

The World in Tune

by
Elizabeth Gray Vining



Pendle Hill Pamphlet 66

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Pendle Hill Publications
338 Plush Mill Road
Wallingford, PA 19086-6023
Email: publications@pendlehill.org

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ISBN: 978-0-87574-562-6
ebook design by the [Quaker Heron Press](#)—2017

Prayer is the world in tune.

Henry Vaughan

The World in Tune

Three hundred and sixteen years ago a little girl struggled alone with a fundamental problem of prayer. Readymade prayers did not satisfy her. She wondered if it was right to use prayers written by someone else to express another's need. In trembling rebellion she made up her own prayer, and wrote it down. For some time she used it every

morning, a good prayer for a twelve-year-old, honest, modest, yet determined: “Lord, thou commandest the Israelites to offer a morning sacrifice, so I offer up the sacrifice of prayer and desire to be preserved this day.” Later she discovered that a prayer need not be written at all, not even by herself, and she felt that at last she had learned true communion with God.

This anxious, sensitive, and adventurous child was Mary Proude, who grew up to marry first Sir William Springett, a Puritan in Cromwell’s army, and, after his early death, Isaac Penington. Together they became Quakers in the earliest days of the Society, and Isaac Penington’s mystical writings helped to determine the nature of Quaker thought and practice. Mary Penington’s daughter, Gulielma Springett, married young William Penn.

At the time when little Mary Proude was writing her own prayers, George Fox, then unknown to her and born in the same year, already knew that his “words should be few and savoury, seasoned with grace.” At the opposite pole from these obscure children, was the fashionable divine of the day, John Donne, the famous dean of St. Paul’s. Crowds flocked to hear his learned sermons, into which he poured the beauty and passion that had once gone into his secular poems. His prayers also were exquisite pieces of writing, composed not only with a literary regard for beauty of phrase and cadence, but with a courtier’s feeling for formal and reverent approach. In one long prayer he wrote, “I beseech thee that since by thy grace I have thus long meditated upon thee and spoken of thee, I may now speak to thee.” For “sudden, inconsidered, irreverent prayers” he

had no use, and averred that “God will scarce hearken” to such. How scandalized he would have been if he had known of St. Teresa, less than a century earlier, sitting on a river’s brim and informing God that the reason he had so few friends was that He treated those He had so badly!

In spite of Donne, however, the tide was turning against set prayers. Milton found them “a supercilious tyranny.” Most Protestant sects discarded them, though few so thoroughly as the Quakers. Prayer was often offered in Friends’ meetings for worship, but always extemporaneously, under the promptings of the Spirit, and it was seldom written down afterwards. William Penn said of George Fox, “The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld ... was his in prayer.” But no collection of George Fox’s prayers was made for later generations.

The mystical writers who see the spiritual life as a ladder assign the prayer of prepared words to the lower rungs. Meditation, contemplation, the prayer of quiet, the prayer of union are later stages. Yet periods of aridity come to all, even the saints, when meditation is empty and unreal or even distasteful, the mind wanders, the heart is earth-bound, and spontaneous prayer is difficult or even impossible. Then verbal prayer becomes a support for the flagging spirit, a frame for our vague and reluctant reaching toward God. The old prayers, beautiful and true, composed by people who have understood the struggle and found victory, used over and over by praying hearts, have acquired a sort of patina. They speak to God, and also to us, disciplining our irresolution, informing our imagination,

directing our will, inducing a reverent awareness from without, when the inner doors appear to be closed or lost.

We can read them, as Père de Caussade taught us to do all our spiritual reading, slowly, savoring each phrase or sentence, following all the lines of thought it suggests, waiting till each line is exhausted before going on to the next. Or we can memorize them, to recall in the times when books are not available, in wakeful periods in the night, While waiting for a train, or as a means of centering down in Meeting when distractions scatter our thoughts. A phrase may accompany us through the day, flashing through our routine tasks, arising to soften a human contact that might turn thorny, steadying us in time of anxiety or stress, or expressing a sudden joy.

The prayers which follow have come from various sources, some old, some recent, and with them are some of the lines of thought that they have suggested to one familiar with the lower rungs of the ladder.

O God, unto whom all hearts

*O God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy Holy Name, through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

This prayer, known as the Purity Collect, is one of the oldest and most beloved prayers of the Episcopal Book of

Common Prayer. Down through the centuries it has been used in the preface to the communion service, preparing men's hearts for the gift of the divine presence and, indeed, expressing in its few and luminous words the essence of worship.

