confession to be at all valuable, he claims, must be voluntary.35

Basing his arguments on a tissue of historical inaccuracies, the Canon denies the power of sacerdotal absolution thus:

...it has been held by the Latin Church and by some members of the Church of England that the priest has the power to say judicially, "Ego te absolvo"--words which are the "virtus clavium et totum Sacramenti effectum." ...The Sacrament of penance, according to the Latin Church and to others who accept its teaching,

35 Ibid., 264-265.
"is the divinely-appointed means by which Christians who have fallen into mortal sin after baptism receive forgiveness." Further, "Those persons who only fall into venial sin are not under any obligation to go to confession."

We have disagreed with this interpretation of the commission bestowed by our Lord and of the division of sins into "mortal" and "venial." 36

Then Canon Redlich goes on to consider the teaching of the Church of England in this matter of absolution. He sums up its position by stating:

Thus the Church of England holds that sacramental absolution gives no fuller absolution than is given in other ways. It is not more efficacious that the public absolution with its declarations of the conditions of forgiveness given in an office of the Church.

The priest, therefore, is the herald, not the giver, of forgiveness. He proclaims that forgiveness is available, and that God alone can grant forgiveness on the conditions laid down by Him. That a priest has the power to absolve...is not the teaching of... the Church of England. 37

We have ventured to cite at such length the Anglican position on confession, forgiveness, and absolution not in order to refute it, but merely because it explains a major aspect of Doctor Johnson's spiritual difficulties. With no auricular confession of sins in a real Sacrament of Penance, with no sacer-

36 Ibid., 267.
37 Ibid., 270.
dotal absolution or definite satisfaction for sin, with no real assurance that his sins had been forgiven, with no priestly counsel on how to overcome his sins and faults, with no real differentiation between mortal and venial sins, Johnson is understandably anxious and perturbed in his Prayers and Meditations. Small wonder is it that he repeatedly confesses as grievous sins such faults as that of wasting time, of which he says:

My reigning sin, to which perhaps many others are appendant, is waste of time, and general sluggishness, to which I was always inclined, and, in part of my life, have been almost compelled by morbid melancholy and disturbance of mind. Melancholy has had in me its paroxysms and remissions, but I have not improved the intervals, nor sufficiently resisted my natural inclination, or sickly habits.38

That Johnson felt a need for the beneficial effects of the real Sacrament of Penance is evident throughout the anguished outcries of his Prayers and Meditations. His remark in answer to Boswell's query about the Catholic doctrine of Confession led Doctor Johnson to admit:

Why, I don't know but that is a good thing. The Scripture says, 'Confess your faults one to another,' and the priests confess as well as the laity. Then it must be considered that their absolution is only upon repentance, and often upon penance also. You think your sins may be forgiven without penance, upon repentance alone.39

38 Johnson, 535.
In the Collects, the General Confession prayer, and the pre-Communion exhortation, after the confessing of sins comes the purpose of amendment. As we have seen, in most of the Collects is included a petition for grace to rise from sin, to reform, to please God henceforth. The General Confession begs God, the most merciful Father, to grant "that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life to the glory of thy holy Name." The Communion service exhorts the communicants to confess "with full purpose of amendment of life."

These counsellings had great effect on Doctor Johnson's spiritual attitude of ever striving to overcome faults, of ever resolving to improve his life, of ever hoping to make progress in his search after peace and perfection. This attitude reveals itself in his numberless petitions for grace to reform his life. We have already seen how often he made resolutions of amendment after his examinations of conscience. The existence of forty-three such lists of resolves in such a brief and fragmentary diary as his Prayers and Meditations testifies to the earnestness and sincerity with which he tried to fulfill the urgings of the Book of Common Prayer.

The fifth act of the penitent in completing the reception

41 Ibid., 244.
of the real Sacrament of Penance is satisfaction. Sometimes this is called reparation, propitiation, atonement, expiation, or penance. Satisfaction for sin is a duty of justice, for, as Father Tanquerey explains,

Sin is a real injustice, since it deprives God of a portion of that eternal glory which is His due. Sin, then, requires a reparation which consists in rendering God, to the extent in which we are able, that honor and glory of which, through our fault, we have defrauded Him.42

The practice of this penance is explained by the same author as consisting of sentiments and acts. The chief sentiments are an abiding and sorrowful remembrance of our having sinned, together with a sense of shame and a wholesome fear of sin.43 These sentiments have already been treated of in conjunction with contrition and sorrow for sin as expressed in Johnson’s prayers and in the Book of Common Prayer.

