



Hazen Books
on Religion

PRAYER AND WORSHIP



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THIS is the sixth volume of a series of little books called the *Hazen Books on Religion*. The purpose of the series is to present simply, compactly, and inexpensively a number of the best available interpretations of the Christian philosophy as a guide to Christian living today.

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E. A. YARROW,

For the Edward W. Hazen Foundation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Blessed are those drowsy ones for they shall soon nod to sleep."—Nietzsche

In a conversation that I had recently with Alf Ahlberg, the head of a workers' folk-high school in central Sweden, he told me of a recent visit with a young worker who was hostile to Christianity. He asked the young man whether he disagreed with Christians because they worked for peace and justice in the world. "No!" He asked him if he was opposed to Christians preaching neighbor-love in the world. "No!" There was a pause, and then the young man continued, "I guess that what I resent in Christians is not that they are Christians, but that they are not Christian enough!"

Unless I am mistaken, the ruthless honesty of Christian youth today would lead them to accept this word of diagnosis "not Christian enough" as well deserved. For they are not blind to the "nothing in excess" attitude in contemporary liberal Christianity. Nor are they unaware of the fear that most Christians would experience if they actually received the very power for which they have prayed.

Jesus and his friends tramping the roads of Galilee; Bernard of Clairvaux and his twenty-nine companions knocking at the door of the despairing reformed Benedictine congregation at Citeaux ready to enter and sustain it; Francis of Assisi and his devoted handful of daring confreres rebuilding San Damiano and discovering that security of fellowship that replaces security of possessions; the loyal lay-friends of Gerard Groote and Florentius Radewyn living together, supporting themselves by copying manuscripts,

and offering hostel and religious instruction to the poor youth of Deynter in Holland; Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, and their number conspiring together to found the Society of Jesus and to go to the ends of the earth to open up new fields of conquest for the church; George Fox and his early company in Lancashire proclaiming the need not for words but for life here and now in the new order; Newman, Pusey, Froude, and their friends at Oxford restoring the organic sense of the Christian Society; Kagawa and his New Life societies in Japan; Grenfell and his socio-medical work in Labrador; Schweitzer and his medical-mission to Central Africa—these are all Christian associations that a man who took the Christian way seriously could join. These are authentic. They are evidences of men laid hold of by a devotion that has made life, and a particular way of life, intensely important. If the Christian Church could multiply their kind, what power on earth could resist it?

The power is there. How may it be laid hold upon? How can Christians remain content with the apparently incurable mediocrity of soul that fills the Christian ranks?

Here is the problem of this book: How does a man become increasingly a Christian when he already is one? How does he begin from where he is and at least be in motion away from "not Christian enough"? In other words, this book is concerned with growth in the religious life.

A look at the life of any one of these practising Christians who have just been mentioned will show that what distinguishes them from most Christians is not the cataclysmic circumstances of their entry into the religious life, but the fact that over a period of years they grew out of what they were into what we know them to have become. For each of these men—both at and after his conscious entry into the religious life, whether that entry was very dramatic or very

simple—was entering upon the long-pull, upon a *life*. And upon that entry he was at a very different stage of growth from that in which we find him at maturity. At the end of his life, Francis of Assisi could gather his beloved followers and entreat them, "Let us begin, Brethren, to serve our Lord God, for until now we have made but little progress." But the humble brother Francis who made that request was a different Francis from the proud young merchant-poet who knelt before the crucifix at San Damiano some twenty years before. Why does Francis grow and deepen steadily from the time of his entry into the religious life until his death, and why do most Christians atrophy away on the early plateaus of the religious life? This is a central problem in the religious life, which the almost exclusive focus of attention upon the original initiation into the life itself, upon "conversion," has almost completely neglected.

It is of no use to look at these great men and women as a kind of a spiritual luxury and to be sure that ordinary men and women must not be asked to share in such growth. We have been insulated from them for too long by regarding these men and women as saints set apart from us by the comfortable gulf of belief that they possess some special bent for sanctity that is not for us. This gulf is one of our own making. For the only difference between the stunted irresoluteness, distraction, half-thoughts, half-resolutions, indecisiveness, and great moments with which most of us occupy our time and the quiet strength of these we have set apart as saints (as Evelyn Underhill in her *Mixed Pastures* so truly says) "is not the possession of abnormal faculties but the completeness of their abandonment to the overruling spirit and the consequent transformation of personality."

