

Taking the Church's Year Seriously



by Norah Johnston



Anglican Agenda Series ♦ J.I. Packer, editor

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Preface To The Series

The Anglican Agenda series of publications aims to open up current questions that call for thought, discussion, prayer and decision among members of the Anglican Church of Canada at this time. The series is sponsored by the Essentials movement, which seeks all-round renewal of life and strength in the Anglican Church, and its writers are Anglican Church personnel speaking out of their loyalty to the Church and their acute sense of its present needs. It is hoped that the series will spark deep personal reflection and group discussion within and between parishes, so that we all may be better prepared for the difficult and demanding era into which, as it seems, our Church is now entering.

J.I.PACKER
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In our present troubles many wrestle with the hard question of where authority lies in the worldwide Anglican Communion, thinking that if we get this straight everything else will fall into place. But we need to look deeper, to a more fundamental question: what is at the heart of Anglicanism and what is it that we are trying to preserve or restore?

Inside our church, such serious departures in belief have developed alongside the historic core of the faith that in effect a parallel church within the church has emerged. There has been no effective mechanism to resolve this impasse, and working one out is going to take time. Meanwhile, how are we to proceed while the authority structure is in confusion? I am writing to suggest that our immediate task is to renew our grasp of essential Anglicanism, the life to which sound faith is meant to lead.

The Church's Year and the Lectionary, that is, the Bible reading pattern, that goes with it, as these have been crystallized in our Prayer Book tradition, are what make Anglicanism distinctive. To be attuned to the Church's Year system as found in Canada's 1962 Book of Common Prayer is to know the heartbeat of the Christian life expressed in Anglican terms. Here is where the meat of true Anglican spirituality is found. In fact, it is not too much to say that without the practice of this characteristic spirituality the Anglican way of being a Christian is of no special consequence.

This is the practice which was central to the repaired foundations which the Anglican reformers bequeathed to our church almost five centuries ago. If those of us who call ourselves Evangelicals do not try to understand how and why this was so, we may hinder the restoration and renewal, in our own troubled times, of the very Church we love.

Anglican Liturgy

The Book of Common Prayer tradition (BCP) is the jewel of the English Church's reformation. It is a system of worship and devotion that restored simplicity and straightforwardness to a rich historic heritage of corporate and personal spiritual life. It brought to common people, in their common tongue, a common liturgy infused with the gospel of Christ and shaped by an orderly method of reading and praying Holy Scripture.

By the sixteenth century, the pattern for public reading of Scripture in the Western church had become overly complex. Over and above the fact that the Bible was read in Latin, so that few could understand it, was the further fact the ideal of the early Christian centuries, to have most of the Bible regularly read to the worshippers, had got lost in a complicated shuffle. In the Preface to his first Prayer Book (1549) Thomas Cranmer wrote:

But these many years passed [past], this godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers hath been so altered, broken, and neglected, by planting in uncertain Stories, and Legends, with multitude of Responds, Verses, vain Repetitions, Commemorations, and Synodals, that commonly when any Book of the Bible was begun, after three or four Chapters were read out, all the rest were unread. And in this sort the Book of Isaiah was begun in *Advent*, and the Book of Genesis in *Septuagesima*, but they were only begun, and never read through: after like sort were other Books of Holy Scripture used...

Cranmer hoped, by his schedule of daily readings, to restore to the Church a complete sequential reading of the whole Bible annually, so achieving the purpose of the church Fathers,

that all the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once every year, intending thereby, that the Clergy, and especially such as were Ministers in the congregation, should (by often reading, and meditation in God's word) be stirred up to godliness themselves, and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine, and to confute them that were adversaries to the truth; and further, that the people (by daily hearing of holy Scripture read in the Church) might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true Religion.

