

ARTHUR T. PIERSON



GEORGE MULLER OF BRISTOL

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George Muller of Bristol

**Enriched edition. His Witness to a Prayer-Hearing
God**

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Spencer McKay

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Introduction

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At the heart of this book lies the unnerving question of whether material necessity can be met by invisible conviction, as a life of deliberate prayer confronts the daily arithmetic of shelter, bread, and care within a modern city, and as the ledger of needs, kept with sober precision, meets the counter-ledger of trust, kept with equal rigor, so that readers are asked to watch how one man's inward posture toward God translates into outward structures for public good, and to weigh, without haste or sentiment, the claim that spiritual dependence can be both ethically responsible and practically effective.

George Muller of Bristol by Arthur T. Pierson is a work of religious biography set largely in nineteenth-century Bristol, England, where an expanding urban population sharpened questions of poverty, education, and care for vulnerable children. Written near the turn of the twentieth century by a noted minister and missionary advocate, the book belongs to a tradition that blends historical narrative with devotional reflection. Its subject, George Müller, was known for directing orphan work and other charitable enterprises while declining customary fundraising appeals, a stance Pierson examines within the climate of evangelical philanthropy. The result is a portrait anchored in context, conviction, and public consequence.

Pierson traces Müller's journey from obscurity to citywide responsibility, following the formation of habits that would

shape his vocation and relationships, and the gradual emergence of practices that defined his leadership. Without dramatization, the narrative moves through scenes of ordinary routine—accounts kept, meals planned, staff coordinated—interspersed with moments of reflection that illuminate governing principles. The voice is earnest and persuasive, yet the register remains documentary, frequently pointing to records, reports, and correspondence. Readers encounter a biography that reads as both chronicle and testimony, inviting consideration rather than coercion, and permitting space to assess how conviction and prudence interact over time.

Several themes recur with measured insistence: the discipline of prayer as a structuring habit, stewardship that treats resources as entrusted rather than owned, transparency as a safeguard for integrity, and compassion organized into sustainable systems. Pierson presents faith not as a private sentiment but as a framework for institutional decisions, emphasizing patient processes over dramatic moments. He is attentive to the moral economy of giving and receiving, to the training of conscience, and to the social obligations that accompany belief. The book therefore becomes a study in character under pressure, showing how a coherent inner life can guide complex, collective work without resort to manipulation.

For contemporary readers, the book raises questions that reach beyond its era: How should philanthropy be funded and governed? What distinguishes trust from presumption in leadership? How can accountability be maintained without dampening initiative? In a world that prizes metrics and

visibility, Pierson's account explores forms of verification that include numbers yet also attend to motive, routine, and communal witness. It suggests that durable social care depends on credibility built over years, on clear processes, and on virtues that are transferable across contexts. Readers interested in nonprofit practice, public ethics, or spiritual formation will find the case material stimulating and instructive.

The reading experience is steeped in a Victorian cadence—measured sentences, moral inference, and a readiness to draw lessons—yet it remains accessible through its concrete attention to daily operations and conscientious documentation. Pierson writes with pastoral patience, avoiding sensational tones, and he favors cumulative detail that allows readers to form judgments from evidence. The tone is sober, hopeful, and occasionally exhortative, but never careless about fact. Episodes are narrated with a steady tempo rather than breathless suspense, and reflections are tethered to events. The combination yields a biography that is devotional without being credulous and historical without being arid.

Approached today, George Muller of Bristol serves as both mirror and map: a mirror reflecting the plausibility of integrity under public scrutiny, and a map outlining habits that sustain service amid constraint. It neither idealizes scarcity nor excuses negligence; instead, it portrays a long obedience expressed in institutions that touch actual lives. Readers are invited to attend to the quiet architecture of trust—clarity about purpose, steadiness under delay, and care for people over projects. Pierson's portrait endures

because it offers a tested interplay of values and practice, encouraging thoughtful action where conviction, responsibility, and hope must daily meet.

Synopsis

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Arthur T. Pierson's *George Müller of Bristol*, published near the close of the nineteenth century, presents a carefully documented life of the German-born pastor famed for founding orphan houses in Bristol. Drawing on Müller's journals, correspondence, and printed reports, Pierson organizes the narrative to show how convictions about Scripture, prayer, and stewardship shaped a public work. While sympathetic, he maintains attention to verifiable incidents and financial records, situating the biography within the wider evangelical philanthropy of Victorian Britain. The result is both a chronological account and an interpretive study of a ministry designed to test principles in practice rather than argue them abstractly.

