

SERMON XXXI.

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WHETHER IT BE EXPEDIENT, AND HOW THE CONGREGATION
MAY SAY "AMEN" IN PUBLIC WORSHIP.*And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people
answered, Amen, Amen.—Nehemiah viii. 6.*

OMNIPOTENT and eternal Goodness never wants instruments to deliver his church from slavery, or reform it from degeneracy. All the empires and emperors in the world have served the kingdom of God, and been as scaffolds set up about the house of God, to be taken down when that is built up and finished. They have been as Gibeonites and Nethinims to the temple of the Lord. The Assyrian was God's rod upon Israel's back. [The] Persian was here God's shepherd, whose spirit was stirred up to raise up the Jews. Alexander was a servant; and the Romans have been but God's slaves, to do his will against their own.

The state of the church at this juncture was the end of a desolation, or beginning of a reformation. The Jews had weathered out seventy years in captivity, wherein multitudes of them were worn off. A remnant being left, God raised up Cyrus, and moved him to set them free from Babylon, according to the prophecy of Isaiah (xlv. 1—4) two hundred and ten years before.

Many of the people, through lazy worldliness or despondency, chose rather still to "lie among the pots" in Chaldea, than return to Jerusalem to build their city and temple; though Cyrus gave them not only liberty by proclamations, but accommodations for the work. But God raised up the spirit of Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, and Ezra, to carry it on.

This Ezra was a great man of God, one of the great synagogue, a prophet, a scribe, a priest. Some will have it, that as Jehoiakim cut and burnt the roll, (Jer. xxxvi. 23,) so the Chaldeans burned all the books of the law; and so Ezra restored them as a prophet by revelation or his memory. But this is false: for Daniel "understood by books" the expiration of the seventy years; (chap. ix. 2;) and Cyrus himself read the prophecy of Isaiah; for he says, [that] "the Lord charged him to build his house at Jerusalem." (Ezra i. 2.) But he was a prophet, as he was directed by God's Spirit to compose this history of his; and a perfect scribe,—living to Malachi's time, he wrote the complete Old Testament, and made a perfect copy. But here he officiates as a priest,—the son of Seraiah, from Phinehas, Eleazar, and Aaron,—to serve the Lord. (Ezra vii. 1.) When they

had neither temple nor tabernacle, they set up the worship of the God of heaven in the open heaven; which was neither typical nor topical, but natural and evangelical, worship.

Upon the first day of the seventh month, in a pulpit in the street, (the people meeting "as one man," Ezra iii. 1,) he read the law of God,—and that distinctly, "giving the sense" of it, (Neh. viii. 8,)—from morning to noon; and all the congregation stood attentively; and at noon probably he dismissed them with a blessing, according to God's command. (Num. vi. 23.)

But here, at the opening [of] the book, praying to God, and praising him for his good hand over them and his good word before them, he blessed the Lord, ere he blessed the people: "And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen."

In which words there is, 1. The priest's or minister's office,—blessing. And, 2. The people's office: "And all the people answered, Amen, Amen." 3. The great God, in the midst of this great congregation, the Object of the priest's office, and the people's also. Whence this

DOCTRINE.

That it is a lawful and laudable practice for people, in the conclusion of public prayer or praising God, to pronounce an Amen.

This will answer the question; which is, *Whether it be expedient, and how the congregation may say "Amen" in public worship?* I. *I will explain what is meant by "Amen."* II. *Show what warrant there is for the practice.* III. *Deduce some inference from all.*

I. 1. First, then, there is *Amen substantive*.—And that is God himself, who is what he is, Alpha and Omega, Truth itself. "He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God Amen," or "of Truth." (Isai. lrv. 16.) Jesus Christ is God and "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness." (Rev. iii. 14.) He is that God in whom we may bless ourselves; his being is of himself as God, and he gives being to his word; "all the promises of God" being "in him Yea, and in him Amen," (2 Cor. i. 20,) whether Hebrew or Greek, Old Testament or New, promises, in him they are completed, and by him they are fulfilled.

2. There is *Amen affirmative*.—A phrase used in the beginning of any momentous truth, as an asseveration. What is "Amen," in Matt. xvi. 28, [is] *αληθως*, or "verily," in Luke ix. 27. Our Saviour hath this phrase peculiar to himself, "Amen, Amen," to give confirmation to the doctrine, and to raise our attention and faith; or to show that not only truth is spoken, but by him who is Truth itself.