Canada's 1962 BCP lectionary covers the Bible in two years rather than one, but otherwise holds to the essence of Cranmer's ideal. But

we today have lost sight of this ideal of daily reading, much to our own and the whole Church's detriment. As Dr. David Curry explains;

The understanding of scripture as a doctrinal instrument of salvation provides the logic of the Prayer Book lectionaries. In the reawakened interest and, indeed, discovery of the Prayer Book, much thought must be given to the ordered reading of scripture as contained in the lectionary. This is necessary for three reasons: first, the intrinsic merits of the lectionary itself which, I think, we in our generation are only just now beginning to understand and appreciate; second, the fundamental relation of the lectionary to the tradition of common prayer and especially to the doctrines of justification and sanctification embodied within that tradition; third, alternate liturgy or liturgies containing alternative lectionaries are now urged upon us. These cannot be appreciated without a proper understanding of the programme of the ordered reading of scripture in the Prayer Book.

Liturgy, meaning the ordered service of God in the church, takes many forms in the Christian world, and I am not arguing that it ought to be the same everywhere. My concern is simply to affirm that our Anglican part of the church is self-consciously liturgical and always has been, that the BCP tradition is by common consent biblical and evangelical liturgy at its best, and that as liturgical forms must embody and reflect revelation, so our use of them must ever be a thoughtful, focused response to revelation. David Ousely has truly said,

...liturgy does not provide the source material for theology or for doctrine, morals, ascetics or anything else. Liturgy properly points beyond itself. Liturgy is not a source, but a means of receiving revelation and worshipping in accordance with that revelation. Revelation is definitively given in Holy Scripture, as understood through tradition and received by reason. It is received in faith, and that faith is expressed and practiced through the liturgy. Thus the liturgical context does not give interpretation its source material, but rather gives the interpreter the proper frame of mind and soul for his task.

Thus when those who would be Christians in the Anglican way embrace Anglican liturgy, they are submitting to forms of discipline which are not an end in themselves, nor are to be admired only for such qualities as beauty and weightiness of language, but are particularly well-made windows through which to gaze at God's revelation,

and well-made tools for the building of God's word of truth into the fabric of our hearts and minds.

The whole range of Christian practices, disciplines, creeds and prayer helps people to become conformed to Christ through the power of the word of God. Liturgy reaches more than just the rational tip of our understanding. We humans are created to worship and if we do not find our home in God we will go searching for home somewhere else. Through the window of classic Anglican liturgy, however, God who is our true home and worship of him, which is our true way home, become very clear to our view.

The BCP tradition has not gone unchallenged. The tumultuous shifts in understanding that took place in the Western world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shattered the spiritual grounding of many in the industrialized nations. As scepticism about Christian origins sprang up in newly urbanized societies, so an impatience with the historic faith swept through the leadership of the churches, and with it in Anglicanism a growing restlessness with our historic forms of worship. As the twentieth century wore on, a quest for new paradigms came to enthral many who felt disoriented by wars and by political and technological upheavals, and dismayed by their awareness that the Anglican church was shrinking and young people seemed to have lost interest in it entirely. Something new and shiny, so they felt, was required. Bishop Anthony Burton tells the story.

...In the last thirty or more years, Anglicans have been trying to set aside the unique biblical dynamic and insights of the Prayer Book tradition by creating liturgies which were believed to have revived Early Church practices. Rather than examining what the Anglican tradition had to offer Catholic Christendom, our actual tradition was patronized and put out to pasture.

...In 1948 the Lambeth Conference had resolved that the traditional Book of Common Prayer "has been, and is, so strong a bond of unity throughout the whole Anglican Communion that great care must be taken to ensure that revisions of the Book shall be in accordance with the doctrine and accepted liturgical worship of the Anglican Communion." A Communion which had no magisterium (teaching authority) apart from the Prayer Book, and which traditionally had defined itself largely in terms of the Prayer Book's doctrine and use, could not abandon the Prayer Book without putting something in its place. So leaders of the Liturgical Movement sought to turn its own principles into a substitute instrument of

unity. In 1965, a committee struck by the liturgical consultation held after the Toronto Anglican Congress of 1963 produced the document “The Structure and Contents of the Eucharistic Liturgy and the Daily Office” which advocated a move away from the Prayer Book as the prime instrument of Anglican unity in favour of a common structure of eucharistic rites...