The acts of penance considered as a virtue are chiefly these: patience in the acceptance of afflictions, obedience by the fulfillment of duties in the spirit of penance, almsgiving, fasting, and mortification.44 In the Sacrament of Penance, of course, the satisfaction is the performance of the duty imposed by the confessor and expiation in Purgatory. But Johnson and the Book of Common Prayer are concerned merely with the virtue

42 Tanquerey, 354.
43 Ibid., 358-359.
44 Ibid., 359-361.
of penance, not the real sacrament, so we are discussing not sacramental satisfaction, but the general voluntary works of reparation of sin which constitute the virtue.

In only a few places in the Book of Common Prayer is there mention of such penance, and even then the task of real reparation is referred to the satisfaction made by Christ. Thus, on Septuagesima Sunday the Collect beseeches God that "...we who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Saviour...." On the first Sunday in Lent the Collect reads:

> O Lord, who for our sake didst fast forty days, and forty nights: give us grace to use such abstinence that our flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions....

The Collect for Holy Saturday asks God that

> ...by continually mortifying our corrupt affections, we may be buried with him, and that through the grave and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection, for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, thy son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Judging from the scarcity and qualifications of such sentiments, we may conclude that the Book of Common Prayer does not seem to have emphasized penance as the satisfaction for sin. A recent Anglican writer, E. L. van Becelaere, in an article in the authoritative Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics has stated:

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45 The Book of Common Prayer, 110.
46 Ibid., 116.
47 Ibid., 149.
Accordingly, the common Protestant view of penance or repentance for sins is that, as a conversion of a soul to God, it involves, by the mercy of God, complete forgiveness both of sin and of the penalty due to sin, without the necessity of works of penance or expiation, for which the satisfaction of Christ is considered sufficient.48

This accords with the remark of Doctor Johnson to Boswell which was quoted above: "You think your sins may be forgiven without penance, upon repentance alone."49

Yet Johnson's common sense and sense of justice and his delicacy of conscience led him to recognize the propriety of performing acts of penance as a consequence of the contrition and confession urged by the Book of Common Prayer. In Johnson's Prayers and Meditations are mentioned frequently all five works of penance outlined by Father Tanquerey:50 patience through his acceptance of the continual afflictions of mind and body, obedience by his fulfillment of duties in the spirit of penance, fasting in spite of his bodily infirmities, almsgiving to the poor and charitable care for them in his own home, and mortification of his thoughts, desires, appetite, senses, and daily actions.

49 Boswell, I, 351.
50 Vide supra, 53, n. 44.
Thus, Johnson in his Prayers and Meditations shows a penitential spirituality so profoundly affected by the injunctions of the Book of Common Prayer that he not only incorporated those elements of the Sacrament of Penance contained as themes of the Proper and Ordinary Collects, but even went beyond them to perform penance in reparation and satisfaction for his sins.

The final major theme of the Book of Common Prayer may be called death, though in reality it is death under the supernatural aspect of entrance into eternal life. This petition, occurring in about half of the Collects, is usually made as the climax or final purpose of the resolution for amendment already discussed. It is typically expressed in the very first Collect, that of the first Sunday in Advent:

...that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty; to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the holy Ghost now and ever. Amen. 51

Doctor Johnson, as we saw in the preceding chapter, echoed this petition in seventy-six of his prayers, with four of these being for the salvation of his wife and his friends. It may be noted that his charity led him to pray often for his departed friends and relatives, as he mentions in nineteen instances52 in

51 The Book of Common Prayer, 86.
his Prayers and Meditations. Here again, though he usually prefixed the qualification, "so far as it might be lawful for me," we see that Johnson's common sense led him to go beyond the strict spirit of Anglican doctrine.

He may have been within the letter of Anglican law, for, speaking of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662, which Johnson used, Anglican writers have said: "The Church of England has however never forbidden prayers for the dead." In the Communion service, the commemoration of the departed was added to the prayer itself. This commemoration is rather non-committal however, merely saying,

> And we also bless thy holy name, for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear, beseeching thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom.