3. There is *ευκτικον*, or "*optative*," Amen.—Which is as much as *Γενοιτο*, "'Let it be so:' blessed be God by us, and blessed be we of the Lord;" or, as in Jer. xxviii. 6 it is expounded, "Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied." This Amen was used to be set-to, when good was spoken;

as, when David commanded Solomon to be made king, Benaiah said, "Amen: the Lord God of my lord the king say so too." (1 Kings i. 36.) Or, when in imprecations of evil,—as the woman tried by the water of jealousy, which sprinkled on the curse, it blotted out the curse, if she was innocent; if guilty, her thigh presently rotted: she was to say, "'Amen, Amen,' let it be so if I be guilty, and let it be so if I be innocent." (Num. v. 22.) So, at the end of the curses in Deut. xxvii. 15—26: "And all the people shall say, Amen." They are loath to have the curse come; therefore they are commanded there to say, "Amen:" but they need no command to seal the blessings with Amen; all are apt enough to believe and wish them.

But here is a double Amen, which hath the greater emphasis, and requires greater attention and intension of mind; as Neh. ix. 5: "Bless the Lord your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise." "Ever and ever" is answered by "Amen, Amen;" or, "Let it be ratified in heaven, so on earth." And the Jews say, that he that pronounceth this Amen as he ought, is greater than he that blesseth in the name of the Lord; he that pronounceth this Amen with all his might, the gates of heaven fly open to him. But there are three evil Amens; they call the first, (1.) "Abbreviated in the first syllable or letter;" and whoever so pronounceth it as to hasten his Amen, his days shall be soon passed. (2.) There is "Amen cut off, in the last syllable suppressed." (3.) There is "the pupillar, or orphan, Amen;" when it is pronounced at random, impertinently, and unseasonably, without understanding, prayer, or praise foregoing; and so there is no father to beget devotion in them, and so it is an orphan Amen, and his children shall be fatherless that pronounceth such a lifeless word and a fatherless Amen. But he that with knowledge and fervour pronounceth this Amen, his days shall be prolonged upon earth, as Buxtorf relates.

II. Now I am to give you some considerations and arguments for the use of this Amen, and the manner of it.—And they are seven.

1. It is lawful and laudable publicly to use it, *because it is connatural to prayer and praise.*—I do not lay the lawfulness of it upon a Persian decree, or a positive injunction, set on things no ways connatural to the action; for that is forced meat, and turns a man's stomach and his conscience. There is no need for a rubric by the men of the great synagogue, or a canon, to command a man to blush, when it is only the natural passion that will command it: so, when the heart is warm in prayer with serious and earnest affections, a double Amen doth as naturally flow from us as milk from a mother's breast to her suckling. And Amen comes from אָמַן, *aman*, which signifies "to nurse;" as if it were, if not the mother, yet the faithful nurse, of lively devotion. Assent to repetitions is essential unto prayer, and it is not signified publicly but by our Amen. Not that we are obliged to speak it always and with a loud voice. *Quantis arteriis opus est, si pro sono audiamur!** "What lungs had we need to have, if God

* TERTULLIAN.

hear us for our loudness!" But when the heart is affected, we see here how "the people stood up, and lifted up their hands" to heaven; naturally signifying, they would lift the name of God with all their might: but they cast down themselves, "bowing down their heads, and worshipping the Lord with their faces to the ground." Who can hold his breath from a groan or sigh, when matter and affection meet together? The Israelites here could not withhold their hands; nor Hannah hold still her eyes, when earnest in temple-prayer; (1 Sam. i. 10;) nor can a zealous heart hold the tongue from moving to an Amen at the end of prayer and praise. There is no child of God that can say, "Our Father," but, lower or louder, he must and will say, "Amen." The Jews in time of incense called themselves "mutes" in deep, silent prayer; when they praised God on instruments, "semivocates;" but when in open prayer and praises, then they were "vocates" in their Amens.