These innovations appear to have been quite destructive of the unity of our Communion. We are, it seems, losing our grasp of the primary thing around which the Communion did at one time coalesce—‘common prayer,’ ‘common practice’ and the ‘common daily discipline of reading Holy Scripture’ as the BCP directs.

This is the moment at which to say that the opening section of the 1962 BCP, comprising more than fifty pages with Roman numerals, ought not to be ignored in the way that Anglicans tend to ignore it. While these pages are preliminary to the service forms themselves, the pages of which are given the more familiar Arabic numbers, they are not unimportant; on the contrary, they are fundamental to the whole book. They contain, to start with, the founding principles of the Anglican Church of Canada (the Preface, and the Solemn Declaration of 1893), and they contain also the two-year lectionary for Sundays and the annual lectionary for weekdays, all designed to secure throughout the Church fruitful solidarity in reading and learning from the Bible. The lections are meant to be used as they are set out, just as the foundation documents are meant to be understood just as they are unambiguously written. Godly togetherness is the goal, and the lectionary is a means to it.

In what follows, I shall assume that you have a BCP of your own. If not, I urge you to get hold of one! It will prove invaluable, I promise you.

Caught in Time: the Liturgical Year

A moment’s reflection on the significance of time will help us to take our next step forward.

Time is one dimension of the framework of finiteness into which we are born. Awareness of the passage of time is one of the things that distinguish humans from other creatures. The wise way to live is to think of our lives as made up of units of time, and to aim at making the best use of every unit. The limits of the time we have, and the

finiteness of temporal life on this earth, are facts to live with. We are caught in time.

Am I implying that this should frustrate us? No, not at all. It is true that sometimes ‘caught’ means trapped, but my thought now, and my reason for using the word, is that ‘caught’ is a pointer to grace and joy, as when a child is joyously tossed high in the air and then caught in the arms of a loving parent. When I as an artist have ‘caught the light’ just so in a painting, or when a writer has ‘caught’ the essence of an idea so that now he can put it into words, or when a Christian has ‘caught’ a vision of what could be, or should be, or will be, ‘caught’ expresses something transcendent over which we are not in control, but which comes, so we feel, to enrich and control us—something that we caught because it caught us and carried us along. This, be it said, is the constant profile of the grace of God.

Now, our appreciation of the Church’s year (the Christian year, as it is often called) should rest on our recognizing, first, that we were made to live within, and be bound by, the restraints of time, and, second, that this particular structuring of time is a proven means of augmenting and maximizing the freedom, eagerness, purposefulness and joy that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ brings into our lives.

The Church’s year begins with Advent, at the end of November or the beginning of December. Its high spots are the celebrating of two great festivals—Christmas, which confronts us with the miracle and mystery of the incarnation, and Easter, preceded by Good Friday and the Holy Week of which that Friday is part, which draws us year by year to realise afresh the astounding grace and glory of Christ’s atoning death and triumphant resurrection. All the seasons from Advent to Trinity—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, leading up to Trinity Sunday, when the unity of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the divine life and in the work of our salvation is highlighted—focus on aspects of the life and work of Christ, who came to earth to save us. Advent recalls the preparation for his coming, Christmas his supernatural arrival, Epiphany his presence as a Saviour for the entire human race, Lent his temptations, Easter his miraculous return to the world that crucified him, Ascension his supernatural exit for the present from our world, Pentecost his sending of the promised Holy Spirit, to make his presence felt and to give life-transforming power to his word until he comes again. The central focus of these seasons is on the doctrine

of Justification, along with Adoption into God's family—our lives made relationally right with God by what Christ has done for us, all of which we embrace by faith as grace and mercy to us sinners. Then the long season called Trinity, the other half of the Church's year, is filled with explorations of the doctrine of Sanctification, our active response to the grace God has shown us in Christ. The Sunday lections, together with the epistles, gospels and collects set for the Holy Communion services, which follow their own distinct course, teach us from many angles how to live a holy life by following the commandments of Christ.