Even though the Anglican tradition was strongly against belief in Purgatory and praying for the dead, Johnson could see these doctrines as being quite reasonable. For when Boswell mentioned, as "common objections against the Roman Catholic Church," the fact that Catholics believed in Purgatory and even prayed for the dead, Johnson replied,

54 Ibid., 422.
Why, Sir, it [Purgatory] is a very harmless doctrine. They are of opinion that the generality of mankind are neither so obstinately wicked as to deserve everlasting punishment, nor so good as to merit being admitted into the society of blessed spirits; and therefore God is graciously pleased to allow of a middle state, where they may be purified by certain degrees of suffering. You see, Sir, there is nothing unreasonable in this.56

And to the objection of praying for the dead Johnson added, "Why, Sir, if it be once established that there are souls in purgatory, it is as proper to pray for them, as for our brethren of mankind who are yet in this life."57

Whatever his doctrinal beliefs on these questions, (and his answers as given above may merely be instances of "arguing for victory") it is certain that he acted as though he hoped those answers were true, as his four recorded prayers and his nineteen notes about having prayed for the dead attest.

There is a connection between Johnson's praying for his dead friends, together with his constant petitions for final salvation ("that I may die in Thy favour"), and what Father E.J. Drummond, S.J., calls "that black thread of fear which runs right through the pattern of his whole life--the fear of death."58

When speaking of Johnson's fear of death, it is wise to recall

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56 Boswell, I, 350-351.
57 Ibid., 351.
the comment of a recent critic, that it was

...an experience, some critics apparently need to be reminded, which was not peculiar to him. What was peculiar to him was his lack of any fear in confessing to the world that death was an awful thing for him to contemplate.59

In this study we cannot deal with the psychological or constitutional basis of that fear, except to note with Father Drummond;

No doubt his psychological weakness, his melancholy and his dread of going mad, his nervous, scrupulous tendencies all aggravated and were in turn aggravated by this fear of death.60

The spiritual basis for his fear of death is explained by the same author as something revealed in his prayers.

It was not because he feared bodily dissolution, or because he ever doubted about Christian immortality that Johnson was haunted by the fear of death. "For the night cometh" were the words that he had engraved on the dial of his watch. The night cometh—when no man can work—. Had he worked sufficiently while there was light?

Johnson was not worrying about some serious fall, but about a wasted life. Sloth, so it seemed to him, had kept him from building the high towers his genius should have built. He knew that he had been given talents, but he feared that instead of trafficking with them he slothfully allowed them to be buried.61

60 Drummond, 455.
61 Ibid., 456-457.
We have already seen that Johnson singled out as his predominant sin the waste of time and general sluggishness or indolence. Yet he knew how his bodily infirmities had influenced his fault, and from that he drew hope of pardon and salvation.

When I survey my past life, I discover nothing but a barren waste of time, with some disorders of body, and disturbances of the mind very near to madness, which I hope He that made me, will suffer to extenuate many faults, and excuse many deficiencies.62

Johnson's fear of death was the beginning of wisdom for him. "To fear death before it comes," concludes St. Gregory, 'is to conquer it when it comes."63 That Doctor Johnson finally conquered death, or at least the fear of it, has been the testimony of some of his contemporaries.

By December 10th Johnson had, so Fanny Burney heard, become "perfectly resigned to his approaching fate, and no longer in terror of death." ...He asked one of his physicians to tell him plainly if he had any chance to recover and the physician, after asking him if he could bear the truth, replied that he could not "without a miracle." "Then, (said Johnson) I will take no more physic, not even my opiates; for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to GOD unclouded."64

Finally, on December 13, 1784, "About seven that same evening he died, muttering to one account, 'Jam moriturus.'"65

62 Johnson, 539-540.
65 Ibid., 554.
The death of Doctor Johnson occasioned the entrance into future life of a spiritual character profoundly influenced, as we have seen, by the spirituality inculcated by the Book of Common Prayer. From his concepts of his relationship to God, his use of the elements of the Sacrament of Penance: Examination of conscience, contrition, confession, amendment, and satisfaction, we gather the picture of a soul humble, hopeful, truthful, just, conscientious, contrite, confessing his faults, striving to amend them, atoning for them, fearing death, and pleading for final salvation. Such a soul may easily be judged to have had a delicate, a tender conscience; some writers have gone so far as to say his was a scrupulous conscience.

To make such a judgment of a person, we need more knowledge than is contained in Doctor Johnson's fragmentary Prayers and Meditations of the convictions upon which his moral judgments were based. We may say, indeed, that many of his entries in this spiritual diary and even many of his prayers bear some of the characteristics of the outpourings of a scrupulous person. But we should recall the difference between a tender and a scrupulous conscience. Father Henry Davis, S.J., gives us these definitions:

Conscience is an act of the practical reason. It tells us that an action which appears to us to be morally bad must be omitted, that an action, which is here and now commanded must, if possible, be performed.

