

Finally they told me that the Bible gives a radical view of life. One disagreed with this, but even he agreed that it impresses an awareness of the devil and of Hell—and on this it was of course the New Testament and our Lord's words which they quoted to me. They defined a radical view as a sense of the gulf between good and evil, that there is no in-between of the choice between being marked by the cross, or by the sign of the Beast. I would stress that these remarks are not thought out or balanced judgments—merely what was uppermost in the mind at the moment.

The Editor, when he asked me to write this article, asked me whether I found that the Bible gave the young an apprehension of the meaning of sin and the redemption. I would say that it seems to me to inculcate a sense of sin as defined in the previous paragraph, but not any sense of personal sin or guilt. It seems to me to enrich enormously an understanding of the redemption which has its normal focus in the Mass and in the Holy Week re-enactment.



THE LAITY AND THE BREVIARY¹

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READERS of Sir Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* may perhaps recall the Dwarf in the poem, and 'how much he marvelled' to find that the wounded opponent of Lord Cranstoun,

'... a knight of pride

Like a book-bosomed priest should ride.'

And the context reveals that he

'thought not to search or staunch the wound

Until the secret he had found.'²

Ignoring the fact that 'the mighty book' in this instance was none other than a magic book of spells by Sir Walter's medieval namesake Michael, and attending to the simile alone, we learn from the poet's own explanatory but confusing note, that 'The *book-a-bosom* priests were those who went to a distance to baptize

¹ A Paper read at THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT Conference, September 1957.

² *Canto* III, viii.

or marry with the *Mass-book* in their breasts'.³ Without any pedantic head-shaking in the direction of Abbotsford we may pass from the wounded knight to a more familiar modern figure, that of the travelling cleric, not *book-bosomed* perhaps, so much as *book-pocketed* or *book-brief-cased*. His fellow-Catholic will scarcely mistake this book for the immensely more bulky *Mass-book*, or even the reduced version of it he himself carries to church; non-Catholics often do mistake it for a Bible, and deserve more marks for their error than they are likely to get from us; very many of the educated today, whatever their religion, know that it is some kind of prayer-book, and may even know what it is called. One might perhaps venture to say that 'priest and breviary' is a conventional symbol today just as 'priest and (some sort of liturgical) book' was to Scott. The priest in the corner of the railway carriage retiring into his breviary in a manner, subtly, if not markedly different from the manner in which he retires into *The Tablet* or *The Times*, the priest withdrawing from company to pace under the elms, and mutter, book in hand, the priest more fussed at having mislaid his 'little black leather-covered volume' than at the loss of his spectacles—all these scenes are familiar enough to justify one in closely associating the priest and his breviary, and regarding the latter as a typically priestly book. But what, one may ask, have the laity to do with the breviary? What can it be to them save part of the sacerdotal mystery, seen from a distance and the outside with reverential awe, but little curiosity? Its appearance merely serves to modulate conversation into a lower key—'We must not distract father from his Office.' Perhaps my choice of title is sufficient to indicate that I have cast myself in the part of the Dwarf, to marvel a little, and possibly to occasion marvel. At all events let us start with the notion of the breviary as 'the priest's prayer-book'.

The present provisions of Canon Law, apart from all else, make the breviary a *vademecum* for clergy in Major Orders, as also for solemnly professed religious of both sexes. Of the small shelf-ful of volumes containing the liturgical texts and order of the Western Church, it alone has become a necessary part of every priest's personal luggage. A Missal, *pax* Sir Walter, need not be lugged around in the same way; the priest expects it to be provided for him with the rest of the altar-furniture. He carries

³ *Ibid.* note.

a Ritual when bound on the sort of sacramental mission Scott apparently had in mind but he does not rely on it for his personal prayers. The Pontifical need only be included in the episcopal bag. As for the Roman Martyrology, in spite of the *laudabiliter* in the rubric I doubt if more than a negligible minority of priests make a habit of inserting it into their daily Prime *extra chorum*. But there is no mystery about how or why the breviary alone is so closely connected with the priest as to become—in *un*-Scholastic language—his (wellnigh) inseparable accident.

