

DAILY WORSHIP - a layman's view

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"Each day I rise, I will thee bless"

I grew up in the 1940s in a large medical family where formal family prayers still survived on weekdays. On Sundays we would attend on the prominent liberal evangelical pulpits of the day. By the early 1960s daily prayers at home had disappeared, but I was by then attending a church which stood more in the Scoto-Catholic tradition, and it was from this setting that my new interest in daily prayer was aroused. For many years now I have tried within fairly elastic limits to keep the discipline of daily prayers in College chapel, at the local Episcopal Cathedral, or where possible in the larger Church of Scotland charges where daily prayer is offered.

Problems

The layman attempting the discipline of daily Worship encounters problems of time and opportunity. Far and away the most important practical problem I have found is time. College Prayers are at 8.45 and fit in easily with the day's routine, but Church of Scotland Daily Prayers in our area are at 10 and 12, and are virtually inaccessible to working folk, except on high days and holidays. Episcopal Morning and Evening Prayers are at more sensible (if sometimes unearthly) hours, but attending an office of 20 minutes duration can easily involve 40 minutes of time when one includes coming and going and perhaps time waiting or in 'Christian Fellowship'. A morning and evening office on this basis could occupy 8 hours a week - the length of a working day. The regular timetable of daily prayers also leads inevitably to conflicts of priority. Important pastoral conversations with undergraduates, or vital research discussions with colleagues seem always to begin in the critical few minutes when one must leave for chapel: or looking at piles of unanswered letters or unmarked scripts one may think guiltily of the hours spend going to and from the Church. These apparently trivial difficulties raise important issues about the relationship of sacred and secular Daily worship as we have it is essentially monastic in origin, and in spite of the brilliant efforts of scholars such as Paul Bradshaw to recover the 'Cathedral Office' (an office of psalmody and intercessions in which laymen took part), there is still a strong monastic flavour about many forms of daily prayer. It may then not be an appropriate exercise for a layman whose divine calling, whose 'Beruf', is a secular profession. Nor is daily prayer a conspicuously successful evangelical opportunity. Many in the Church commend the practice of Daily Worship and talk touchingly of it, but few actually attend, and when Baring Gould spoke disparagingly of "one or two old ladies at the Litany on Friday", he pretty well hit the nail on the head. Unsympathetic observers have also criticised a tendency for observance of this kind of ritual to become precious and pharisaical. Erasmus denounced the monks of his time for "observing with punctilious scrupulosity a lot of silly ceremonies and paltry traditional rules". More recently Trollope poked fun at Caleb Oriel who "delighted in lecterns and credence tables [and] in services at dark hours of winter mornings when no one would attend". On a familiar note he chided him for a calling which was "rather to the outward and visible signs of religion than to its inward and spiritual grace".

An apologia

Why then does one persist in a practice which is often tedious and uncomfortable, which competes with the legitimate claims of one's salaried appointment and which is regarded with suspicion or incredulity by one's kinsfolk? I freely admit to an intrinsic affection for daily Church which is only partly religious. Walking to Mats through the misty grey of an Autumn dawn, praying with students in the Chapel on the eve of the Final Examinations, following the sickness and recovery of a friend at daily intercessions can be sacred moments of great poignancy. Friendships and loyalties grow in these tiny congregations, and there can be glimpses of real catholicity: one may visit a church at the farthest end of the kingdom and find them ploughing through the plagues of Egypt, or riding with the horsemen of the Apocalypse just as one is at home.

But there are more substantial reasons for attempting this discipline. In the First Series of Scottish Church Society Conferences there is an article by Arthur Wotherspoon on "the Celebration of Holy Communion and Daily Service". Wotherspoon claims that the day, with its evening and morning, is God's unit of time; he quotes Acts 2 46 "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart praising God and having favour with all the people". He continues "Morning and evening in the House of God [the Church] should gather up the private

prayers of all her children and present them through her Lord with intercession. The prayers should link day to day, and each week begin with the breaking of bread "a silver chain with a golden clasp". This is a beautiful phrase, and the whole passage is a rich endorsement of a form of worship "agreeable to the Word of God".

A different emphasis is given by the late Martin Thornton, of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd in his book *Pastoral Theology - A Reorientation*. Thornton sees daily prayer not only as a Dominical imperative, but as a discipline, a training by which we become "athletes of God". In another memorable metaphor he compares the Anglican Rule with a fence to keep out the devil - the big strong posts are the Communion, the smaller stakes the Daily Office, and the cross-pieces, private prayer. He talks of the balance of the liturgy, a balance between the objective intellectual giving of the office, and what he calls the "loving embrace of Christ" in the communion. This is powerful writing - the idea of discipline appeals to me as a Presbyterian, and the idea of objective intellectual giving appeals to me as a medical scientist.

In recent times, however, I have moved to a freer and wider appreciation of daily Prayer, partly as a result of attending a retreat at the College of the Holy Spirit in Millport, led by Canon Brian Hardy of St Andrews. One of the themes of the retreat was a special awareness of the natural rhythm of day and night, and how this rhythm is recognised and hallowed by the rhythm of the daily office. This wide and generous view, implicit in *Wotherspoon*, is also developed in Dr George Guiver's magnificent book *Company of Voices*. The first seven chapters of this book tackle the fundamental problems of the practice of daily prayer, and the book is full of wonderful phrases -

"How are we to recognise the Lord in daily life if we have not first sought him neat in the direct encounter of prayer?"

"The Church's daily prayer bears the stamp of the paschal mystery as it constantly acknowledges the presence of the living God who leads us in that ontological passage through the waters from death to life".

"Daily prayer imposes a pattern on time, creating the kind of framework to daily living which human nature naturally responds to"

Daily prayer can be a painful and touching personal experience or it can be a strenuous devotional exercise, rich with anamnestic and eschatological significant. I have even believed (with Dr Donald Soper) that with its brevity, flexibility and integration with daily life it might form the paradigm of a new kind of church life as Sunday attendance continues to decline.

Daily Prayer is one of many strands in the life of the Church, a minority gift, contingent on time, place and opportunity, but still a gift which can enable the layman to fill a special niche in the devotional life of the Community.

Bibliography

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