This book is concerned with the practices that assist this transformation. It attempts no justification for the Chris-

tian life.¹ It proposes no intellectual world-view in which the relation between the demands of this inner life and the rest of experience is developed.² It presupposes the experience of having felt and faced at some time the claim of this life. It is concerned with the growth and cultivation of the religious life, which, for it, means growth in *devotion*. The modern mind does not like this word *devotion*. It often does not understand it. Devotion is steady. Listen to one of the spiritual counsellors of the late eighteenth century: "We are not devout," wrote Jean Grou, "just because we are able to reason well about the things of God, nor because we have grand ideas or fine imaginations about spiritual matters, nor because we are sometimes affected by tears. Devotion is not a thing which passes, which comes and goes, as it were, but it is something habitual, fixed, permanent, which extends over every instant of life and regulates all our conduct." And devotion is swift and gay: No one has ever surpassed the distinguished spiritual guide of the early seventeenth century, Francis de Sales, at this point: "Devotion, is simply the promptitude, fervour, affection, and agility which we have in the service of God: and there is a difference between a good man and a devout man; for he is a good man who keeps the commandments of God, although it be without great promptitude or fervour; but he is devout who not only observes them but does so willingly, promptly, and with a good heart."

The life of devotion will grow in this steadiness and in this agility. Those who possess it are often plain people. They often bear scars. They may have been at one time very difficult personalities. There is a striking realism in their recognition of the power of the destructive forces that dissipate and divide life, of the cleft between the ideal and

¹ See John Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World* (Association Press).

² See Walter Horton, *God* (Association Press).

the real. Yet they seem to see beneath the cleft, to be confident that it can be healed, and to turn up at unexpected moments, prepared for action. For them marriage, and birth, and the family, and the community, and work, and the seasons, and even suffering and death are good—for they, too, are related to the center. These men and women seem to be living from within outwards and to be inwardly awake and alive. They are far from perfect in their conduct, but they usually know where they are weak and they are not led to conceal it from themselves or to be unnerved by it. They are teachable. And they seem to be extremely well satisfied with their schoolmaster.

The saints and these plain people understand one another remarkably well, and these plain devout Christians are at home with the counsel of the saints. The saint may not be the best theologian, as some have claimed, but he is not to be scorned if what we are seeking is to know the nature of the self, of its errors, of its evasions, of its cultivation; in short, if we are seeking out a much-needed psychology of the deeper reaches of life. It is significant that psychologists such as C. G. Jung and Fritz Kunkel have recognized a deeper rôle for psychotherapy than it has hitherto acknowledged. Where it has been content until recently to devote itself to the salvaging of the mentally sick, it is now beginning to sense a deeper function: that of assisting those who already possess a mediocre adjustment but who are sick unto life and are reaching out for more creative levels, levels of greater abandonment, of more effective freedom. In approaching this field they are at once faced with the spiritual problem. And they, too, are at once driven back to these pioneers of the spiritual life. They scarcely need the strong words of a philosopher like A. E. Taylor, who emphasizes the costliness of any worth-while discoveries in this field:

"The psychologist who can teach us anything of the realities of the moral or religious life is not the Professor who satisfies a mere intellectual curiosity by laboratory experiments, or the circulation of *questionnaires* about the dates and circumstances of other men's 'conversions,' or 'mystical experiences.' A man might spend a long life at that business without making himself or his readers a whit the wiser. So long as he looks on at the type of experience he is investigating simply from the outside, he can hope to contribute nothing to its interpretation. He is in the position of a congenitally blind or deaf man attempting to construct a theory of beauty, in nature or art, by 'circularising' his seeing and hearing friends with questions about their favourite color-schemes or combinations of tones. The psychological records really relevant for our purpose are first and foremost those of the men who have actually combined the experience of the saint, or the aspirant after sanctity, with the psychologist's gift of analysis, the Augustines and Pascals, and next those of the men who have had the experiences, even when they have been unable to analyse and criticise them, the Susos and the Bunyans. Mere analytical and critical acumen without a relevant experience behind it should count for nothing, since in this, as in all matters which have to do with the interpretation of personal life, we can only read the soul of another by the light of that which we know 'at first hand' within ourselves."³

It is nothing new to these psychotherapists to know that the cost of inner discoveries and of inner cultivation is high. They are ready to go to school to these devotional masters and learn their way. They are prepared to give to the exploration of the inner life of man a precision, a care, and a discipline comparable in its own manner to that which

³ *Faith of a Moralist* I, 17-18 (Macmillan).

has been devoted to the investigation of the physical world. They know from many years of practice that it requires the most regular discipline to develop a really adequate response to another level of life than that in which a man has been accustomed to functioning. They never conceal it from him.