Pierson begins with Müller's early years in what is now Germany, describing a youth marked by restlessness and a later awakening to faith during his student days at Halle. The biography traces a decisive reorientation toward pastoral service, shaped by Bible reading, prayer, and contact with evangelical reformers. A move to England follows, where Müller embraces ministry in small congregations and forms partnerships that will frame his life's work. In Bristol he settles into regular preaching and oversight, refining convictions about church life and finance that emphasize voluntary support, transparency, and dependence on God rather than fixed salaries or appeals.

Out of this pastoral base, the orphan work emerges as both a response to social need and a practical demonstration of belief. Pierson recounts how Müller, seeking to show that prayer and integrity could sustain public charity, began with modest housing and a small staff. Daily routines centered on Scripture readings, careful accounts, and watchful stewardship. Without issuing solicitations, he recorded gifts as they arrived and matched expenditures to the means at hand. Early trials, including uncertain supplies and administrative growing pains, serve in the narrative as crucibles that formed policy, staff culture, and a durable pattern of service.

As demand increased, the work expanded from rented quarters to purpose-built facilities on Ashley Down, a shift Pierson treats as both logistical milestone and test of principle. Construction proceeded without debt, each stage undertaken as resources permitted. The biography details governance, admission standards, schooling, and training intended to prepare children for adult life. Alongside material care, the program stressed order, responsibility, and moral instruction. Pierson notes that meticulous reporting, published figures, and public accountability served as safeguards. Episodes of apparent shortage are presented not as sensational crises but as occasions that reinforced discipline, planning, and calm reliance under pressure.

Beyond the orphan houses, Pierson surveys parallel undertakings: the distribution of Scriptures and religious literature, support for missionary labor, and schools for local children. The narrative pauses to examine financial practice,

including designated gifts, general funds, and the refusal of personal salary guarantees. Objections that such methods might be imprudent are acknowledged and weighed against published records and long-term outcomes. Pierson's portrait underscores the administrative competence behind the piety, arguing that the approach functioned as a transparent model of philanthropy within its era, even as it raised questions about replication, dependency, and the relationship between persuasion, publicity, and trust.

In later chapters Pierson follows Müller into extensive international preaching after the Bristol institutions were well established. Traveling for years across Europe, North America, and beyond, he addressed audiences on the themes that had shaped his work: Scripture study, prayer, integrity, and evangelistic concern. Administrative systems at home allowed continuity under capable associates, and the itinerant phase broadened the biography's scope from local philanthropy to global testimony. Pierson sketches the reception of these journeys and the personal discipline that sustained them, while noting bereavements and transitions that tested resolve without turning the account into a private chronicle of sorrow.

Closing reflections integrate narrative and argument. Pierson presents George Müller of Bristol as a historical study of a distinctive charity and as an exploration of what steady conviction can accomplish. Rather than ending with a dramatic crescendo, the book leaves readers with questions about the sustainability of faith-based models, the ethics of fundraising, and the responsibilities of leadership in caring for vulnerable children. Its enduring resonance lies

in documenting how principles were operationalized in a specific time and place, offering a record that continues to inform discussions of philanthropy, accountability, and spiritual motivation without presuming to settle every debate.

Historical Context

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Arthur T. Pierson's *George Müller of Bristol*, first published in 1899, situates its subject within the high Victorian world of evangelical philanthropy. Pierson, an American Presbyterian pastor and missions advocate, drew on Müller's multi-volume Narrative and annual reports to produce an account grounded in documents and ledgers. The book emerges from a transatlantic Protestant network linking Britain and the United States through revivals, voluntary societies, and print culture. It reflects late nineteenth-century biographical aims: edification built on fact, emphasizing character, habits, and institutional results. Bristol, a major British port reshaped by industrialization, serves as the chief geographic stage.

George Müller (1805–1898) was born in Prussia and educated at Halle, where pietist influences intersected with university theology. After moving to England in 1829, he ministered among Nonconformists, first at Teignmouth, where he abolished pew rents, and later in Bristol at Bethesda Chapel. There he aligned with the Open Brethren, favoring simple worship and congregational autonomy. Britain's Dissenting chapels and voluntary societies provided platforms outside state-church structures, encouraging entrepreneurial religious leadership. These settings shaped Müller's convictions about prayer, stewardship, and church order, convictions that Pierson foregrounds as historically formed rather than merely

personal, and as integral to the institutions Müller helped establish.