There is no intrinsic reason why any of the books mentioned should come into lay hands; they are needed to codify a text and fix an order, and are primarily intended to help those who are deputed as leaders and mediators in public worship. The faithful need not even be sufficiently literate to be able to make use of them. Moreover, their presence at and share in the common sacrifice and prayer can be secured without their being able to do so. We have, however, to take into account the actual development of the church in our parts. Here the prevalence of literacy may be presumed, and also a tendency to stress (even to over-stress) the value of 'following' the liturgy in the sense of understanding its verbal and conceptual, as distinct from its symbolic, content. In the light of these facts we must view the extraordinary growth in the use of the popular missal, precisely as a *recent phenomenon*, and one that cannot be taken for granted and left unexplained. Containing, as it does, the text of Mass, the missal might justly be regarded as a far more typically priestly book than any other, yet no one is any longer astonished or scandalized to see it in the hands of all. Whatever abuses may be found in propagating the use of the missal, it has been and still is a powerful instrument in helping the laity to realize and share more actively in the common sacrifice. It has become a layman's prayer-book, and I suppose that the majority of missals published today is intended rather for the layman in the nave than for the priest at the altar. This change has occurred in a short time and has successfully overcome many obstacles. There seems to be nothing intrinsically absurd in supposing that a subsequent phase of liturgical growth may include, or even be characterized by popularization of other liturgical collections, pre-eminently the breviary and the ritual. Comparing missal with breviary as anthologies of prayer, surely the latter is the broader and fuller

source, and opens more doors to the soul in quest of inspiration or material for prayer. Would it be outrageous to look forward to the day when both missal and breviary might be familiar to such of the laity as are drawn to them? I think not, and I think that there are already signs pointing in that direction. Catholic publishers, like others, depend on existing markets for the disposal of their goods; it appears that some of them are already reading those signs and interpreting them in the sense of the expectation I have just indicated.⁴

Before discussing these signs, it may be well to fish a little in the troubled waters that fringe our real problem. There are regions of controversy, and sometimes of heated feelings, where unproved assumptions abound. Unless something is done to get rid of them any discussion of a popular breviary is likely to be bedevilled from the outset and its conclusions nullified.

Much as I desire to 'fulfil my obligation' in reciting Divine Office, I cannot help regarding the 'obligation' as something of a bogey in our present discussion. The available casuistry has strict reference to certain ecclesiastical laws binding certain groups, 'under sin', to a daily recitation of the breviary, to do so (with exceptions) *vocally*. This discipline has grown up gradually; the Church has often modified it and can do so still. Useful as it might be, as a guide or an analogy, to a layman, it has no direct reference to him, and from its standpoint he remains one who has 'no obligation', i.e. none of *this sort*. But any discussion of the part a layman might have in Divine Office, apart from passive assistance, or lending it his support through benefactions, which takes no account of any *other* source of obligation is foredoomed to sterility. There is another, anterior, obligation (or *necessity*) arising from human nature, from the essential pattern of the Church, from the double aspect of religion as a social as well as an individual bond between God and his creatures. The hierarchical organization of worship and the necessary division of

⁴ I do not mean a *proximate* expectation, nor one that is likely to come about without controversy and opposition. In this context it is worth while noting that the Secular Institutes, so marked a feature of the time, so prolific since the war, and usually so closely allied to what is up-to-date (even 'advanced') in liturgical practice, do not by any means universally assume any greater use of the breviary for their members even when living the common life. Indeed some have adopted the attitude that the Office is so much the part of clerics and religious that 'secular' Christians have no time or aptitude for it. Amongst the petty ironies of history is surely the fact that one such Institute bears the anomalous title of 'Opus Dei'!

labour in paying this debt do not replace this basic necessity, but simply reinforce it. The necessity itself flows from the natural law and is amply reinforced by divine positive law; the layman's active share in public cult can and should be discussed in reference to this, quite independently of any further ecclesiastical dispositions. I need hardly bother to interpolate at this point that by public worship I mean something quite different from the mere adding together of the individual prayers of Christians, and something immeasurably more than the mere *physical* publicity which results from even two persons praying together. It is a *sort* of worship made in the name of and with the authority of the whole Church as a moral personality; it retains that character however *privately* performed. What has an 'ordinary' Christian to do with that, and not with the regulations and bye-laws made for particular groups?