2. *We have the practice of the Old and New Testament believers for our example.*—In Moses you had it in Numbers and Deuteronomy, and David oft useth it in the Psalms; yea, this double Amen: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen." (Psalm xli. 13.) God was Israel's God, accepting their praises, hearing prayers, fulfilling promises, and this for ever and ever; and be it eternally ratified, "Amen, and Amen," to all generations. In Psalm cvi. 48, the same words are repeated, with this exhortation, "Let all the people say, Amen. Hallelujah." And they had the same praises and petitions to offer; therefore the same conclusion is suitable. So the prophet Jeremiah, speaking of God's oath to give Canaan to the Jews, says, "Amen, O Lord," or, "Be it so." (Jer. xi. 5.) So Paul: "How can *the idiot*," "the private man," who knows only his own private single language, "say Amen" to prayer or praise in another tongue? (1 Cor. xiv. 16.) Which not only imports the custom, but the manner of saying Amen to be with faith and understanding. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Eph. iii. 21.) Yea, Jesus Christ, a greater than Moses, prophets, and apostles, adds this conclusion to his perfect form of petitions, in Matt. vi. 9—13. So, in his book of Revelation, "the four beasts and the four and twenty elders," who represented the whole church of Jews and Gentiles together, cry, "Amen." (Chap. v. 14.) Yea, that innumerable company of those triumphing souls, who had white robes and palms in their hands, as victors over temptations, with the elders and angels, "fell on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." (Rev. vii. 11, 12.) So at the fall of Babylon, as the voice of many thunders and waters, the church cries, "Amen; Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and hath avenged the blood of his servants." (Rev. xix. 1—6.) Yea, it lasts unto the marriage of the Lamb: (verse 7:) still, when the Bridegroom comes, the church cries, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." (Rev. xxii. 20.)

3. *Amen, after prayer and praise, is the man's consent, judgment, and approbation of what is offered unto God.*—It is the setting-to of our seal to all, and our putting our hands to bear a part in the praises and to have a share in the petitions. It imports the desire of our soul, which is the formality of prayer. Now all these are essential to these duties; and the pronounciation is but the publication of our inward sense, which is very significant in public worship. Hearing is but the formal sense in conceiving the petitions; but speech brings them forth, and is a more open profession and a more masculine expression of devotion. "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens." (Lam. iii. 41.) When the heart is intensely elevated to God, it carries the hands and the voice along with it; it acts all the body from the centre; as Tertullian phraseth it, *Bona conscientia eructat ad superficiem*.* He lifts up his soul and body too to God; (Psalm cxliiii. 8;) as they lifted up the *mincah*, or "heave-offering," and waved it before the Lord. The soul will work the body into sympathy, when it is earnest indeed: that which made the veins of the body to open their mouths in drops of blood, as Christ's prayer in his agony did, (Luke xxii. 44,) will certainly make us open our lips. Out "of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Chap. vi. 45.)

4. *This vocal Amen is, as it were, the epitome and sum of all our petitions and praises to God.*—It is the centre which all those lines are drawn toward. It is all the duty, virtually reduced to one word and point. Yea, it is the repeating and echoing, or redoubling, of all over again. As the mercury behind the glass, it reverberates the lively image of all preceding devotion. It is a drawing [of] the arrow to the pile by a strong ejaculation, *quod toto corde Deum petimus*, in Bellarmine's phrase; "whereby the whole heart is darted up to God." It is a "stirring up [of] ourselves to take hold of God." (Isai. lxiv. 7.) It is taking aim, and "directing our prayer to him, and looking up;" (Psalm v. 3;) as if they would hand up God's praises to him, and stand ready to receive his mercies with open hands and mouths. It winds up all together in one bundle. Many are willing to have God forgive their trespasses, but cannot so readily forgive others; we may be free for God to give us daily bounty and bread, but cannot make it as meat and drink to do his will. Men will easily accept of God's kindness—not so roundly pay their tribute of praises. Such cannot roundly pray, nor say, "Amen." "Ah, Lord!" and, "Amen," are two long prayers in few words, managed by the whole soul; and thus it is an Amen with a Hallelujah. When we seek God "with all our hearts," then we find him. (Jer. xxix. 13.)