Victorian Bristol confronted rapid urban growth, precarious labor, and recurrent disease. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 reshaped public relief, emphasizing workhouses and deterrence, while cholera epidemics in 1832 and 1849 exposed vulnerable families. Across Britain, evangelical reformers promoted Ragged Schools, temperance, and child rescue, often through voluntary associations rather than state programs. This climate made orphan care both urgent and contested—how to aid without fostering dependency, and how to fund sustained relief. Pierson sets Müller's choices against these pressures, showing how local need, national policy, and evangelical organizing converged in Bristol's neighborhoods to create enduring institutional responses.

In 1834 Müller founded the Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad to support schools, Bible distribution, and missionary work without incurring debt or making public appeals. Orphan care began in 1836 in rented houses on Wilson Street, then moved to purpose-built facilities on Ashley Down, the first opening in 1849. Over subsequent decades five large houses were erected, with careful admissions policies, daily schooling, and vocational training. Records attest that more than ten thousand children passed through the homes. Pierson emphasizes the operational principles—prayer, meticulous bookkeeping, and transparent annual reports—as the framework that sustained expansion despite fluctuating economic conditions.

Müller's practice of declining direct solicitation influenced the emergence of "faith missions" that trusted God for provision while maintaining strict accounts. Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission (founded 1865) drew encouragement from such models, as did numerous interdenominational agencies. Pierson, editor of *The Missionary Review of the World* and a collaborator with figures like D. L. Moody and C. H. Spurgeon, interprets Müller through this wider missionary awakening. The biography shows how orphan care, schools, and missionary grants formed one coherent strategy: grassroots evangelical advance financed by unsolicited gifts, documented in public reports, and circulated through a lively Anglo-American religious press.

Ecclesiastical tensions also shaped the Bristol scene. In 1848 disputes within the Plymouth Brethren over discipline and fellowship divided assemblies into "Exclusive" and "Open" streams. Bethesda Chapel in Bristol, where Müller served with Henry Craik, adopted policies that resisted blanket exclusion, a stance criticized by John Nelson Darby and his allies. Pierson treats these matters chiefly as context for Müller's pastoral commitments to conscience, Scripture, and local church liberty. The controversy framed how networks formed or fractured, affecting invitations, support, and reputations, yet the biography concentrates on institutional perseverance rather than polemic, reflecting wider Victorian anxieties about sectarianism and unity.

Müller's methods aligned with Victorian expectations of probity. He published audited figures, cash balances, and case summaries in annual SKI reports and in successive volumes of *A Narrative of the Lord's Dealings with George*

Müller, inviting public scrutiny. Such transparency paralleled wider reforms in charitable administration, including the rise of the Charity Organization Society (1869) and debates over “scientific” philanthropy. Meanwhile, the Elementary Education Act of 1870 expanded state schooling, gradually altering the landscape into which the orphan houses had long provided instruction. Pierson leverages this documentary record to present verifiable outcomes rather than anecdotes, matching contemporary standards of accountability.

In later years Müller undertook extensive preaching tours from 1875 to 1892, visiting churches across Europe, North America, and beyond before returning to Bristol, where he died in 1898. Pierson’s biography, appearing soon after, reads as a culmination of Victorian evangelical ideals: voluntaryism, global evangelism, and confidence in providence tempered by rigorous accounts. It also implicitly critiques reliance on state subventions and ecclesiastical endowments, portraying private association as capable of large-scale social care. By assembling dates, balances, and institutional milestones, the work mirrors its era’s documentary faith while offering a transatlantic commendation of disciplined piety in an industrial, urban age.