The principle of *delegation* observed by the Church in the organisation of her prayer needs no justification. But like 'obligation' it needs to be properly understood. It does not intend to set up any sort of monopoly, nor can it do so. Naturally, amongst those specially deputed to lead and sustain the ecclesiastical prayer, some will be moved to do so with greater solemnity and outward splendour, or to give more attention to the highest artistic standards; then they will deserve admiration and support from everyone, and up to a point, imitation, but also, in certain circumstances some measure of deliberate *non-imitation*. But their monopoly is superficial, affecting only a modality of the worship and not the '*opus Dei*' itself. Neither Benedictines, nor Dominicans, nor Canons Regular, nor any other group, clerical, religious or secular, can possess, and by implication exclude, others from the inalienable heritage of every baptized member of the Church. The only real problem is the extent to which each will choose to exercise the functions that result from his birthright. There was a period in which there grew up a too narrowly functional and static notion of the sphere of activity for diverse groups within the Church; e.g. it was the knight's part to defend the faith, the peasant's to till the soil, the priest's and canon's to sanctify souls, the monk's to pursue the ascetic path and restrict his apostolate to the austere and aloof one of contemplation and vicarious suffering. It seems odd that now, having travelled so far from a framework of society envisaged in that way, some of us should

still conserve cognate attitudes regarding the Liturgy.

In these days, so conscious of the social aspect of the Church, and of 'community' in general, it may be necessary to forestall another objection occasionally to be met with. A potent factor in the building of any group is a cultivation of its awareness of its own unity. This is being continually re-discovered by community-builders, and as often as not, they discover at the same time the essential part played by a rhythm of *common* prayer quite distinct from that of the individual members. Some of them may feel that if you are not actually building up some group in the Church, an order, congregation, institute, or society, insistence upon this element of common prayer is unavailing or inappropriate. I believe that such a view is refutable on the following grounds. No community can be built within the Church except upon a basis of the community already existing there—the essential Church-unity that Christ prayed, and died for, and so, put into his Church. A group cultivating a sense of its own unity apart from this, or even without due attention to it, sets out on a pathway of self-delusion. It seems obvious that the reality of Church unity, and the sense of it, must be available to all, whether they reach it through membership in some subordinate group or in other ways. The pronouncedly liturgical character of countless hermit saints, to say nothing of so many solitary layfolk, in all ages, is evidence for this. Ideally speaking, no doubt, psalmody is *choral* and the Office a *co-operative* chant, but this does not necessarily imply alternate *noises* from *wooden choir-stalls*. The spiritual choir of the Church is co-terminous with the whole Church; parts of it, alas, remain as inaudible as the untouched harp. Yet, happily, each string, while unbroken, can be called back into the consort.

I suppose that no one would wish to deny that there are many valid *a priori* inducements urging the laity to take more interest in the breviary, but like so many theoretically unexceptionable statements they seem to 'cut very little ice' in practice. For example, the breviary is, amongst other things, a select anthology from the inspired Word of God, providing a good, if not perfect, methodical scheme for the annual reading of the Bible. Better still, it is solidly built upon an armature of psalmody, and involves the weekly reading of the Psalter, that inspired prayer-book so often used by our Saviour himself, the Blessed Virgin and the

Apostles, and countless Christians from the earliest ages of the Church to our own day. There can be nothing odd about a contemporary Christian, not otherwise incapable of profiting thereby, being drawn towards this source. It might even be taken for granted, in an age marked by an enlightened liturgico-pastoral impulse visibly re-enlivening the whole devotional life of the Church, that there should occur something like a 'movement' in that direction.