It is ascribed to the learned Englishman of the eighth century, Alcuin, who included it in his Votive Mass for Invoking the Grace of the Holy Spirit, but he may well have taken it from some still older group of prayers. Alcuin, churchman, scholar, and philosopher, was summoned at the age of fifty to Charlemagne's court from the Cathedral of York, where his life had been lived and from whence his fame had gone forth. Out of his immense enthusiasm for learning, for teaching, and for libraries, came that revival of learning on the continent of Europe which foreshadowed and perhaps made possible the later and more splendid glories of the Renaissance. Only one of his achievements was his sacramentary, or missal, based on the Gregorian sacramentary of Rome with masses and prayers from Gallican and other sources.

Four centuries later his prayer appeared in the Sarum Missal, the first English prayer book in which the various "uses" were gathered together into a uniform service book—English because though it was written in Latin it was used in England. Osmund, the nephew of William the Conqueror and bishop of Sarum, built a cathedral in the shadow of the royal castle of Old Sarum and compiled this manual of prayers revising and combining the old rituals. Circulated in manuscript form, for the use of the priests, not the people, it was in constant use for nearly 500 years.

His prayer book lasted longer than his cathedral. By 1220 the Norman soldiers had got a bit above themselves, as occupation forces will, and were harassing the priests and hindering them in their duties, to the annoyance of the townsfolk. A new modern city was being built on the plain below. The people all moved down, and they put through the building of a new cathedral with so much vigor and determination that alone of English cathedrals Salisbury is all of a single period.

I remember well a spring visit to the ruins of Old Sarum. We left the city of Salisbury with its spire, its pilgrim's inn, and its shops filled with the Coronation mugs of that year, and walked up the long hill to the northeast of the city. The clear chilly wind of early May swept across Salisbury Plain. Some stunted flinty ruins, deep grassy ditches, and high grassy banks were all that was left of the moats and walls, the castle in the Inner Bailey, the town in the Outer Bailey, and the cathedral that Osmond built. Britons, Romans, Saxons, Normans had come and gone. It had the mysterious emptiness and sadness of all abandoned places. The offending soldiers had left no trace, but the prayers that came out of Old Sarum kept its name alive.

By 1350 the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* was prefacing his classic treatise on the contemplative life with the Purity Collect, translated into the English of his day:

God, unto whom all hearts be open and unto whom all will speaketh, and unto whom no privy thing is hid, I beseech thee so far to cleanse the intent of mine heart

with the unspeakable gift of thy grace that I may perfectly love thee and worthily praise thee. Amen.

Two centuries later when King Edward VI was twelve years old, Archbishop Cranmer produced the first English prayer-book actually written in English, and the Purity Collect appeared in the form in which we have it now. The Book of Common Prayer of 1549 lasted only three years, being criticized like all innovations by extremists on both sides, the most curious complaint being that it was “nothing but Christmas games,” and it was succeeded by a long line of revisions. But through all the changes of rubric and content, this prayer has proved itself indispensable.

The magic bit in it for me, that makes it glow freshly each time I slip the familiar words through my mind, is the word *inspiration*. It is used, of course, in the sense of its Latin derivation, *in-spirare*, to breathe into, and it suggests what Sir Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici* called “the warm gales and gentle ventilations of the Spirit.” The cleansing and airing of our souls by the stirring of God’s spirit is not all that is asked for, however; desirable and unspeakably comfortable though that is, it is not to end there. The familiar, the sound, the eternal sequence of inward attitude and outward action follows: “That we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy Holy Name.”

The last phrase once seemed to me an outworn formula grown meaningless. Even when one substituted the more modest word, *praise*, for the grandiloquent *magnify*, how could a grubby and self-absorbed little human add anything worthy to the Name of God? Since I have lived in Japan,

however, I see it in another light. In an oriental country Christians are a conspicuous minority, professing much. They are observed and appraised acutely, not on their words but on their acts, their way of living. By their deeds they not merely cast shame or credit upon their fellow Christians, but they magnify or belittle the God with whose Name they are identified.

But this prayer may go back farther than Alcuin or even his predecessors. In the *Shemoneh 'Esreh*, the great Jewish prayer of Eighteen Petitions which scholars cannot date exactly but parts of which were used in the earliest days of the Pharisaic synagogue, may be found a plea which expresses even more directly this sequence between pure hearts and worthy acts: "Cleanse our hearts to serve thee in truth."