George Muller of Bristol

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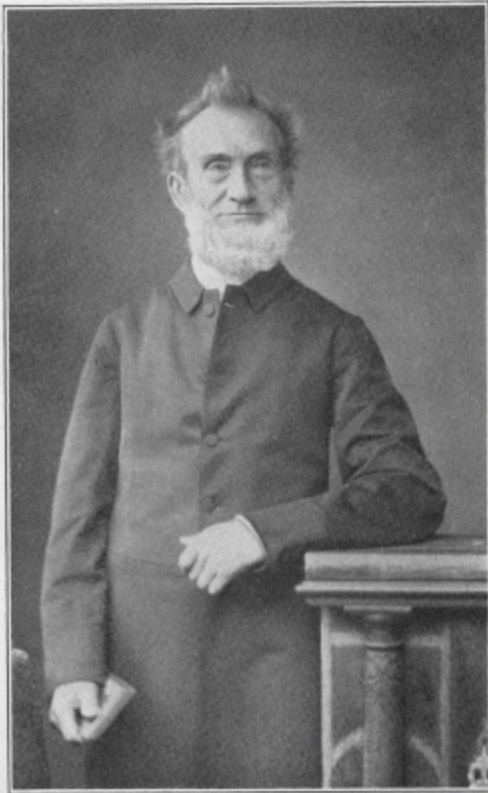
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George Müller

Introduction

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VERY soon after the decease of my beloved father-in-law I began to receive letters pressing upon me the desirableness of issuing as soon as possible a memoir of him and his work.

The well-known autobiography, entitled "Narrative of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller[1]," had been, and was still being, so greatly used by God in the edification of believers and the conversion of unbelievers that I hesitated to countenance any attempt to supersede or even supplement it. But as, with prayer, I reflected upon the subject, several considerations impressed me:

1st. The last volume of the Narrative ends with the year 1885, so that there is no record of the last thirteen years of Mr. Müller's life excepting what is contained in the yearly reports of "The Scriptural Knowledge Institution."

2d. The last three volumes of the Narrative, being mainly a condensation of the yearly reports during the period embraced in them, contain much unavoidable repetition.

3d. A book of, say, four hundred and fifty pages, containing the substance of the four volumes of the Narrative, and carrying on the history to the date of the decease of the founder of the institution, would meet the desire of a large class of readers.

4th. Several brief sketches of Mr. Müller's career had issued from the press within a few days after the funeral; and one (written by Mr. F. Warne and published by W. F. Mack & Co., Bristol), a very accurate and truly appreciative

sketch, had had a large circulation; but I was convinced by the letters that reached me that a more comprehensive memoir was called for, and *would be* produced, so I was led especially to pray for *guidance* that such a book might be entrusted to the author fitted by God to undertake it.

While waiting for the answer to this definite petition, though greatly urged by publishers to proceed, I steadily declined to take any step until I had clearer light. Moreover, I was, personally, occupied during May and June in preparing the Annual Report of "The Scriptural Knowledge Institution," and could not give proper attention to the other matter.

Just then I learned from Dr. Arthur T. Pierson, of Brooklyn, N. Y., that he had been led to undertake the production of a memoir of Mr. Müller for American readers, and requesting my aid by furnishing him with some materials needed for the work.

Having complied with this request I was favoured by Dr. Pierson with a syllabus of the method and contents of his intended work.

The more I thought upon the subject the more satisfied I became that no one could be found more fitted to undertake the work which had been called for on this side of the Atlantic also than this my well-known and beloved friend.

He had had exceptional opportunities twenty years ago in the United States, and in later years when visiting Great Britain, for becoming intimately acquainted with Mr. Müller, with the principles on which the Orphanage and other branches of "The Scriptural Knowledge Institution" were carried on, and with many details of their working. I knew

that Dr. Pierson most thoroughly sympathized with these principles as being according to the mind of God revealed in His word; and that he could, therefore, present not merely the history of the external facts and results of Mr. Müller's life and labours, but could and would, by God's help, unfold, with the ardour and force of *conviction*, the secret springs of that life and of those labours.

I therefore intimated to my dear friend that, provided he would allow me to read the manuscript and have thus the opportunity of making any suggestions that I felt necessary, I would, as my beloved father-in-law's executor and representative, gladly endorse his work as the authorized memoir for British as well as American readers.

To this Dr. Pierson readily assented; and now, after carefully going through the whole, I confidently recommend the book to esteemed readers on both sides of the Atlantic, with the earnest prayer that the result, in relation to the subject of this memoir, may be identical with that produced by the account of the Apostle Paul's "manner of life" upon the churches of Judea which were in Christ (Gal. i. 24), viz.,

"They glorified GOD" in him.

JAMES WRIGHT.