Christian Year Spirituality

Spirituality is another name for the responsive fellowship with the triune God that Christ through his word and Spirit seeks to draw out of us. It is one aspect of the larger reality of Sanctification, which includes, in addition to communion with God, behaviour under God and for God in this world. 'The sequential scheme of the Church's Year, with its stress on turning-points, brings out the dramatic quality of Christ's saving ministry here on earth, and calls on us to match devotionally what we remember Christ as doing at each season. Following out the Christian year in this way, letting oneself be carried along by it and making a point of greeting each new season as it comes, is the inward habit from which the eagerness, purposefulness, freedom and joy of which I spoke earlier actually derive. Varying one's devotional emphases in response to the themes of the story can, as it were, add condiments—salt, pepper, mustard—to one's spiritual life, and keep one on one's toes looking forward to what comes next, thus keeping the evils of spiritual apathy and boredom at bay.

So, to be perhaps too specific and perhaps not specific enough,

- at Advent we shall make a point of being prepared for Christ's second coming;
- at Christmas we shall welcome Christ afresh into our hearts;
- at Epiphany we shall renew our desire and commitment for Christ to manifest himself to others through our lives;
- in Lent we shall brood in self-distrustful humility on our spiritual war with Satan, seek to deepen our dependence on the Lord to keep us from sin, and be open to some form of self-deprivation (fasting!) so as to have more time for prayer;
- in Holy Week, climaxing in Easter, we shall focus our thoughts on Christ's redeeming love on the cross, and commit ourselves afresh

to maintain a life of dying to sin and living to him in the power of his resurrection;

- at Pentecost we shall open our lives as fully as we can to the Holy Spirit;
- at Trinity and after we shall ask for help to go deeper into all the specifics of the Christian life, taking them one by one as God through Scripture brings them to our attention.

The BCP brings us rich resources for entering wholeheartedly into these seasonal emphases, and thus for living a Christian life marked by the fullest devotional variety and the best of spiritual health. Most if not all of us will lag behind here if we do not use the BCP to keep ourselves up to the mark. Only when we wake up to this shall we be appreciating our classic Anglican liturgy at its true worth.

A Disciplined Personal life

The BCP follows simultaneously two scales of time: the annual cycle of the Church's Year, and the daily discipline of sustaining a rule of prayer and meditation that will constantly turn us to humble holiness of life. Let us look now at its lectionary, which is organized round the liturgical year and is designed to serve both time scales equally.

The 'Table of Lessons' is set out in charts from p.xvi to p.xlviii of the BCP. Combined here are the lessons for the Daily Offices (Morning and Evening Prayer each day of the week) and the Sunday lessons (for each of two years, year 1 and year 2). The Sunday lessons aim to cover what are seen as the decisive points in the overall narrative. The Eucharistic lectionary, which is distinct from these, is set out under the heading 'The Collects Epistles and Gospels To be used throughout the Year' (p.94). It is printed out in full, and runs to p.330.

Cranmer's hope that entire parishes would come to church each day for Morning and Evening Prayer was never fulfilled. But Anglicans need to consider the option of keeping up with his lectionary and reading the services privately, as part of their personal pattern of devotion, in the way that all clergy are supposed to do. However, any who undertake this will find themselves involved in three cycles, the daily, the monthly and the yearly.

DAILY CYCLE: One who reads the Daily Office lessons usually completes four chapters of the Bible each day, one Old Testament and

one Gospel lesson in the morning, and one Old Testament and one Epistle reading in the evening. Almost all the Bible is covered every year. Reading this way, one's sense of the organic continuity of Holy Scripture is much deepened, and one's sense of Scripture as a coherent body of teaching becomes strong.