It is important, however, to realize that some characteristic advantages of our age, such as widespread literacy and ease of communications, do not necessarily favour such a movement. Universal ability to read print does not necessarily involve a more widespread desire to read Holy Scripture, or the better literature in any field. The democratization of culture is leading, even amongst educated Catholics, to an increasing unfamiliarity with Latin, and in some quarters even to the building up of an anti-Latin bias. These are real obstacles, though not so insurmountable as sometimes assumed. There remains a further and more profound difficulty to be recognized and overcome. When we moderns attempt to psalmodize, either with the 'Old' or 'New' Latin Psalter, or the original Hebrew, or, for that matter, in any vernacular version which does or might exist, we are speaking 'in an alien tongue' in a sense far more serious than the mere linguistic one. We are divided from the Psalmist by the centuries, and more than one cultural revolution, in conditions of life very different from those in which the psalms were spontaneously produced. Furthermore, many current concepts of prayer seem different from and even contradictory to the typical procedure of the Psalmists. Unless the two approaches can be harmonized, one runs the risk of making a dangerous division in what ought to be the supremely unifying force of our lives.⁵

Genuine as these, and other, difficulties may be, to one who might wish to popularize the breviary, I do not think they amount to the defeatist solution of abandoning so great a part of our Christian patrimony of prayer. This would surely be unsafe,

⁵ Consider the typical psalmic pattern of the *Benedicite* at festal Lauds with its piling of imagery; the singer calls on a whole procession of creatures to join him in praise of God. This is no prayer of 'distractions' but, if we can rely on the assertions of so many saints, the royal road to contemplation. Incidentally, the same procedure still seemed natural and congenial to St Francis of Assisi in his *Cantico del Frate Sole* and to Dante in his celebrated pageant of the church in *Purg.* xxxii ff., and indeed throughout the whole of his poem.

even if one had some adequate substitute to offer, which we have not. The real lesson to learn here is, perhaps, that the debate should not be conducted on *doctrinaire* grounds, however sure we may be of our theological premises, but upon the collection and interpretation of facts in the living Church. 'Field-work', the application of statistical methods, possibly, a discreet use of questionnaires, and similar techniques familiar in other realms of study, would seem to be indicated for this purpose. Some may be shocked at this suggestion, but I am convinced that the method is suitable, and the only way to dispel some of our almost innate prejudices on the subject. The way has been indicated to us already, e.g. by the American, Verner Moore,⁶ and with particular reference to the Divine Office by the French Dominicans.⁷ I cannot claim to have advanced their findings, but I have had an opportunity to imitate them on a small and tentative scale, yet enough to surprise me and reform many of my own cherished assumptions, and to leave me convinced that this is a fruitful field for other more competent and resolute investigators.

Are there in fact numbers of ordinary Catholic lay people who desire to use the breviary, in spite of knowing all about the difficulties we have mentioned, from their own experience? If so, are these numbers considerable, and are they growing? If so, what is the significance? My connection with a small group of such people during the past four or five years inclines me to an affirmative answer in every instance.⁸

In an organization so large, so various, so ancient as the Catholic Church, the existence of some such people can be presumed. But the actual numbers cannot be wholly accounted for by the sort of assumptions which most readily occur to the mind. First, that they would consist largely of the leisured, who are free to follow a natural liturgical bent, or some historical or aesthetic attraction towards the liturgy. Secondly, that many of them will be disappointed or chequered religious vocations, in whom a kind of nostalgia for the choir has survived the possibility of actually occupying a stall. Thirdly, that their ranks would be

⁶ Now Dom Pablo Maria, Carthusian. As head of the Department of Psychology and Psychiatry and Director of the Child Guidance Centre at the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., he is well known as the author of a number of books on psychology and mental hygiene. The work I had particularly in mind here was his 'clinical' treatment of the spiritual life in *The Life of Man with God*, New York 1956.

⁷ *Laudate Dominum*, special number of *La Vie Spirituelle*, 19.

⁸ *The Perseverantes Handbook*, Colchester 1956.

swelled by converts, e.g. from Anglicanism or Jewry, disconcerted to find, on entering the true Church, that their long habit of using the psalms in both public and private worship must now be severely curtailed, sometimes under the threat of being eyed askance as not quite in tune with a modern Catholic outlook. Lastly, we must face the fact that the liturgical movement (but in fairness one must add the *non*-liturgical, or any other kind) will infallibly attract spiritual 'cranks'.