13 CHARLOTTE STREET, PARK STREET,
BRISTOL, ENG., March, 1899.

A Prefatory Word

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DR. OLIVER W. HOLMES wittily said that an autobiography is what every biography *ought to be*. The four volumes of "The Narrative of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller," already issued from the press and written by his own hand, with a fifth volume covering his missionary tours, and prepared by his wife, supplemented by the Annual Reports since published, constitute essentially an autobiography—Mr. Müller's own life-story, stamped with his own peculiar individuality, and singularly and minutely complete. To those who wish the simple journal of his life with the details of his history, these printed documents make any other sketch of him from other hands so far unnecessary.

There are, however, two considerations which have mainly prompted the preparation of this brief memoir: first, that the facts of this remarkable life might be set forth not so much with reference to the chronological order of their occurrence, as events, as for the sake of the lessons in living which they furnish, illustrating and enforcing grand spiritual principles and precepts: and secondly, because no man so humble as he would ever write of himself what, after his departure, another might properly write of him that others might glorify God in him.

No one could have undertaken this work of writing Mr. Müller's life-story without being deeply impressed with the opportunity thus afforded for impressing the most vital truths that concern holy living and holy serving; nor could

any one have completed such a work without feeling overawed by the argument which this narrative furnishes for a present, living, prayer-hearing God, and for a possible and practical daily walk with Him and work with Him. It has been a great help in the preparation of this book that the writer has had such frequent converse with Mr. James Wright, who was so long Mr. Müller's associate and knew him so intimately.

So prominent was the word of God as a power in Mr. Müller's life that, in an appendix, we have given peculiar emphasis to the great leading texts of Scripture which inspired and guided his faith and conduct, and, so far as possible, in the order in which such texts became practically influential in his life; and so many wise and invaluable counsels are to be found scattered throughout his journal that some of the most striking and helpful have been selected, which may also be found in the appendix.

This volume has, like the life it sketches, but one aim. It is simply and solely meant to extend, emphasize, and perpetuate George Müller's witness to a prayer-hearing God; to present, as plainly, forcibly, and briefly as is practicable, the outlines of a human history, and an experience of the Lord's leadings and dealings, which furnish a sufficient answer to the question:

WHERE IS THE LORD GOD OF ELIJAH?

CHAPTER I

FROM HIS BIRTH TO HIS NEW BIRTH

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A HUMAN life, filled with the presence and power of God, is one of God's choicest gifts to His church and to the world.

Things which are unseen and eternal seem, to the carnal man, distant and indistinct, while what is seen and temporal is vivid and real. Practically, any object in nature that can be seen or felt is thus more real and actual to most men than the Living God. Every man who walks with God, and finds Him a present Help in every time of need; who puts His promises to the practical proof and verifies them in actual experience; every believer who with the key of faith unlocks God's mysteries, and with the key of prayer unlocks God's treasures, thus furnishes to the race a demonstration and an illustration of the fact that "He is, and is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

George Müller was such an argument and example incarnated in human flesh. Here was a man of like passions as we are and tempted in all points like as we are, but who believed God and was established by believing; who prayed earnestly that he might live a life and do a work which should be a convincing proof that God hears prayer and that it is safe to trust Him at all times; and who has furnished just such a witness as he desired. Like Enoch, he truly walked with God, and had abundant testimony borne to him that he pleased God. And when, on the tenth day of March, 1898, it was told us of George Müller that "he was not," we

knew that "God had taken him": it seemed more like a translation than like death.

To those who are familiar with his long life-story, and, most of all, to those who intimately knew him and felt the power of personal contact with him, he was one of God's ripest saints and himself a living proof that a life of faith is possible; that God may be known, communed with, found, and may become a conscious companion in the daily life. George Müller proved for himself and for all others who will receive his witness that, to those who are willing to take God at His word and to yield self to His will, He is "the same yesterday and to-day and forever": that the days of divine intervention and deliverance are past only to those with whom the days of faith and obedience are past—in a word, that believing prayer works still the wonders which our fathers told of in the days of old.

The life of this man may best be studied, perhaps, by dividing it into certain marked periods, into which it naturally falls, when we look at those leading events and experiences which are like punctuation-marks or paragraph divisions,—as, for example:

1. From his birth to his new birth or conversion: 1805-1825.
2. From his conversion to full entrance on his life-work: 1825-35.
3. From this point to the period of his mission tours: 1835-75.
4. From the beginning to the close of these tours: 1875-92.
5. From the close of his tours to his death: 1892-98.