It is a good thing

*It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord and to sing praises unto thy name, O most highest;
To tell of thy loving-kindness early in the morning, and of thy truth in the night season.*

Psalm XCII: 1-2

Our first thought in the morning and the last at night should be of God, whether we express it, as the psalmist goes on to recommend, "upon a loud instrument" or in the secret recesses of our hearts, in the sensitive twilight period between sleeping and waking.

When first thy eyes unveil, give thy soul leave

*To do the like; our Bodies but forerun
The spirit's duty; True hearts spread and heave
Unto their God, as flowers do to the sun.
Give Him thy first thoughts then; so shalt thou keep
Him company all day, and in Him sleep.*

So in “The Morning Watch” Henry Vaughan pictures all life turning toward God at dawn.

*The rising winds
And falling springs,
Birds, beasts, all things
Adore Him in their kinds.
Thus all is hurl'd
In sacred Hymnes and order, the great chime
And symphony of nature. Prayer is
The world in tune.*

It seems to be of the nature of religion—of all religions—to turn in the morning, after the darkness and oblivion of the night, to the source of returning light. I remember one morning, in a little inn in Japan, looking down from my window into an inner garden. I saw an old man in a cotton kimono standing before a little Shinto shrine, a small replica, with its weathered wooden sides and cross-beams pointing upward on the roof, of the great shrines of the Sun Goddess at Ise. He bowed low, clapped his hands three times, stood for a few moments in silence, bowed again, and then went back into the house, his wooden clogs scraping lightly on the dirt path winding among the gray rocks and broad-leaved evergreens of the little green

garden. I don't know which of the myriad Shinto deities was summoned to attention by the clapping of his hands, but the atmosphere of true worship was palpable in those few silent moments.

It is a natural sequence that the psalmist suggests to us in the 92nd psalm. We are aware in the morning of God's loving-kindness, of His gift of the new day, fresh and unspoiled, of the opportunities that lie before us. At night, when we are older by twelve or fifteen hours of experience and wiser for our knowledge of failures and incompletely realized opportunities, then it is His truth that is uppermost in our minds. But whatever our disappointment and fatigue—or, it may be, our satisfaction and hope—if we have kept “Him company all the day” then we can most completely give ourselves into His hands for the night and “in Him sleep.”

Helen Waddell, author of *The Desert Fathers* and other scholarly and fascinating books, has translated into verse some of the Christian Latin Lyrics, and among them the following poem by Prudentius, the fourth century Spaniard who held a high place at court and retired to devote himself to religion.

Before Sleep

*The toil of day is ebbing,
The quiet comes again,
In slumber deep relaxing,
The limbs of tired men.*

And minds with anguish shaken

*And spirits racked with grief
The cup of all forgetting
Have drunk and found relief.*

*The still Lethean waters
Now steal through every vein,
And men no more remember
The meaning of their pain.*

*Let, let the weary body
Lie sunk in slumber deep;
The heart shall still remember
Christ in its very sleep.*

Lord, grant me the sorrow

*Lord, grant me the sorrow of the humble; a mind
escaped from mortal body; to love, to laud, and to
behold thee and cherish every act and thought that is
toward thee. Grant me a clear and sober and genuinely
prayerful mind with real intuition of thy will, together
with the love and joy which make it easy to perform.
Lord, vouchsafe me always modest progress toward
better things, and never to backslide.*

Meister Eckhart

Sometimes we are repelled by the frenzies of the mystics, by what seem their excesses of other-worldliness, unhygienically kissing lepers, torturing themselves in hideously painful and to us quite unnecessary ways, wishing their families dead that they might give their minds solely to God. Then it is good to turn to Meister Eckhart,

who lived in Germany from 1260 to 1327, and who was, according to Rufus Jones, one of the greatest mystics of all Christian history. Of him, Rufus Jones further wrote,

He was a man of sanity, of moral health and vigor, and he had a penetrating humor which is one of the very best signs of sanity and normality. He exhibited religious intuitions of a very high order. He broke a fresh way of life through the jungle of his time and by the depth and power of his personal experience he brought conviction of the reality of God to multitudes of persons in his generation.

In this prayer of his we see his sanity, his moderateness, as well as his pure and lofty spirit. More than most people he had a grasp of that essential flow between the inward and the outward which makes the integrated and effective life. "The active life," he said, "is better than the life of contemplation so far as we actually spend in service the income we derive from contemplation."