5. *Amen, rightly pronounced, is an intense act of faith, or it involves a strong faith.*—The Hebrew verb in Niphil signifies "to be firm, stable, and strong," and in Hiphil it signifies "to believe and trust;" and, indeed, we cannot believe or trust to any thing but that which is stable, invariable, and immutable. So that there are two declarations made by this Amen: (1.) That God is firm and immu-

* "A good conscience raises all up to the surface."—EDIT.

tably true in himself and his word. (2.) That we will not only believe his truth, but trust to his veracity and build upon it; as the prophet doth both: "That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O Lord." (Jer. xi. 5.) This is a laying hold on God's strength; (Isai. xxvii. 5;) as we see Abraham: "He believed in the Lord," (Gen. xv. 6,) אֱמַן אֱמַן *vehemen*; God's truth is believed, his veracity trusted to. Israel twisted about both these, as Abraham did; he wrestled with God, and "prevailed." (Gen. xxxii. 28.) The Jews say, *Amen habet tres nucleos*, "[Amen] hath three kernels;" the one is of an oath, the second of faith, the third of confidence, as Bunto says, on אֱמַן. When we have confessed our sins, we do by our Amen say, [that] all is true, and we have deserved God's displeasure; we beg pardon of them, and so believe [that] God hath promised pardon to the penitent; we trust ourselves with God in Christ, and believe that he will pardon our sins, as all others that cast themselves upon his promised grace.

6. *The unanimous pronounciation of Amen is an assurance that God will accept our praises and answer our prayers.*—So as the soul comes off with Luther's *Vicimus*, "We have prevailed." "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark xi. 24.) Nay, "if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." (1 John v. 15.) We ought to believe we shall have them, either in kind or value; and Infinite Wisdom and Goodness must be judge in that case alone. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. xviii. 19.) If any single soul pray in faith, it shall be heard; much more, if two "have a symphony," (as the word imports,) they shall be answered: how much more, when the whole congregation is in harmony, and unanimously cries, "Amen;" when the whole congregation meets "as one man," (Ezra iii. 1,) and "the multitude of believers are of one heart and of one soul!" (Acts iv. 32.) God will say, "Amen," to such Amens. They are, as it were, בַּח-קוֹל a *Bath-Col*, "the echo and voice" of God from the mercy-seat: *Sanctorum vota sunt oracula*.* God's Spirit stirs up such prayers, and they shall not be denied.

The soul, like Luther, says, *Fiat voluntas mea*,—as men make their wills, "In the name of God, *Amen*, 'it shall be thus:'"—"For once let my will, O Lord, be done!" Heaven's gate is open to this united knock.

7. And lastly, *This unanimous Amen of faith strikes terror on the enenies of the church, whether devils or men.*—When the Romans had conquered Philip and the Grecians, and Flaminius caused peace to be proclaimed to the Grecians, "there was such a shout," says Plutarch, "that the very crows and other birds fell down to the

* "The prayers of the saints are oracular."—EDIT.

ground,—the air was so rent and shaken." And when the church of God, "Terrible as an army with banners," gives her unanimous voices of Amens, not only "Satan falls as lightning from heaven," (Luke x. 18.) but Simon Magus by Peter's prayer is fetched down, when he attempted to fly in the air, as if he had been the Holy Dove and Power of God, as ecclesiastical story relates. And Socrates tells us, that, upon Theodosius's prayers and his army's, the Barbarians' captain was smitten with a thunder-bolt, and his soldiers by fire; as the Turks mined the eastern empire of the Romans by "fire and smoke and brimstone," that is, by guns and gunpowder. (Rev. ix. 17.) When the church is united in hearty Amens, it is like the shout that the Israelites gave, when God and his ark came into the camp, which was such a great sound "that the earth rang again." (1 Sam. iv. 5.) For then "God is gone up with a shout," (Psalm xlvii. 5.) to answer the prayers made for the salvation of his people. This makes the hearts of their enemies to melt and tremble, as the Philistines' did. As Jerome expresseth it, "The hollow idols and their temples, that were empty, did echo and rebound the church's Amen, so as their fabrics shaken." Thus when the (שׁוֹפָר *shophar*) "lovely trumpet" sounded the seventh time upon the seventh day, the walls of Jericho fell; (Joshua vi. 20;) and so shall the gates and walls of Babylon by the preaching of the gospel on the Lord's days, and the prayers of the saints. The united breath of God's people sends a blast upon their enemies: the trumpet blew, and the people shouted, and Jericho fell down to the ground. Our Amens must not drop like a cold bullet of lead out of the mouth of a musket, bowing to the ground; but they must be fired by preparations of the heart and warm affections, they must be discharged and shot-off with the utmost *valdè* ["vehemency"] of the soul and fervency of the spirit. Samuel thundered in prayer, and God thundered upon Israel's enemies: "And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel." (1 Sam. vii. 9, 10.) So David prays that God would "bow the heavens, and come down," &c.; (Psalm cxliv. 5;) and he did "bow the heavens, and come down," and "the Lord thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire." (Psalm xviii. 9, 13.) When God's people can unite in one voice, God gives his voice with them and for them.