55 George Müller (1805–1898) was a German-born evangelical Christian who ran the Bristol orphan houses and became widely known for supporting that work by prayer and unsolicited donations rather than organized fundraising.

56 The Christians of Philippi, a city in Macedonia, spoken of in the New Testament (the Epistle to the Philippians); Paul praises their ‘free-will offerings’ for supporting his ministry.

57 Spikenard is a costly aromatic oil derived from the nard plant (historically from the Himalayan region) used in ancient anointing and perfuming and mentioned in the New Testament as an offering for Jesus.

58 A 19th-century Christian evangelist and philanthropist who founded and ran large evangelical orphanages in Bristol, England, and published annual reports of his work and answered prayer (lived 1805–1898).

59 A Protestant missionary society associated with Hudson Taylor that began in the mid-19th century to evangelize inland China, notable for relying on faith and prayer rather than guaranteed fundraising (often dated to the mid-1860s, commonly 1865).

60 A literal rendering used here of Genesis 15:6 indicating Abram's firm assent to God's promise; the author explains it as from the Hebrew 'Amen', conveying the sense 'it shall be so' rather than the more casual modern 'let it be so.'

61 One of several residential homes George Müller established and ran in Bristol for orphaned children in the 19th century; the houses were numbered and formed part of his well-documented orphanage work.

62 A coastal town and Victorian seaside resort in North Devon, England; the passage refers to Müller climbing nearby heights overlooking the sea while visiting there.

63 A town in northeast Scotland (Huntly, Aberdeenshire) where Müller stayed in May 1897 and where meetings and preaching were arranged during his brief rest from the orphan-house work.

64 Refers to J. B. Rotherham, a 19th-century English biblical scholar and translator known for the Emphasized (or Rotherham's) Translation of the Bible, cited here for his rendering of James 5:16–18.

65 An older idiom meaning to make a binding agreement or pledge (often by shaking hands); in the Proverbs context it warns against entering into guarantees or suretyship for another person's debt.

66 A theological doctrine (often called "limited atonement" in Reformed/Calvinist theology) that holds Christ's atoning death was intended to secure salvation for a particular people (the elect) rather than for every individual; the scope and terminology of the idea vary among Christian traditions.

67 In 19th-century British usage, a 'poor-house' was an institution (also called a workhouse or almshouse) that provided shelter and basic relief to the indigent, typically under strict rules and often requiring residents to perform work.

68 This phrase indicates Müller intended to rely solely on God's providence through prayer rather than by direct solicitation or organized fundraising; it reflects his well-documented practice of depending on prayer for supplies.

69 A biblical epithet for God (from Psalm lxxviii. 5, i.e. Psalm 68:5) signifying divine care for orphans and the vulnerable; Müller invokes it to argue that God would provide for orphaned children.

70 A common Protestant expression for the Lord's Supper or Communion, meaning the shared eating of bread (and often wine) in remembrance of Jesus' death; in 19th-century usage it often indicated participation in the rite even where formal church membership practices differed.

71 A Christian rite commemorating Jesus' Last Supper, involving the sharing of bread and wine (also called Communion or the Eucharist); theological interpretation and frequency of observance differed across traditions, and in this text it is discussed in the context of weekly congregational practice (cf. Acts 20:7).

72 Refers to casting lots, an ancient method for making decisions (e.g., the apostles used it in Acts i to choose an apostle); Müller argues that after the coming of the Holy Spirit the New Testament practice shifted to prayer and fasting instead of using the lot.

73 A Jewish festival (Shavuot) that in Christian tradition is the day the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles; it is observed fifty days after Easter and is treated in the New Testament as the start of the church's Spirit-led ministry.

74 A room or meeting space in a church used for clergy and administrative meetings and for private conversations with parishioners; here it denotes a place where inquirers could be seen privately.

75 Persons appointed to distribute alms or charitable relief; Müller's suggestion to use children as almoners means training them to give out charity under supervision.

76 A civic organisation that collected information and promoted reforms in public and charitable welfare (the name here refers to the New York association that investigated charitable cases and statistics in the 19th century); Müller cites a report presented to one of its meetings.

77 A town mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (notably 1 Samuel 30) where David stayed and later recovered from a raid; its