To me this prayer is a plea primarily for steadiness and patience. Haste and frothy enthusiasms are to be set aside, and with them the reaction, the fatigues, the loss of pace that can make the spiritual life so difficult a series of ups and downs, of light withdrawn and doubted, of gritty darkness. "Abide courteously and meekly the will of our Lord," says the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, "and snatch not overhastily, as it were a greedy greyhound."

The parable of the Sower, as told in Luke, ends with these words: "And that in the good ground, these are such as in

an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

Vouchsafe me always modest progress toward better things and never to backslide.

Give us grace and strength

Give us grace and strength to persevere. Give us courage and gayety and the quiet mind. Spare to us our friends and soften to us our enemies. Give us the strength to encounter that which is to come, that we may be brave in peril, constant in tribulation, temperate in wrath, and in all changes of fortune, and down to the gates of death, loyal and loving to one another.

Robert Louis Stevenson

The Cathedral of St. Giles in Edinburgh is dim and vast; old battle flags hang tattered and motionless under the vaulted roof. On one side of the nave is the tomb of Argyll; opposite it, that of Montrose—those two who fought each other so bitterly in the religious wars of the seventeenth century and who died in the end on the scaffold. In one corner of the great church is the statue of John Knox, bearded and severe, and across from it a tablet marks the spot from which Jennie Geddes in a burst of religious disapproval flung her footstool at the minister. His offense lay in using the prayer book of 1637, which Archbishop William Laud of Canterbury had rashly prepared for the use of the Church of Scotland.

Everything in St. Giles seems to speak of religion in its harshest and most militant aspects. And then you come upon the Stevenson memorial in a side chapel; a bronze basrelief of the invalid in his chair, with his afghan over his knees, and beside him the prayer which he wrote. The words, “Give us courage and gayety and the quiet mind,” especially, gleam like sunshine in the gray building.

We need the courage that is “bravery in peril and constancy in tribulation” and something more: courage to stand by what we know to be right, to acknowledge as reasons for our actions the claim of justice or of love. Gayety—but how easily we forget it! —goes hand in hand with courage; it sets to one side the self and its urgencies, and it handles life with a light and healing touch. “To be a joy-bearer and a joy-giver says everything,” Mother Janet Stuart wrote, “... and if one gives joy to others one is doing God’s work.” And St. Teresa of Avila was emphatic in her dislike of “sour saints.”

Both courage and gayety spring, surely, from the deep, rich soil of the quiet mind. In Meister Eckhart’s words, “To, the quiet mind all things are possible. What is a quiet mind? A quiet mind is one which nothing weighs on, nothing worries, which, free from ties and from all self-seeking, is wholly merged into the will of God and dead as to its own. Such an one can do no deed however small but it is clothed with something of God’s power and authority.”

Prayers like this of Stevenson’s, in which specific virtues are sought, are addressed at least as much to our own deep selves as to God. People have said that such prayers are no

more than auto-suggestion and they seem to imply that such a label covers and discredits all prayer. But to suggest improvements to ourselves is both honest and humble, and there can be no better or more effective place to do it than in God's presence.

Be still, my heart

Be still, my heart, these great trees are prayers.

Rabindranath Tagore. *Stray Birds*.

I think I know the very trees that Tagore had in mind when he wrote this, for many of the poems in his volume, *Stray Birds*, were said to have been written at the place in Karuizawa where I spent the summer holidays during my four years in Japan. The house was surrounded by great balsam trees, and the clear pure mountain air was tangy with their fragrance. In the early mornings long shafts of sunlight came slanting through their purplish trunks and green branches, and cuckoos called in the distance. In the hush and the freshness, one's heart was filled with that wonder and awe which come when nature silences us with beauty like a trumpet call. Something more explicit than words, higher than thought, deeper than feeling, seemed to be expressed by those majestic trees, as if they were indeed prayer made visible.

We thank thee

We thank thee for the dear and faithful dead, for those who have made the distant heavens a Home for us, and whose truth and beauty are even now in our hearts.

One by one thou dost gather the scattered families out

of the earthly light into the heavenly glory, from the distractions and strife and weariness of time to the peace of eternity. We thank thee for the labors and the joys of these mortal years, we thank thee for our deep sense of the mysteries that lie beyond our dust and for the eye of faith that thou hast opened for all who believe in thy Son to outlook that mark. May we live together in thy faith and love and in that hope which is full of immortality.