It is in this same spirit that this little book must constantly consult the articulate saints and quote freely from them. When a man is unconscious and you are working over him with artificial respiration, you often have to make the lungs move many times before he begins to take over the function for himself, and the early breaths on his own initiative have to be meticulously watched lest he relapse again. Without practice, without discipline, without continuous devotion, without failure, correction, re-dedication, re-orientation, the writer knows of no growth in the religious life—which to him is not an episode, or an event, but a *life*.

What is set forth here will naturally find readers at different stages of growth. Therefore, what may be useful to one may mean nothing to another. It seeks only to suggest, not to prescribe. Phillips Brooks used to tell his friends that when a fish was served to them, it was not necessary either to reject it because it contained bones or to eat it bones and all. A wise diner calmly and patiently separated the flesh he wished to eat from the bones, enjoyed it, and went away content. There could be no wiser suggestion for the use of a book on religious practice.

This book will rejoice when it finds the reader who is able to say either on a first or a subsequent reading that such suggestions are now superfluous to him, that he has found his own way. Now, like Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), he is ready perhaps to write his own manual of devotional practice. This he will go on revising and recasting, as Andrewes did, until he leaves this life. For any forms of

the cultivation of the religious life are in themselves always subject to change in order to meet the changing needs of the seeker. They are scaffolding to be torn down and re-erected in new forms in accordance with the stage of growth of the life structure they seek to aid. To take them as an end in themselves is idolatry and blasphemy.

Yet the temporary character of any specific practices that seek to encourage or to give expression to the religious life need in no way blind us to their importance. Instruction in painting and in music is perhaps only a passing stage in the development of the innate genius of a great master. But none of them ever reached the stage where it was superfluous without it. Perhaps no area has been so neglected in our generation as adult religious practice. I can put my hand on a dozen expertly written books on the theological controversies of the day that deal with the defense of religion against its secular attackers. But outside the works of Evelyn Underhill, my shelves seem to carry but few recent books by living writers⁴ that are of equal caliber and freshness and insight that give me help in the cultivation and nurture of the religious life itself. There have been glimpses here and there, but this field is left principally to the compilers of devotional anthologies, or to those who retouch, re-frame, re-illustrate conventional counsel without re-thinking it in the light of existing needs; or to those who would parasitically exploit religion of its social and therapeutic qualities with only the most shallow conception of what is meant by the *demands* of religion, by what Albertus Magnus called "adhering to God."

To sum up: the real enemy of the Christian fellowship is itself. It is the low level of mediocrity of devotion with

⁴Georgia Harkness, *Religious Living* (Association Press); Hornell Hart, *Living Religion* (Abingdon); Wieman's *Methods of Private Religious Living* (Macmillan) are a few exceptions to be noted.

which the majority of Christians are content. The Christian fellowship is "not Christian enough."

Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish Pascal, once told a story: One time there was a wild duck used to the freedom of the trackless wilderness of the air. On one of his migrations north he chanced to alight in a farm-yard where the tame ducks were being fed. He ate some of their corn and liked it so much that he lingered until the next meal, and then the next week, and month, until the autumn came and his old companions flew over the farm-yard and gave their cry to him that it was time to be away. The old ecstasy roused within him again and he flapped his wings in order to join them, but he could not leave the ground. He had grown fat on the farmer's corn and the indolent life of the barnyard. He resigned himself to remain there, and each season until his death the calls of his fellows roused him—but each year the calls seemed fainter and further away. The wild duck had become a tame duck.

The quickening of this good man, this tame man into the fervent and devout man, is the task of devotion. Three aids are set forth here: private prayer, corporate worship, and devotional reading.

CHAPTER II

THE PRACTICE OF PRIVATE PRAYER: I

"There is that near you which will guide you; O wait for it, and be sure ye keep it."—Isaac Penington

THE NATURE OF PRAYER

"Ostriches never fly; fowls fly, but heavily, low down, and seldom; but eagles, doves, and swallows fly often, swiftly, and on high." Once more Francis de Sales is contrasting the drowsy ones, the "good" ones, and the devout ones. Of all the practices that serve to arouse this spiritual nimbleness and swiftness and vivacity of devotion, none is so central as the practice of private prayer. In fact, this practice is in itself an act of devotion. For the great Christian men and women of prayer have always looked upon prayer as a *response* to the ceaseless outpouring love and concern with which God lays siege to every soul.

Prayer for them is a response to the prior love of God. Nearly a thousand years ago Bernard of Clairvaux gave a matchless word on this in a talk to his religious brotherhood: "Do you awake? Well, He too is awake. If you rise in the nighttime, if you anticipate to your utmost your earliest awaking, you will already find Him waking—you will never anticipate His own awakeness. In such an intercourse you will always be rash if you attribute any priority and predominant share to yourself; for He loves both more than you, and before you love at all."