The scrupulous conscience is one that has no sound reasons for judging one way or
the other, and yet gives its commands now in one way, now in another, basing its dictates on what it knows to be insufficient motives, yet in fear and apprehension leaning to the strict side. In brief, its motives are foolish and it knows them to be so when the mind is not obsessed by fear.

The tender conscience, if a true conscience, is, however, an eminently desirable conscience to possess, for its owner will rightly regard even slight sins as matter for regret and avoidance. The tender conscience differs from the scrupulous in that it is true and is founded on reasonable convictions; whereas the scrupulous conscience is always erroneous.

Father Davis goes on to tell us that the scrupulous conscience is usually exercised about three distinct classes of action: 1) about past confessions; 2) about possible or probable consent to evil thoughts in the past; 3) about the pervading presence of sin, considered as lurking in every action of the waking life, so that what appears quite harmless to ordinary people is moral poison to the scrupulous. He is so preoccupied with the thought of possible or unforgiven sin, that he has no peace; he becomes diffident, hesitating, introspective.

Many of Doctor Johnson's admissions in his diary and many petitions in his prayers would seem to fit that description of the actions of a scrupulous person. Without going into detail, we may estimate that a good deal of Johnson's "scrupulosity" was

67 Ibid., 75.
a direct effect of the spiritual influence of the Book of Common Prayer, though a rather negative influence in this instance.

For the Book of Common Prayer urged the adherents of the Church of England to perform most of the acts which are to be exercised by a penitent in the real Sacrament of Penance. These acts Johnson performed, as we have seen. Yet Johnson did not have at hand, according to the knowledge we have, the benefits of private, auricular confession of sins in a real Sacrament of Penance, nor of sacerdotal absolution and definite satisfaction for sin, nor of real assurance that his sins had been forgiven, nor of priestly counsel on how to overcome his sins and faults, nor of a satisfying distinction between mortal and venial sin.

Without these aids, Johnson still sought for peace, but he was never sure that he had done all in the way of repentance that was required of him. He wanted the real assurance that sacramental absolution would have given him. He continued to feel more and more something like envy for the helps and the security that the Catholics had. Speaking of Catholicism on June 9, 1784, just six months before his death, he said,

There is one side on which a good man might be persuaded to embrace it. A good man of a timorous disposition in great doubt of his acceptance with God, and pretty credulous, may be glad to be of a church where there are so many helps to get to Heaven. I would be a Papist if I could. I have fear enough; but an obstinate rationality prevents me. I shall never be a Papist unless on the near approach of death, of which I have a very
great terror.68

We can only regret that an "obstinate rationality" was the obstacle that prevented this great and tender-conscienced soul from having its scrupulous tendencies remedied in the real Sacrament of Penance. In spite of this privation, Catholics as well as Protestants can admire Doctor Johnson's strong, manly, and upright piety--a piety revealed in his Prayers and Meditations as having been deeply influenced by the Book of Common Prayer.

68 Boswell, II, 482.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

The spiritual constitution of Samuel Johnson's many-sided character was formed by his religious ideas and exercises. From evidence found in his *Prayers and Meditations*, two main streams of influence on his religious concepts and practice are disclosed. The effect of his reading the works of religious writers is said to have influenced his ideas of the truth and the evidences of Christianity. Stuart G. Brown has shown some of these influences as regards rationalism and the supernatural.1

The second stream of influence was directed more at the formation and discipline of Johnson's spiritual character. This stream is found in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England and stems from the Proper and Ordinary Collects and the Communion Office. Its effect on Johnson's prayer structure and material is discovered in the striking similarity of form and content of the four parts of each prayer: elevation of the soul, thanksgiving, petition, and supplication. While Johnson embodied the same thoughts in forms corresponding to those of the collects, he placed added emphasis on penitential expression in most of his prayers. His extra effort in adapting the words and ideas of the prayer book to fit his personal needs shows how deeply these

1 Stuart G. Brown, "Dr. Johnson and the Religious Problem," *English Studies*, XX (1938), 1-17.
ideas impressed him. He did not merely copy out the Collects; he chose what appealed to him and what fitted his spiritual needs.