MONTHLY CYCLE: The Psalms are laid out in Morning and Evening Prayer for reading (praying!) once a month. They are printed in full in the BCP, and fill pp.331-521.

YEARLY CYCLE: The Eucharistic lectionary gives a distinct theme to each Sunday through the year by its readings and its brief devotional prayer ('collect' as it is called) for the ensuing week. David Curry writes of this:

The actual manuscript tradition, from which the lectionary emerges, dates from the late seventh and early eighth centuries. The Prayer Book tradition sharpens and completes the systematic order and coherence of the eucharistic lectionary to form a comprehensive pattern of doctrine. The daily office lectionary and the Sunday office lectionary are ultimately comprehended within that doctrinal pattern.

By constant reading we build the story sequence of Holy Scripture into our own understanding. It becomes embedded in us. We have not only our theological tradition to interpret the story for us, but the word set in our own hearts, which works on us day and night. Light dawns, and the relationships of Old Testament to New Testament, the historical movements of God in promise and fulfilment, become clear to us. To quote David Curry again:

The contemporary interest in narrative has pre-modern echoes in the Reformation desire to have the Scriptures read continuously in lengthy passages morning and evening, that our imaginations might be converted.

Through the constant diet of Sacred Scripture not only does God speak in his Word to us, not only do we contemplate over and over again the central mysteries of salvation, but our own lives are gradually attuned to this rhythm, and we meditate again and again on the history of Israel, recapitulated in Jesus, that is also the saga of our own spiritual odyssey.

Pay particular attention, now, to the monthly cycle of praying the Psalms! Large sections of the evangelical church world have abandoned any idea of teaching the Psalms, often dropping their read-

ing altogether. But the Psalms are central in producing within us a **language of worship**, a language that is near to being universal. It has an amazing power to reach into the human condition, touching the heart in a way that our sophisticated reasonableness never does. Imagery for the imagination is a key element in good communication, and the imagery of the Psalms reaches the heart with godly wisdom at a very deep level. Consider, and let yourself feel, the haunting power of images such as these:

‘Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, / so longeth my soul after thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God’ (Ps. 42:1-2).

‘I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; / my heart also in the midst of my body is even like melting wax’ (Ps. 22:14).

‘Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young: / even thine altars’ (Ps. 84:3)

‘For he knoweth whereof we are made: / he remembereth that we are but dust. The days of man are but as grass; / for he flourisheth as a flower of the field. For as soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone; / and the place thereof shall know it no more’ (Ps. 103:15-16).

These quotes come from the first English translation of the Psalms, made by Miles Coverdale almost five hundred years ago, used by Cranmer in his 1549 and 1552 Prayer Books, and kept, with the slightest of revisions, in the 1962 BCP. The Psalms are songs, and when Coverdale’s words are sung, as it has always been intended that they should be (the ‘ / ’ strokes in mid-verse are musical directions), their vividness grabs the heart and their archaism ceases to matter.

Reading the Day’s Lections

Suppose one resolved to adopt the discipline of reading all that the BCP prescribes for the Church day by day, what would one be letting oneself in for? To answer this question, I will choose a ‘day in the life’ of the lectionary way of spiritual reading—an exercise, let me say, that many around the world and across time have found hugely rewarding. Our example day will be the day on which I am writing this, Wednesday, February 28 2007, in the week following the First Sunday in Lent.

Begin, then, with the Eucharistic lections, which with the Collect give you a theme for the week. The Collect runs:

O LORD, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights: Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.

The Epistle is 2 Corinthians 6:1-10; the Gospel is Matthew 4:1-11; both, with the Collect, are printed out on pp. 140-41 of the BCP. The theme—sustaining holiness under pressure—is clear. To re-read this material, and re-pray the Collect, each day of the week would be in accordance with the BCP’s intention. And there is more to come.

On p.xxiv we find a table of daily readings for the first full week of Lent. I reproduce it here.