III. USES.

USE I. The first inference, then, is of REPROOF for our deep silence, and too much neglect of this hearty Amen.—Which proceeds from these four ill causes:—

1. From thence whence all ill things come in upon us, even from *Popish ignorance and darkness*.—When men grew dull and stupid,

and neither understood nor cared to understand, either the word of God to us, or ours to him in prayer, religion was looked upon as a *ωαρεργον*, a "by-business," or troublesome, laborious, and needless curiosity. It was enough to believe as the church believed, and to pray as the church prayed. And so they devolved all their devotions on a pack of idle monks and friars, whom they called "religious orders," who should serve God, supererogate, and merit for them; yea, procure a freedom from purgatory, and not only pardons, but Paradise also, for their moneys; and as soon as their silver did chink in the basin of the priest, out springs the soul from purgatory; as if the sound of money was powerful in purgatory, as true Amens are in heaven.

2. *The divisions among Christians of the Reformed religion, is another cause of this defect and neglect.*—"When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." (1 Cor. xiv. 26.) One was for singing, another for reading, a third for preaching; one for prophesying, another for interpreting. The apostle gives two rules, to oppose this and women's talking in the church: "Let all things be done decently and in order to edification." (1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40.) Natural decency forbids all confusion. In our days, some have such schismatical phrases, notions, and doctrines, in preaching, praying, and praising, that a sober Christian cannot say, "Amen." Some [are] so zealous for forms, that nothing else must be a prayer but the Lord's Prayer; as if, because Cyprian calls it "a legitimate form," all others were spurious; when it is the sense that is the prayer, and not the words, which are differently set down in Luke from Matthew, as Chemnitius well observes. Others are so vehement against all forms, that they would reduce all devotion to an invisible spirituality; as if they had dropped their bodies, and were crowded within the veil, into the triumphant choir of spirits in heaven. But certainly, while we are in the body, we ought to glorify God with our bodies as well as our spirits, and with our tongues as the body's instruments in public worship. *Verbo Deus laudandus, quia Deus Verbum*, says Lactantius: "God was made flesh to speak to us; therefore we ought to speak to him." The tongue is man's "glory:" (Psalm xvi. 9:) as it differenceth us from beasts, so it "makes us priests unto God," to offer up our own and the dumb creatures' sacrifices of praise to God: "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (Rev. i. 6.)

3. Another rate of this defect is *the degenerating of assemblies from their first constitution and plantation.*—For these, as all bodies, contracted defilements both in ministers and people. Formality hath overrun that zeal, piety, and charity, which formerly burned among them: so that many assemblies are run down so into the spirit of the world, that they differ little from Papists. How have some ministers been thrust-in upon the assemblies by a secular hand, who never understood how to preach, or pray a live prayer! and many congregations [are] full of such ignorance and profaneness, that the arches

and vaults in the building give as good an echo as their dead Amens. One comes in his drink; another, piping hot out of their worldly businesses; a third, in huffing finery and bravery, to be gazed on; another is heavy laden with sleep, and comes for a nap. How can they that are not concerned for God's glory, his church, his word, the pardon of their sins, nor think themselves beholden to God for daily bread, or that they need daily grace, say, either, "Our Father," or, "Amen," with any sense? When either ministers or people drink and swill and swear and roar with one another at the tavern all the week, and yet will be the most vocal and loud in their responsals on the Lord's day, it turns men's stomachs and consciences from public expressions, as [smelling] something too rankly of hypocritical formality; that, with the wise Heathen in the ship, when a company of wicked persons cried and prayed,—“Hold your peace,” said he, “lest the gods know you are here, and so destroy us.”* Roaring at the ale-house, and bellowing at the church, are both alike beastly and ugly to be heard.