Rufus Ellis

Prayers for the dead went out of Protestant practice with the prayer book of 1549 and the Thirty-nine Articles of Faith. The picture Dante paints of weary souls released from years of toil in Purgatory through the masses paid for by their friends on earth is repugnant to us, both because of the somewhat commercial flavor of the transaction and because Purgatory itself has been discarded. But having thrown out these “blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits,” we have tended also to thrust our beloved dead out of our religious exercises. Hallowe’en is celebrated as the secular holiday perhaps most enjoyed by children of all the holidays, but All Saints’ Day, to which historically it was the prelude, is almost forgotten.

From its earliest days the Christian Church has been remembering its saints and martyrs once a year, and from 835 the day has been fixed as November first. From 998 until the Reformation, All Souls’ Day followed on November second, when the ordinary run of faithful departed were lovingly celebrated. The Protestants laid this aside, objecting to such grades and distinctions on the

ground that in the New Testament the word saints was used for all the people of God who were sanctified by the Spirit. A service is appointed in the Book of Common Prayer for All Saints' Day as one of the major festivals of the church, but apart from devout Episcopalians, few people think, or even know, of it.

The traditional prayers for All Saints' Day refer to the cloud of witnesses by which we are surrounded and to the example of virtue which they offer us, remind us of their unseen fellowship as we run the race that is set before us, and point forward to the joys of heaven at the end. It is a noble concept. We have gained much by dropping the paid masses and emphasizing the communion of saints, but we have lost much too. We have lost intimacy and the opportunity, so comforting to us and so psychologically sound, to do something to help those whose passing has left such an aching emptiness behind. The dear, charming, human sinners have become a cloud of witnesses and models of virtue, to whom our prayers are useless.

In Japan, and in China too, of course, from where Japan took the custom, a three-day festival of the dead is held annually. It is a joyous time when the souls of the departed return to visit their families on earth. The living do everything in their power to make the visit a happy one. They provide food, little piles of vegetables on the sides of bridges, or formal services in the temples (paid for by the families) called Feeding the Hungry Ghosts. They provide entertainment. In one of Tokyo's great shrines I saw a beautiful display of flower arrangements set out for the pleasure of the unseen visitors. In a mountain village

children made and decorated lanterns set on wheels, and at nightfall down all the little lanes came toddlers pulling lighted lanterns to the graves beside the temple.

Everywhere for three nights there is dancing before the local shrine. In wide circles, sometimes one inside another, the people of the neighborhood join in the Bon Odori, a folk dance for this occasion only. All ages are represented, young men with towels tied round their heads, young girls in gay kimonos, their long sleeves swaying to their graceful movements, old women, gray, wrinkled, skilled, tiny children, absorbed, jubilant, imitative.

Before the war and the shortages, when there were plenty of candles, those who lived by running streams sent their guests away at the end of the time in tiny boats, each with a lighted candle. They slipped down the river together, a fleet of little lights glimmering away into the dark.

Only simple and literal-minded people believe all of this, of course; most take it as we take our Christmas customs, for the sake of the love and joy and the poignant beauty of the symbolism; but it must warm hearts chilled by loneliness and separation and brighten memories grown dim.

Religious belief in the modern world has lost much of its old certainty of heaven. It was the story of the Resurrection, as some one has said, that made Christianity spread like wildfire around the basin of the Mediterranean. When in 627 the Roman abbot Augustine went to England to preach the gospel, the Northumbrians said to him, "So seems the life of man as a sparrow's flight through the hall when you

are sitting at meat in winter-tide, with the warm fire lighted on the hearth, but the icy rain-storm without. The sparrow flies in at one door and tarries for a moment in the light and heat of the hearthfire, and then flying forth from the other vanishes into the wintry darkness whence it came. So tarries for a moment the life of man in our sight, but what is before it, what after it, we know not. If this new teaching tell us aught certainly of these, let us follow it.”

Now, however, we say little about the life of the world to come, stressing instead the teachings of Jesus and their bearing on social justice. Perhaps it is more true, as well as more humble, to admit that we cannot know with certainty what lies beyond the horizon, to accept, in Wordsworth’s phrase, the burden of the mystery. But the night has stars and universes of light in comparison with which the hearthfire in the hall is dim and smoky and brief as a candle’s flame.