My restricted experience with people actually using or wishing to use the breviary forces me to acknowledge all these things as operative factors which may not safely be left out of account, but also that none of them singly, nor all of them together, may be assigned as the total cause of the movement which can already be discerned in an inchoate form. As far as the group in question is concerned the 'leisured' have been conspicuously absent from the start; all its members are busy people, many of them busy in just the ways and just the degree that liberal moralists unhesitatingly admit as lawful reasons for exemption from the strict canonical obligation. Every kind of status, profession, trade, and social grade is represented, so that the roll of membership is a fair 'sampling' of the modern world of work and responsibility. A minority is independently pledged to a use of the Office, as tertiaries, oblates, members of a secular institute, and of course, there is a sprinkling, but only a sprinkling, of ex-religious. These form an 'instructed nucleus' to enlighten and consolidate the rest. But even these, or I might say especially these, are encouraged at finding so many like-minded people whose attraction to the Office is not motivated by any ecclesiastical obligation, however tenuous, but merely by their sense of community and corporate worship. The 'others' are equally encouraged at their reception into a group which understands and sympathizes with them, neither tries to re-direct them into less congenial channels, nor snubs them as rather peculiar, or even as guilty of pharisaical self-regard. Adult converts, some of whom are a trifle ill at ease about the 'non-conformist' features of some contemporary Catholic worship, or shocked that so many papal pronouncements seem a dead letter, are of course included. Yet they by no means swamp the 'cradle Catholics' and those with a modern Catholic schooling. And, what of the 'cranks'? I shall only say that a Church which is Catholic has no more power to exclude

the crank than to exclude the sinner, only to reform him. The objection to the crank in a free society is that he is a disruptive force; so far, the group I have in mind has managed to absorb its small quota of oddities without disintegration.

This is a small amount of fact, you may argue, and a very desultory and casual interpretation of it. But I find it impressive enough to feel that the investigation is worth pursuing further and with greater exactness. I am prepared to admit that a hard-working priest in the mission-field might be excused for dismissing the matter as not immediately relevant to his work. He may, and must, be cautious if he meets such people. Nevertheless, I believe that we have already passed the stage where their occurrence amongst 'ordinary parishioners' can be completely disregarded in the field of practical soul-saving. The liturgical movement is to be supported in its true essence, though not in its vagaries; this incipient hankering of the layman for the breviary, or at least for the psalms, may not be safely stigmatized today as one of the vagaries.

Amongst the many interested enquirers concerning the group I have referred to, some eighty per cent were of the sort for whom it was primarily envisaged, i.e. those who already used the breviary, in many cases for some years, and sought entry to the group simply to combat their frustrated feeling of isolation. The remainder were attracted for a variety of reasons, and usually sought information and help, even in procuring breviaries. (This was probably the most serious practical problem of all.) Of this twenty per cent only a few were completely ignorant of the Office; only a negligible few expressed any sort of puzzlement that the Office should even be suggested to a layman. One could not help noting the widespread consciousness of the spiritual needs of the laity, backed up by an admirable degree of zeal and generosity. The problem therefore presented itself in an urgent form; here were people who must be directed towards, or away from, the breviary, here and now. One could scarcely afford to temporize. They had to be put into a position where, with an appreciation of what the Office is and could be for an ordinary lay Christian, and a full knowledge of the obstacles in their way, they might then make a deliberate choice between making some use of the breviary or turning away from it and adopting some alternative.

The manner in which the problem presented itself dictated the procedure adopted. The more proficient were at once invited to name some part of the Office (a single Hour was regarded as the normal minimum) which they would undertake to recite daily whenever circumstances permitted. They might use any form or version of breviary approved by the Church, and they were encouraged to be liberal-minded about substituting another Hour for the chosen one whenever it seemed more suitable or they felt like it. This point was all the more important since a good deal of emphasis was laid on the suitability of reciting the Hours at the 'proper' time; in the absence of any moral obligation to recite at all they could afford to pay all the more attention to this and to avoid too great a use of anticipation, deferment, and 'blocage'. Almost from the outset one could think in terms of a widespread network of 'stalls' forming a spiritual choir. From the geographical point of view this soon became impressive: the response came from nearly all parts of the English-speaking world, though not confined to it; versions of the Handbook have been issued in Spanish and Flemish, and arrangements for French and German versions are under discussion. The results were impressive, too, because of the ease with which the whole *cursum* of the Office was covered by the members. Naturally, a majority opted for the crucial Hours of Lauds or Vespers, and/or Prime and Compline, but the other Hours were accounted for, sometimes in unexpected ways. For example, Matins was taken care of by a travelling salesman in the U.S.A., otherwise destined for insomnia in wayside Motels, and also, quite appropriately, in this country, by a night-watchman, who took the trouble to learn Latin, and also enough Gregorian to *sing* the psalms of the nocturns whilst the rest of us are asleep! Even the ancient ideal of the Ascemetes would appear not to be beyond the scope of modern, workaday Christians.