	MORNING PRAYER			EVENING PRAYER			
First Sunday in Lent	Year I	Gen. 13	Matt. 9.1-17	Gen. 8	Mark 14.1-26	Year I	First Sunday in Lent
	Year II	29.1-20	Heb. 4.14-5.10	42	Luke 22.1-30	Year II	
M.	Year I	Gen. 42	Matt. 26. 1-30	43	Phil. 1	Year I	M.
	Year II	43.1-14	Matt. 26. 1-30	43.15-end	Phil. 1	Year II	
Tu.		44	26.31-56	45.1-15	Phil. 2		Tu.
W.	Ember Day	45.16-46.7	26.57-end	46.26-47.12	Phil. 3	Ember Day	W.
Th.		47.13-end	Matt. 27. 1-26	Gen. 48	Phil. 4		Th.
F.	Ember Day	49.1-32	Matt. 27. 27-56	Gen. 49.33-50 end	Col. 1. 1-20	Ember Day	F.
S.	Ember Day	Exod. 1.1-4,22-2.10	27. 57-28 end	Exod. 2.11-22	1.21-2.7	Ember Day	S.

How can we know which year of the lectionary’s two-year cycle we are in? At the top of the BCP pp. vi and vii, at the start of the Table of Lessons, we are told how. I am writing in year I, for the Advent that began the Church’s Year now in process came in an even-numbered calendar year (2006).

Look back, now, at the year I lessons for Morning Prayer (Genesis 13 and Matthew 9.1-17) and Evening Prayer (Genesis 8 and Mark 14.1-26) on the First Sunday in Lent. Did you hear them in church? If so, refresh your memory of them. If not, read them now. The Sunday

lessons are meant to overshadow all the daily readings for the rest of this week.

Now—at last!—the stage is set, and we are tuned in fully to the context of Scripture-already-in-mind-and-heart in which the BCP would place us for Wednesday’s Daily Office readings.

Begin with the Psalms for Morning Prayer (Pss.132-138, pp. 503-06). Then read the first lesson, Genesis 45.16-46.7, and the second, Matthew 26.57-end.

For Evening Prayer on the same day, the Psalms are 136-138 (pp. 506-09), and the lessons are Genesis 46.26-47.12 followed by Philippians 3.

You will notice from the Table that today is called an Ember Day. Nobody can be sure where the name came from, but Ember Days, of which there are four sets in the Church’s year, are earmarked for special intercessions. Missionary work is the theme for prayer on this Ember Day, and pp. 142-43 provide a special Collect, Epistle and Gospel for the purpose.

A Daily Devotional System

Daily Bible reading with prayer is a necessity for spiritual health. Out of the Prayer Book’s hopeful provision for twice-daily congregational worship a personal devotional pattern can easily be designed. Here are two ways of doing it, both of which I make use of myself.

Praying Morning and/or Evening Prayer is my first way.

When praying the Daily Offices on my own, I begin with the General Confession (p.4, bottom, p.20 top), followed by the Lord’s Prayer. I read the Psalms, Canticles and lessons. I say the Creed, and finish by praying the Lord’s Prayer again, after which I move to personal petitions and intercessions. Surely *Confession of Sin, Praise, Absorbing the Word, Confession of Faith* (the Creed), and the *Lord’s Prayer* are a proper preparation for making humble petitions to God.

Here is a helpful way to begin each of these times of prayer. I draw it from *Common Prayer: A Commentary on the Prayer Book Lectionary*, published by St. Peter’s Press.

Recollect what needs others have for which you wish to intercede—to help bear their burden. Recall which sins you need to repent of. Remember for what benefits you desire to thank God. Draw to remembrance what of his beauty and goodness demands your adoration. All these, adoration, repentance, petition, intercession and

thanksgiving, will have their place in the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. If you learn to raise all these motions of the soul to God through Jesus Christ as you hear his word and respond in his language, you will find such communion with God, such community with his Church and his creation, that you will find him all in all and come to pray without ceasing.