The prayer of devotion is a response, a reply, the only appropriate reply that a man or a woman could make who had been made aware of the love at the heart of things, the love that environed them, that rallied them, that wearied out evil and indifference by its patient joy. To sense that is for

a man to long to love back through every relationship that he touches. "I trow God offers himself to me as he does to the highest angel," Meister Eckhart, the great German mystic, cries out, "and were I as apt as he is, I should receive as he does." And in one of his later sermons Meister Eckhart went a step further and could say, of God's own delight in this outpouring of His love, "The joy and satisfaction of it are ineffable. It is like a horse turned loose in a lush meadow giving vent to his horse nature by galloping full tilt about the field; he enjoys it and it is his nature. And just in the same way God's joy and satisfaction in his likes finds vent in his pouring out his entire nature and his being into this likeness." With such a consciousness of the love of God, is it any wonder that in Eckhart's day, in the fourteenth century, we hear of an old woman who was seen coming along the streets of Strasbourg carrying a pail of water in one hand and a torch in the other? When asked what she was about, she answered that with the pail of water she was going to put out the flames of hell and with the torch she was going to burn up heaven, so that in the future men could love the dear Lord God for himself alone and not out of fear of hell or out of craving for reward.

Prayer then is simply a form of waking up out of the dull sleep in which our life has been spent in half-intentions, half-resolutions, half-creations, half-loyalties, and a becoming actively aware of the real character of that which we are and of that which we are over against. It is an opening of drowsy lids. It is a shaking off of grave-clothes. It is a dip into acid. It is a daring to "read the text of the universe in the original." "We should in ourselves learn and perceive who we are, how and what our life is, what God is and is doing in us, what he will have from us, and to what ends he will or will not use us," says John Tauler, a disciple of Eckhart's.

To know and to love God directly is to come to know what we are. All true Christian prayer also presupposes the further step, that there are things He will have from us and that some of our responses are true and authentic responses to His love and others are not. Prayer is an attempt to get ourselves into that active co-operation with God where we may discern what is authentic and be made ready to carry it out.

With our increased knowledge about the continuous reorganization of life that goes on in the depths of the unconscious, the impressive definition of prayer as *the soul's sincere desire* has appeared. In this sense the fearful man prays by his acts of withdrawal, of cringing, of brooding, of distrust; and the man of faith prays by his openness, freedom, readiness to take risks, trust of the future. Both pray by these acts even though they are not conscious of them as prayer. There is a large measure of truth in this interpretation. For many forms of prayer do send down into the unconscious: positive imagery, positive resolutions, positive incentives to action. And these forms of prayer would willingly recognize that these elements operate within the unconscious to aid, and to bring into fruition in the life of inward desire what is begun above the threshold of consciousness, what is intentionally and consciously sought after in prayer. Yet since this deep unconscious intention of the soul is able to be reached and affected by consciously directed intention, *prayer* in this sense becomes not merely *the soul's sincere desire*, but prayer is the process of intentionally turning the focus of the soul's sincere desire upon the active nature of the Divine Love and by every device within its power holding it there until it becomes engaged.

There is no fear here of the charge of autosuggestion in prayer that so haunted the last generation. It is freely admitted from the outset that large elements of prayer are and

should be of that character. One wise writer has suggested recently that the very purpose of the active cultivation of the interior life is to transform the gifts of grace into an effective autosuggestion. All that is meant by this word autosuggestion, or self-suggestion, is that the suggestion is selected and presented by the person to himself. We have come to recognize that all that we know has been suggested to us either by our external or internal environment in the form of what is called heterosuggestion.

In entering prayer we have a perfect right to choose from this random mass of heterosuggestions some that we regard as more significant than others, and to dwell upon them. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Autosuggestion is no more than this act of dwelling upon selected aspects of experience. By the mere act of dwelling upon them we do not necessarily prove them to be true. Nor did we intend to. That matter of truth is both a prior and a subsequent matter of tests and interpretations to which either auto- or heterosuggestions must be submitted. These selected aspects of experience with which we may enter prayer are, however, only a threshold of past experience that we cross in order to engage with what is there. And they are subject to revision and to addition as the prayer brings its bearer to new levels of insight.

Prayer is often defined as *speech with God*. It may begin that way. But prayer of a high order rarely stops there. Real prayer is more nearly *work with God*. In Japan, a student of painting is not allowed to touch his brush to the canvas until he has spent hours moving first his body and then his brush in a synchronizing response to the curves of the mountain he would paint. This empathy, this *feeling*