4. *Worldly peace, plenty, and prosperity dirty and dull the wheels of the soul, so as activity and fervency are bird-limed.*—It is unreasonable, yet too true, that those tenants who have the best farms, pay God his rent worst. When Christians were kept warm by the zeal of their persecutors, they met in caves and woods, with the hazard of their lives; they had a zeal for God and the gospel, they heard and prayed as for their lives, and for the life of religion. It might be their last sermon or prayer they might join in, and so they had a fervent, hearty love for one another; which made them not only seal their prayers with warm Amens, but they sealed “one another also with a holy kiss.” (Rom. xvi. 16.) Not knowing whether they should ever see one another's faces again in the flesh, or no, they fell on one another's necks, and kissed, at parting; (Acts xx. 37, 38;) another expression springing naturally from strong affection, truly Christian, in those times; which, if practised in this dirty age, would be perhaps proved, as well as judged, a piece of wretched carnality. But their flesh was kept under by poverty and persecutions, so as such filthy temptations were burnt up by the love of God and each other. And we have cause to fear, God hath some such irons in the fire, to sear off that dead, yet proud, flesh, which in these days is bred in the hearts of many professors. In the mean time this flesh hinders our very lips from closing in a sound Amen.

USE II. This, then, informs us, that if ever the church recover primitive purity and fervency, it must have such administrations as,

1. *The whole worship of God must be in a known tongue, that so all may say, “Amen,” in the congregation.*—It is observed by Tertullian,† that “sack” is the same in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; (to which we may add English also;) to show, all nations are sinners, and need repentance and humiliation in sackcloth and ashes: and so “Amen” is the same in all languages; that all nations might have the same intel-

* DIOGENES LAERTIUS.

† *De Pœnitentiâ.*

ligible language, in their devotions especially. But the Papists will tell us, that a jewel is of equal value in an ignorant clown's hand, as it is of when in a skilful lapidary's; a petition to a prince is of the same efficacy in one's hand who can neither write nor read, as it is in a scholar's hand. And all is true, if God did not read hearts, when princes only read papers: God required to be worshipped with an understanding soul. Nay, the Jesuits tell us, the unlearned do merit and obtain more than they that understand, because they have more humility and fervour: but it is a strange humility and fervency to pass for a grace, which is not an act of an intelligent man; it is so far from divine and meritorious, that it is not a human act. Cajetan, more to the plain truth, tells us, that organs, which are a distraction to the intelligent worshippers, were yet retained to promote the unlearned men's devotions; and charms, though not understood, yet have power over serpents and devils: so that prayers and praises in an unknown language are, with them, enchantments upon the only wise God, and their devotion is rather the breath of an organ than the breathings [of], and being "filled with, the Spirit." (Eph. v. 18.)

2. This informs us, also, *that all public administrations are to be in the matter of them intelligible, as well as in the form of language.*—Ministers are not to use over-studied phrases, and singular notions of their own fancies, which sometimes men endeavour to pin upon their auditors. Prayer is putting the word and promises of God in suit; and therefore plain scriptural pleadings are our best arguments. Any unintelligible or doubtful expressions do but lay a stumbling-block in the way, to hinder the hearers giving readily their Amen. Therefore we must not only pray with our own "spirits," but with the people's "understanding also." "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?" (1 Cor. xiv. 15, 16.) Our seal must be, and can be only, set to God's covenant: his trust goes before our Amen. So God promiseth to give his people "pastors after his own heart, which shall feed them with knowledge and understanding;" (Jer. iii. 15;) without which, our sacrifices are but the offering up of swine's flesh, or cutting off a dog's neck. (Isai. lxvi. 3.)

3. *All the congregation must be unanimous,—of one heart, sense, and soul.*—Or else they can never meet and centre in one Amen, but are in separation when they are together. The apostle tells us, that the variance of husband and wife causeth their prayers to be hindered, 1 Peter iii. 7; (when passion is up, devotion is down;) or very opposite, like the mountains of blessing and cursing, (Deut. xi. 29,) or Samaria and Jerusalem, or Hannah and Peninnah, scolding under the same roof. But the true Jerusalem is a city at unity with itself: "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together." (Psalm cxxii. 3.) "One Lord, one baptism," one bread, one body, one soul, "one spirit," one heart, "one faith," (Eph. iv. 4, 5,) and one request;