This prayer of Rufus Ellis, an English minister of the past century, reminds us to give joyous thanks for our beloved dead. Though there is nothing we can do for them, we can remember gratefully all they have done for us, and been to us, not only in their high moments but in the sweet familiar homely ones. Thankful too we must be for the experience of continuing companionship that comes to us at times, and the deep conviction that beyond the separation and the mystery we shall find one another once again in God.

O Lord, who has taught us

O Lord, who has taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; send thy Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

In the Book of Common Prayer this is the collect for Quinquagesima Sunday, the Fiftieth Sunday before Easter. The Epistle reading prescribed for the day is the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, and the collect, which was written new for the 1549 prayer book, is based upon the theme of the Epistle.

“This business of loving!” wrote Vida Scudder in her fine autobiography, *On Journey*. “It isn’t simple. ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God—and thy neighbor as thyself.’ Sometimes that paradoxical command has turned me cynic. ‘Love may not be constrained by maistrie,’ as Chaucer knew.”

When you add to love of God and neighbor, love of our enemies, the difficulty becomes acute. “Love,” said William Penn soberly, “is the hardest lesson in Christianity; therefore it should be most our care to learn it.”

That we love is one of the illusions we moderns most cherish about ourselves. We will admit cheerfully that we are not “strictly” truthful, that we are lazy, greedy, self-indulgent, proud, angry (though we prefer to say

righteously indignant), that we take the Lord's name in vain and profane the Sabbath, but all these minor sins, we imply, are amply compensated for by the way we love. "I love people," we say frequently, complacently, and as conventionally as the pious used to boast that they were saved by grace.

Yet obviously we do not love, or the world would not be what it is today. We do not love vividly enough even to avoid conflicts among those who seriously wish to get along together and accomplish good works. Wrangles in committees, acrimonious disputes over the phrasing of resolutions, hard feelings among leaders in women's auxiliaries are only a few items of evidence that even when we are consciously about the Lord's business we do not love. When we encounter people of opposing politics, different races or economic theories, when we meet with opponents who quite openly do not care whether they reach agreement or not so long as they get what they want, our bankruptcy of love proclaims itself in the feuds, persecutions, discriminations, wars and chaos of our times.

"Love and do what you will," said St. Augustine, but he did not mean, as we seem to interpret it, Pretend to love and be as bad as you want to be. He meant, if you really love, you cannot do ill; all the things that you wish to do, informed by your love, will be beneficent.

Love, powerful, healing, quickening, enduring, the bond of peace and of all virtues, is of God. We cannot constrain it of our own effort, but we can have it as a gift from Him, if we want it enough, if we pray for it urgently, unceasingly.

Pour it into our hearts, in a generous, life-giving flood, for we have sore need of it.

Prayer of Intercession

To some, the prayer of intercession is the most natural and congenial way of approaching God. These people find it ungenerous and lonely to enter alone into His presence, and so they would take with them their loved ones, their friends, all the suffering and the needy, the dismayed and the sinning people the world over. They would hold them up in the light of God's love, asking not for specific gifts that might prove cramping or distracting for them, but that God's will be done in their lives. There is far too little of this kind of prayer in the world today, especially too little prayer for our enemies, national even more than personal.

There is so much wrong that needs righting, so little we individually can do, except to pray. That we can always do, and we should not underestimate the power of prayer. In some way that we do not understand, the very act of selfless prayer seems to open a channel for God's healing action. Evelyn Underhill wrote to a friend in this connection, "Perhaps the prayer we make here may find its fulfillment on the other side of the world. Perhaps the help we are given in a difficult moment came from a praying soul we never knew. It is all a deep mystery, and we should be careful not to lay down hard and fast rules."

In his wonderful William Penn lecture of 1950, "And Having Done All, To Stand," Clarence Pickett quoted a prayer for our enemies that came out of sixteenth century

England, which seems to me to be luminous with love and humility and yet not entirely unattainable by our arrogant and hate-filled minds today.

Prayer for our Enemies

Merciful and loving Father, We beseech Thee most humbly, even with all our hearts, to pour out upon our Enemies with bountiful hand, whatsoever things Thou knowest will do them good.

And chiefly a sound and uncorrupt mind wherethrough they may know Thee and love Thee in true charity and with their whole heart, and love us Thy Children for Thy sake.

Let not their first hating of us turn to their harm, seeing that we cannot do them good for want of ability.

Lord, we desire their amendment and our own. Separate them not from us by punishing them, but join and knit them to us by Thy favorable dealing with them.