The spiritual character of Johnson, as revealed by his Prayers and Meditations, had its chief constituent elements in the concepts and virtues used as main themes of the prayer of worship and the prayer of petition as expressed and recommended in the Book of Common Prayer. His prayer of worship embodied the same concepts of man's relationship to God as those used and taught in the Anglican prayer book. In his expression of these concepts is manifested the humility, self-knowledge, sense of justice, and hope which were moulded by the precepts and practice of the Book of Common Prayer.

The themes of Johnson's prayer of petition were found to coincide with those of the Proper and Ordinary Collects and the Communion Office in consisting mainly of the five acts of the penitent in the Sacrament of Penance: examination of conscience, contrition, confession, firm purpose of amendment, and penance or satisfaction for sin. The Anglican ideas of confession, sin, absolution, and satisfaction were shown to have influenced the ideas of Johnson regarding the spiritual condition of his soul, and to have affected Johnson's concern with penitential and expiatory expressions.

The hopeful concern of the Book of Common Prayer regarding
death and final salvation was mirrored in the prayers and the meditation notes of Doctor Johnson. His frequent prayers for his departed relatives and friends bear marks of the restraining influence of the Anglican doctrine about Purgatory, but his own common sense and charity led him to rise above this limitation to express the real attitude of human nature. In addition, his fear of death, based on his remorse for what he called his reigning sin—indolence—and on his high ideals, was shown as affected by the conscientiousness partially induced by the Anglican teachings on confession, which were not properly fitted to lessen or relieve the anxieties resultant therefrom.

These anxieties and the lack of a remedial treatment in the practice of the Church of England so influenced Johnson's tender conscience as to produce the actions and prayer expressions ordinarily characteristic of a scrupulous person. However, not enough material regarding the motives of Johnson's moral acts is contained in his spiritual diary to allow of a satisfactory conclusion about his so-called scrupulosity.

Doctor Johnson's spiritual character is not completely revealed in his Prayers and Meditations. But from the partial evidence therein contained, some idea of his spiritual personality may be gathered. The tenor of that idea may vary, according to the impression made by the particular elements which appeal to, or strike most forcibly, the individual reader.
Augustine Birrell has given us his impressions in these words:

In these Prayers and Meditations we see an awful figure. The solitary Johnson, perturbed, tortured, oppressed, in distress of body and of mind, full of alarms for the future both in this world and the next, teased by importunate and perplexing thoughts, harassed by morbid infirmities, vexed by constantly recurring scruples, with an inherited melancholy and a threatened sanity, is a gloomy and even a terrible picture, and forms a striking contrast to the social hero, the triumphant dialectician of Boswell, Mrs. Thrale, and Madame D’Arblay. Yet it is relieved by its inherent humanity, its fellowship and feeling. Dr. Johnson’s piety is delightfully full of human nature—far too full to please the poet Cowper, who wrote of the Prayers and Meditations as follows: ‘...Poor man! one would think that to pray for his dead wife and to pinch himself with Church fasts had been almost the whole of his religion.’

From the study of Doctor Johnson presented in this thesis should come a somewhat similar, yet somewhat different, idea and impression. Johnson’s spiritual progress was unfortunately impeded by the anxieties and difficulties mentioned by Birrell. But it is more than “relieved” by its inherent humanity. Doctor Johnson’s piety may be full of human nature, but it is difficult to see how it could be “delightfully” full, unless one is merely amused at the spectacle of the great Doctor Johnson revealing the spiritual endeavors and difficulties of his naked soul.

In these Prayers and Meditations we see a truly impressive figure. The Johnson who prays alone with God, earnest, sincere, devout, humble, truthful, just, frank, hopeful, conscientious, contrite, full of repentance for past faults and of resolution to rise from them once more, taking himself into solitude for annual retreats, constantly reading the Scriptures and spiritual treatises, faithful in attending church services, regular in performing his private devotions, charitably praying for dead relatives and friends, caring in his own home for the poor and the unfortunate, doing private penance in reparation for his sins, yet putting his whole trust in the mercy of his Father and the merits of his Redeemer—this Johnson is a stimulating and even an inspirational picture, and forms a striking contrast to the lukewarm generality of mankind.

This brief personal impression of Doctor Johnson’s real spiritual character, as well as all the evidence previously presented, leaves us with but one conclusion: the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, through the spiritual advice and practice embodied in its Collects and Communion Office, profoundly influenced the spirituality manifested by Doctor Johnson in his Prayers and Meditations.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by John J. Miday, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English, West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Aug. 13, 1947

Date

Signature of Adviser