namely, that "the Lord may be King over all the earth; that the Lord may be one, and his name one:" (Zech. xiv. 9:) which will be, when God shall "give his people one heart, and one way, that they may fear him for ever." (Jer. xxxii. 39.) Then there shall be as many taches as loops, and sockets as tenons, and all the "tabernacle be one." (Exod. xxxvi. 13.) As the Jews,—when they sacrificed, they compassed the altar round; so, when they feasted, they "sat round." (1 Sam. xvi. 11.) This symphony and harmony, when it obtains, will make one Amen, when God's praises and the saints' prayers shall be all one; which will be, when Christ's prayer shall be answered: "Let them be one, as we are." (John xvii. 11.) All heart-burnings shall cease, when all our fire shall be only upon God's altar, and unite in one pyramidal flame, aspiring and terminating in the pure love of God.

4. *To all this, there must come-in diligent attention and intension of mind.*—For, else they cannot consent to all and every part. And as a man who is to set his hand and seal to an indenture will hear all the conditions, that he may know what he binds himself to; so we, being to seal all the prayers with our lips and heart, "Amen," had need mind what we seal to. How do many frisk and air their thoughts in vanities, like a wanton spaniel from his master's walk; and come in from this false scent to the quest, with full cry and a dirty Amen! This only mocks God's all-seeing eye, and hypocritically colludes with the congregation. And when we consider how few hold pace with every petition,—the fourth Toletan council, that made a canon against any using Hallelujah in Lent, might have forbidden Amens also in public congregations; considering that jejune attention and intension of mind, which accompanies the devotions of the generality. But when all societies shall be intelligent, unanimous, intent, and affectionate, they may, ought [to], and will say Amens, with Hallelujahs too, though Lenten canon forbid both.

USE III. The third use is of CAUTION, to beware of all that which may hinder this powerful Amen.

1. Then beware of all sin.—Deliberate sins deaden our faith and spirits in prayer. *Quantum a præceptis, tantum ab auribus Dei distamus*:* "We are always as much at a distance from God's hearing us, as we are from hearing his righteous precepts." "If we regard iniquity in our hearts," God will not say, "Amen," to our prayers, (Psalm lxi. 18,) nor can we do it in faith. How can any say, "Amen," to, "Cursed be the man that maket hany graven or molten image, or that removeth his neighbour's landmark?" (Deut. xxvii. 15, 17.) For an unholy person to say, "Hallowed be thy Name," is to pray God to sanctify himself upon him; and he that cannot have charity to forgive them that trespass against him, while he prays God to forgive his trespasses, he doth interpretatively pray that God would not forgive his sins.

2. Take heed of too much business.—For that dusteth us with so

* TERTULLIANUS *De Oratione Dominica*.

many thoughts, which not only choke the word, but stifle our prayers. The apostle would have them *αμεριμνους*, "without cares," that they might "serve the Lord without distraction," *προς το ευσχημον και ευπροσεδρον τω Κυριω απερισπαστως*. (1 Cor. vii. 32, 35.) By these "convulsive motions" of distracting thoughts, which pull us first on one hand, then on the other, the face of the duty and the soul is very distorted, ill-favoured, "of an ill scheme and fashion;" all the beauty of duty is gone off; nor can the soul "well sit close to the Lord and steady," but sits tottering,—half on, half off; no settled frame of spirit can be maintained. First one business, then another, comes and pulls us off, to speak with us, so as we are not at leisure to speak with God. As Cyprian says,* "It is strange we should think God should hear us, when we do not hear ourselves."

3. Beware of a *lazy posture of the body*.—For the soul is drawn into consent and sympathy with it. Here the Jews "stood up," to show their reverence and attention to the word of God. (Neh. viii. 5.) They "lifted up their hands, bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." Here was exalted attention and devotion, and most humble veneration, with intense affections; and these could say, "Amen, Amen." (Verse 6.) But to see one sit and hang down his head, and hang his hat on his nose; or, perhaps, sleeping till he snore himself awake, and then give a yawn or an idle Amen; any one, without breach of charity, may think him guilty of lazy hypocrisy with detestation. This is a mocking of God, giving the congregation a flap† with this fox's tail, when they have cunningly slept over the greatest part of the prayer, and slipped out of the congregation without removal. *Irreligiosissimum est sedere; nisi quoddam Deo exprobramus quoddam oratio nos fatigaverit*; as Tertullian says:‡ "It is most indecent, (without a good reason,) to sit at prayer; for it is else in effect to tell God [that] prayer hath tired us out."