And seeing that we be all ordained to be citizens of one Everlasting City, let us begin to enter into that way here already by mutual Love which may bring us right forth thither.

Short Prayer

Short prayer pierceth Heaven.

The Cloud of Unknowing

Brief prayers, sometimes called Aspirations, often arise out of our daily life, not merely in time of danger and crisis, when even the determinedly sceptical find themselves crying out for help, but in our most peaceful times, if we follow William Penn's advice and make a practice of stepping home, within ourselves, at intervals. Such prayer, St. Francis de Sales assures us, may be "interwoven with all our business and occupations without hindering them in the slightest degree," and he likens it to a traveler pausing on a journey for the moment's refreshment that will enable him to go forward the better.

Many of the great practicers of prayer have included some of these "short but ardent efforts of the heart" in their written works, from which they can be culled for our use. It is much better, as St. Francis says in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, for us to make our own aspirations prompted by our own needs and the motions of our hearts, but one of the characteristics of periods of dryness is that we do not then spontaneously reach out toward God. Then it may be helpful to choose another's aspiration that expresses what we would like to feel, and carry it in our minds during the day.

*O my God, why dost thou ever remember me whilst I,
alas, so often forget thee?*

St. Francis de Sales

I will listen to what the Lord God will speak within me.
Psalm LXXXV:8

My God, behold me wholly thine; Lord, make me according to thy heart.

Brother Lawrence

Help me, O Lord God, in my good resolution and in your holy service. Grant me now, this very day, to begin perfectly, for thus far I have done nothing.

Imitation of Christ

O Lord, make clean my heart within me.

Psalm LI:10

O Holy Spirit, descend plentifully into my heart; enlighten the dark corners of this neglected dwelling and scatter there thy cheerful beams.

St. Augustine

O God

“O God,” I said, and that was all. But what are the prayers of the whole universe more than expansions of that one cry? It is not what God can give us, but God that we want.

George MacDonald, quoted in C. S. Lewis’s
Anthology of George Macdonald

“Mean Himself and none of His goods,” the author of the *Cloud* had said five centuries earlier. None of His goods, not courage to do His work, nor joy to share with others, not even the quiet mind. God Himself.

The modern Irish poet and novelist, James Stephens, has put the same thought into verse:

*Do never pray
But only say
O Thou!*

*And leave it so,
For He will know
—Somehow—*

*That you fall,
And that you call
On Him now.*

O Lord, I know not

O Lord, I know not what I ought to ask of thee; thou only knowest what I need; thou lovest me better than I know how to love myself. O Father! give to thy child that which he himself knows not how to ask. I dare not ask either for crosses or consolations; I simply present myself before thee, I open my heart to thee. Behold my needs which I know not myself; see and do according to thy mercy. Smite or heal, depress me or raise me up; I adore all thy purposes without knowing them; I am silent; I offer myself in sacrifice; I yield myself to thee; I would have no other desire than to accomplish thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray thyself in me.

Francois de la Mothe Fénelon

His seems to me the prayer of perfect commitment, of the complete yielding of one's own will to the divine will and even of one's own ideas of one's own needs. A long prayer

and a profound one, packed with thought as well as feeling, it might well be broken up and prayed in parts, at different times.

It is not an easy prayer to make sincerely. Most of us think that we know pretty well what we want and need, and silence in the inward heart is even more difficult to achieve than silence of the tongue. I saw this prayer once included in a collection of prayers, and in the margin beside the words, “Depress me or raise me up,” some honest, outraged hand had written, “Oh, *no!*” Honesty in prayer is the primary and basic essential, and if what we really want is not to be depressed, then we must certainly omit that clause. But still we can say, “I present myself before thee.” We can alter the prayer if necessary, and say, “I wish to yield myself to thee.” Dom John Chapman, the abbot of Downside, in England, who, according to Evelyn Underhill, knew more about prayer than anyone else she knew, wrote: “It is not necessary to ‘want God and want nothing else.’ You have only to ‘want to want God and want to want nothing else.’ Few get beyond this really.”

Francois de la Mothe Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, who lived from 1651 to 1715, just within the span of William Penn’s life, is best known as the spiritual adviser to Madame de Maintenon and other highly placed French women. His letters of spiritual counsel have become religious classics. Two of his books have been recently issued in a fine modern translation by Mildred Whitney Stillman under the titles “Christian Perfection” and “Spiritual Letters of Fénelon.”