For the others, simple instruction was given about the shape of the Office, how to recite the psalms, to get breviaries or substitutes for them, how to prepare for the undertaking of a full member. During a probationary period, weekly rather than daily recitation of an Hour was accepted, with a daily 'token', entailing at first no more than a verse or two or a prayer. For these, and indeed for all, a serious effort was made to interpret the 'promise' or 'undertaking' in terms other than those in reference to the

ecclesiastical obligation.

The incidence of backsliding in this, as in all matters of *intention* and the *interior life*, is not easy to assess even if it were desirable; in any case, I do not think it of great importance in comparison with what this small-scale experiment has taught those who are taking part in it.

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I am still prepared for some to argue that after all the idea of the breviary as a layman's, as well as a priest's, prayer-book remains a debatable and academic point. But I assume that all will be ready to grant that behind such a debate there are deeper problems about which we need be in no disagreement.

First, our Catholic laity, in so far as they are prepared for it (and some are), should have more *psalmody* (one way or another) as a main ingredient of their life of prayer. It is not cranky to look forward to a day when the Psalter may once again be the treasured companion of the layman, though not, of course, his only source of prayer.

Secondly, it is reasonable to think of enriching the religious culture of the laity with an ever greater knowledge and love of the rest of the Bible, *and* something of the Church Fathers, *and* something of the annals of Christian sanctity, and that not just as culture but as equipment for prayer. The breviary is one instrument for doing this, admittedly not yet perfected for the purpose. What are the practicable alternatives available to us now?

Thirdly, laity, clergy and religious alike, must in any case, learn more profoundly that a life of prayer demands a lifelong, balanced, and interdependent share in both liturgical and individual prayer. Further, these two halves or aspects of prayer should as far as possible derive from the same source, and proceed by analogous methods.

Finally, setting aside all question of breviary or even of the Psalter itself, must not all Christians learn to re-create for themselves *out of* (not diverting from) the normal, compulsory activities of their lives, a *liturgical rhythm*, which would at least involve them in an orderly, formal, and multiple consecration of each appreciable time-unit in life—each year, season, week, day and hour? Such a consecration, to be effective, implies a more or less formal approach to Almighty God, on the part of every Christian, in his dual character of member of the Mystical Body

and redeemed individual soul. If so, shall we make use of the tools and materials we have got, striving ever to improve them, or shall we first jettison them and then think of making bricks, possibly without straw?



THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

DAPHNE POCHIN MOULD

THE Mass, and the beauty of the Liturgy of the Mass, was one of the forces which overcame my struggles against the grace of God, and pulled me into the Church. And I could not get to know the Liturgy of the Mass without wanting to know more about the Church's official daily prayer, the jewelled setting of the daily sacrifice, the Divine Office. So, as a convert, newly received, I began to find out more about the Office and attend its choral recitation as and when I could. Then came my reception into the Dominican Third Order and the obligation to say our Lady's Hours, which, simpler and almost unvarying, are yet built on the same plan as the longer Office and provide an ideal guide and introduction to it. Later still came the possession of a Dominican breviary, the first tentative attempts at saying the Office on the bigger feasts, and eventually the time when I found that it was not whether I would or would not say the Divine Office daily, but simply that I could not bring myself to leaving off so doing.

And as a footnote to this personal account of the praying of the Divine Office, I should perhaps say that I always said our Lady's Hours in Latin, as I now say the Divine Office. I have only the sort of knowledge of Latin a science graduate might be expected to have remembered, but it is enough to rub along on, to sense the glittering beauty of the Latin phrases, and feel the unifying influence of a supranational tongue, linking all nations, all ages. It does not matter if I miss the sense of a word here and there, the thread remains unbroken, the mind is intent on God rather than on minor problems of translation or interpretation.

The first thing to realize about the Divine Office is that it is the communal prayer of the whole Church, of the Mystical Body