USE IV. The fourth use is of DIRECTION AND EXHORTATION,—*how to keep up this harmonious Amen in public assemblies.*

1. *Let pastor and people never meet, but premise some solemn preparations of heart to meet the Lord*.—Rehoboam, and most of the kings of Israel, and their people also, sinned in this,—that they "prepared not" themselves to set their "hearts to seek the Lord." (2 Chron. xii. 14.) He "fitted not his heart," as the Hebrew word imports; it was no more fit to that duty, than an ass is to play upon a harp. We should never offer God that which cost us nothing. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet," (Exod. iii. 5.)—vain thoughts and vile affections,—and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," (Rom. xiii. 14,) ere you go into the Father's presence. A worldly spirit, coming off from common employments, is not fit for communion with God. A common heart will never be enclosed in any duty, but runs wild of itself, and lies open to all incursions. Uzza was smitten, though he touched the ark out of a good intention, but in an undue manner:

* Epist. viii.
Orations Dominica.

† Concerning this word, see the note in vol. i. page 1.

‡ *De*

he did it not in judgment, nor according to God's order and appointment. (1 Chron. xv. 13.)

2. *We must "watch unto prayer."* (Matt. xxvi. 41; 1 Peter iv. 7.)—For the devil is there; as to catch away the good seed, so to catch us away by every wandering thought. Peter and John were at Christ's transfiguration in the mount, but were sadly "heavy with sleep." (Luke ix. 32.) It is strange, when they should have been taken up with raptures and ecstasies of joy, that they should be so drowsy and drowsy. But how hard a matter it is for to watch with Christ one hour in duty! (Matt. xxvi. 40.) Grief might make them heavy in the garden; and yet Christ's propassion, and sweating drops of blood, was enough to have put them into an agony of compassion. But, alas! neither the garden nor the mount is able to transport us, or keep up intension of soul or affection, unless God keep fire on his own altar, and blow-up our spark into a flame.

3. Our intension cannot last long; our actions depending on the body, and those spirits, the finer particles of the blood, separated from it by the alembic of the brain. And as it is some time ere they rise, so their height and speed is soon over, and then we run down into phlegm and heaviness. Therefore, in all public duties, (solemn fastings excepted, for humbling soul and body,) *we ought not to be too prolix, but to labour for strength rather than length.*—Thick and short; as David's panting, (Psalm xlii. 1,) and Daniel's praying: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name." (Chap. ix. 19.) When weighty petitions are sent up for the whole church, they draw universal consent. Not that we ought, for brevity's sake, to confine all prayer to the Lord's Prayer, as if no bushel was a bushel but the standard; so, to fall down at this, and stand up against all others: whereas it is so diffused in sense, and so contracted in words, that the text may very well admit a comment in conformity to its sense; and we need a more comprehensive mind than the vulgar have, to fill those words with.

4. When all is done, there is nothing done, but all to do, till we *implore the good Spirit of God.*—Which he gave the Jews here: "Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst." (Neh. ix. 20.) And he bade them work; for his Spirit was with them, and should remain among them, when they built the temple: "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." (Haggai ii. 4, 5.) Christ bade his disciples tarry at Jerusalem, till they were "endued with power from on high;" (Luke xxiv. 49;) there was no preaching or praying without this "Spirit of grace and supplications." (Zech. xii. 10.) It is impossible [that] the organs of our bodies or faculties of our souls should praise God aright, unless

this Spirit of God fill them, and blow them up. He must *επιχορηγειν*, (Phil. i. 19,) "tune the praise, and form the prayer," in us; he must *εσπερειν*, (James v. 16,) "inlay it, and work it," both in and out; and he is "the Master of the choir," to hold and keep us in frame, as well as set us in, and enable us to drive all our petitions home and through, to a fervent Amen. *Deus solus docere potest ut velit se orari*, as Tertullian says: "None but God can teach us how to pray to God." That Spirit of adoption that enableth us to say, "Abba, Father," (Rom. viii. 15,) can only teach us how to pronounce, "Amen, Amen."