It is less well known that he was for five years the tutor to the Duke of Burgundy, who was the eldest grandson of Louis XIV and who would have succeeded to the throne of France if he had lived. During his formative years, the boy's "violent, haughty, and passionate character" was softened and tendered by the influence and wise guidance of his mentor Fénelon. The Catholic Encyclopedia even hints that Fénelon succeeded too well in taming his pupil. After Fénelon retired from the court to his abbey of Saint Valery, he continued his correspondence with the Duke of Burgundy for some twenty years, until the young man's death in 1712.

Fénelon in his turn was guided by Madame Guyon, who, with Miguel de Molinos and Fénelon himself, was a leader of the Quietist movement, which had so much influence upon the Society of Friends. At the time of his appointment to the tutorship in 1689, she wrote to the thirty-eight year old Fénelon a long letter, of which this is a part: "When the moment of duty and of action comes, you may be assured that God will not fail to bestow upon you those dispositions and qualifications which are appropriate to the situation in which His providence has placed you. Act always without regard to *self*. The less you have of self, the more you will have of God."

One can see a reflection of these words in a statement of Fénelon's which came to be a source of strength to me when I was placed in a somewhat similar situation without the qualifications and dispositions which were his in such abundance. Short enough to be slipped through the mind in the few seconds before any "moment of duty and of

action,” this talisman sentence helps to release tension, to restore a sense of proportion, to distract one’s attention away from the anxious and importunate self:

Cheered by the presence of God, I will do each moment, without anxiety, according to the strength which He shall give me, the work that His Providence assigns me.

Conclusion

There are many ways to pray, and each soul must find its own. The important, the essential thing, is to pray.

“I started with a disbelief in God and prayer,” wrote Gandhi in *The Cultural World*, “and until a late stage in life I did not feel anything like a void in life. At that stage I felt that as food was indispensable to the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul ... I am not a man of learning, but I do humbly claim to be a man of prayer. I am indifferent to the form. Everyone is a law unto himself.”

And Dom John Chapman wrote to “one living in the world,” “Pray as you can, don’t try to pray as you can’t.” And again, “The only way to pray is to pray, and the way to pray well is to pray much.”

Acknowledgements

The editor wishes to acknowledge gratitude to the authors and to the publishers who have granted permission to include the following material in this anthology:

Henry Holt and Company, Inc., USA and Constable & Company, Limited, London for *Before Sleep*, from *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics* by Helen Waddell.

The Macmillan Company for *Paternoster*, from *Kings and the Moon* by James Stephens.

About the Author

Though her experience as tutor to the Crown Prince of Japan from 1946 to 1950 was the most dramatic episode of Elizabeth Vining's career and the part of it that has aroused the most interest, the actual basis and texture of her life has been her writing. Among her twenty-five books, written under the names Elizabeth Janet Gray and Elizabeth Gray Vining, are *Penn*, *Adam of the Road* (Newbery Medal, 1943), *The Taken Girl*, and *Mr. Whittier*, for young people; and for adults, *Windows for the Crown Prince*, *Friend of Life: The Biography of Rufus M. Jones*, *The World in Tune*, and *Being Seventy: The Measure of a Year*.

Pendle Hill

Located on 23 acres in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill is a Quaker adult education, retreat, and conference center offering programs open to everyone. Pendle Hill's vision is to create peace with justice in the world by transforming lives. Since Pendle Hill opened in 1930, thousands of people have come from across the United States and throughout the world for Spirit-led learning, retreat, and community. Every year, people from many faiths and backgrounds come to experience Pendle Hill's

educational programs in arts and spirituality, community activism and leadership training, and spiritual deepening.

Programs are offered in a variety of formats—including weekend workshops, extended online/on-campus programs, and evening presentations. Information on all Pendle Hill programs is available at www.pendlehill.org. Pendle Hill's mission of spiritual education is also furthered through conference services—hosting events for a variety of religious and educational nonprofit organizations, including many Quaker groups.

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A typical pamphlet has characteristics which make it a good vehicle for experimental thought. It is the right length to be read at a single sitting (about 9000 words). It is concerned with a topic of contemporary importance. Like words spoken in a Quaker meeting for worship, it embodies a concern, a sense of obligation to express caring or to act in response to a harmful situation.

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338 Plush Mill Road
Wallingford, PA 19086-6023
610-566-4507 or 800-742-3150
<http://www.pendlehill.org/>