My second way of ordering daily devotion is to follow the *Forms of Prayer to be used in Families*. These prayers begin on p.728 of the Prayer Book. When I am praying with children, or with friends who are visiting, or am just in a hurry, I use these prayers. I try to read as many of the lessons for the day as I can, then pray the Psalms and after that begin the form of Family prayer, ending with my own petitions and the Collect.

The purpose of these descriptions of what I do is to suggest to my readers what they might do, or adapt, as they look into the spiritual wealth of our Prayer Book tradition, and with that to encourage the habit of setting aside time in the midst of the busyness of our day to day lives to meet with God. Anglicanism has produced in its BCP a system which, far from being archaic, is a lifeline to draw us out of the flood of amusements and distractions in which we are currently drowning and fix our feet on the rock that is God. To learn to do this is a supreme need today, and many of us have no idea how helpful the BCP can be at this point.

Following the Anglican path of godliness means learning to live by the rhythm of the liturgical year, and this aspect of Prayer Book discipline is like being sustained by a heartbeat. The rhythm of heartbeat assures us that with each beat oxygen and nutrients are being carried around the body to sustain its life. Without that consistent pulse, the body will languish and die for lack of circulating blood. For Christians, Holy Scripture, the living word of the living God, is the lifeblood, maintaining spiritual health in the Christian life is the goal, and daily encounter with Holy Scripture is the vital exercise through which the lifeblood circulates. The Church's Year, faithfully observed as the Prayer Book prescribes, acts as something of a pacemaker in this process.

In Conclusion

I began with a question about the essence of Anglicanism. I would like to end with an extended quotation from one of our brothers in

the American Church, the Very Revd. Philip W. Turner III. He reflects on what we all might be losing if we lose touch with the realities I have been writing about. He addresses clergy, but his words have a message for us all.

We have abandoned daily recitation of the psalms, daily instruction from the Holy Scriptures, and daily recitation of the prayers that the church has carefully honed through the ages as necessary for a fully Christian life. We do not exist in a fellowship of presbyters where each of us is obedient to this binding common, and communion forming discipline. We do not daily place ourselves as one body within this carefully formed way of entering the presence of God...

...The point I am making I know may appear platitudinous; piously platitudinous at that. If, however, I add certain explanatory remarks, the point may lose its dull finish.

First, departure from daily reading of the psalms signals removal from regular participation in all the forms of prayer thought necessary for growth in the knowledge and love of God. Second, departure from daily reading of the scriptures, which each year takes one through the sweep of the biblical narrative removes one from ever refreshed knowledge of the full account of God's dealing with his creation. Thirdly, the eclipse of the collect of the church by selective forms of personal devotion (periodically engaged in) removes one from prayerful participation in the measurement of time by means of the seasons of the Church's year. In short, the decline of this common practice spins us presbyters out into a myriad of private spiritual worlds, and we should not kid ourselves by saying that we are all brought back together again by common participation in the Eucharist.

I simply note that weekly celebration of the Eucharist has not been followed by the unity its advocates promised but by ever increasing division and hostility. The reason is not hard to find. Weekly celebration of the Eucharist has been accompanied by the decline or disappearance of the practice of daily common prayer and common reflection upon the Holy Scriptures. The eucharistic practice of the church and its presbyters no longer stands upon a foundation of this daily practice. The result is also disappearance of mutual correction and the possibility of finding unity of belief and practice disappears as well.

I ask my readers to give these thoughts the most careful consideration. May God guide us all along the path of life.

Questions For Study and Discussion

1. How important is it for the Church and the Christian to make much of keeping the Church's Year?
2. How important is it for the whole Church and the individual Christian to read the Bible according to the Prayer Book lectionary?
3. How can the Prayer Book help us in our personal praying?
4. "Prayer Book devotion is a major gift from Anglicanism to the world church." Do you agree?
5. What use would the Church be wise to make of its 1962 Prayer Book for the future?
6. What use of the Prayer Book might we benefit from making personally during the next twelve months?

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