

### 3. Whatever Happened to Morning Prayer?

#### The Other Side of the Story

The shift to parish communion was controversial, to say the least. Bishop Michael Marshall, in his book, *Renewal in Worship* (page 62), noted that the parish communion movement has “done more than any other single movement to unchurch the people of the United Kingdom. It insisted on one sort of service (exclusively the Eucharist) for one sort of people at one sort of time.”<sup>1</sup> In Canada there was a gradual introduction of ‘parish communion’ by the clergy, combined with a not-so-subtle message from the leadership that it was futile to resist inexorable theological progress. The decisive factor was that canonically the clergy, themselves, had virtually unfettered authority to institute it.<sup>2</sup>

There was, indeed, opposition – not only to the institution of a new liturgical style and service book, but also to the almost complete disappearance of Morning and Evening Prayer services. However, as noted above, the clergy had the power to make, and did make, the decision about the choices of liturgy and services that would be offered. The laity could complain, but beyond that, could have little effect.

#### Why is Morning Prayer Important?

In order to understand the controversy, and the divisiveness of the clergy’s decision for Eucharistic worship as the norm – a decision that still rankles in some quarters some twenty years later – it is important to know just where the services of the Divine Office, Morning and Evening Prayer, fit in Anglican worship.

Percy Dearmer wrote in 1915 in his book on Anglican worship: “The (Anglican) Divine service has retained its hold upon the affections of the people, as it has done in no other part of the Catholic Church. Indeed, it

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<sup>1</sup> Hayes, 5

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 14

is often said that Matins and Evensong are too popular, because so many people come to them on Sunday instead of to the Holy Communion.”<sup>3</sup> How things have changed in a hundred years! When I was a boy, the normative order of worship was Holy Communion on the 1<sup>st</sup> and Third Sundays, and Morning Prayer on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. Evensong was conducted weekly. At that time, in the 1960’s, the Divine Office was still the normative form of Anglican worship.

Both Morning and Evening Prayer are completely infused with Holy Scripture. It permeates every part of it. Not only are portions of Scripture read during the service, but the opening Versicles, the Responses, the Responds, the Lord’s Prayer and the Canticles are all Scripture or adapted from Scripture. In addition, lengthy passages of both the Old and New Testament are read. The Office readings are not the few verses that typically accompany the Eucharist. Praise is a major element. It is here that the Psalter comes in. Indeed, in both Morning and Evening Prayer, there can be a lot of singing if they are done in their fullest expression. The prayers are sung, hymns are sung, and psalms are sung; adding much to the beauty of the worship. As those of us who grew up with such services know, singing causes prayer to go straight to the heart. Over time the words and tunes were internalized, without effort, so that many older Anglicans no longer need to refer to the Prayer Book for such services.<sup>4</sup>

It is also important to note that the different services of the Church are held in different places within the church building; for each has its own particular character. Holy Communion is solemnly held at the Holy Table. Baptism, a service of admission, is conducted near the church door. The Litany may be sung in procession or while quietly kneeling. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are said or sung within the choir. They

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<sup>3</sup> The Rev. David Beckmann, *The Morning Prayer Service – What is it and Why is it Important?* Found at <http://www.standrewschattanooga.org/divineservice.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

are services of praise, drawn from the Psalter, the songbook of the Church.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to these very important features, what distinguishes these two services is their accessibility. There is no bar to full participation in them. Nobody is identified as being 'different' by not going forward to the altar. It is very possible, in a large church, for a newcomer to be quite anonymous. In a smaller one it is still possible to feel comfortable sitting at the back.

George Hunter notes that for over 150 years, many Protestant traditions offered services targeted for pre-Christians – gospel, evangelistic or Sunday evening services. The Sunday morning service, was designed to nourish the faithful. The Sunday evening service was really for pre-Christians.<sup>6</sup> When people had servants, the servants generally attended evening services, after the work of the household had been completed for the day. Such services had a teaching function, were often in the people's language, and were often more enjoyable; incorporating singable, indigenous music, preaching that addressed human needs, and explanation of the gospel message. People prayed, the Spirit visited, and people experienced forgiveness, faith, healing, empowerment, visions and perhaps a call to serve the mission of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Most churches eventually abandoned the Sunday evening service, without replacing it with anything else for catalyzing regular outreach. As a result, Hunter remarks, seekers in the 1970's began to show up at Church on Sunday mornings – at the services designed for Christians. They were bewildered by the liturgy and ritual because they were not inculturated, and concluded God was not for them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Beckmann, op cit.

<sup>6</sup> Hunter, 69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 70.

In *Rites for a New Age*, Michael Ingham observes that Morning and Evening Prayer are liturgies of praise and joy. They lack the profoundly penitential character of the Prayer Book Eucharist, and express the more positive feeling of Christian joy in the house of the Lord.<sup>9</sup> He also notes that since the BAS Eucharist was to become the principal Sunday service, in a profound departure from Prayer Book tradition, it presents rites that are more joyful, positive and optimistic than those in the BCP.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this was an attempt to compensate for the effective loss of the services of praise and joy on Sundays. Judging by the attendance figures reported over the years by Bibby, and the more recent “McKerracher Report”, his attempt was not altogether successful.

Since the virtual disappearance of Morning and Evening Prayer, and the coincident introduction of the BAS, church attendance has been in continuing decline. Bibby’s surveys leave one with the nagging suspicion that many voted with their feet, and left. Bibby even raised serious concerns about the medium-to-long term viability of the Church as an organization – a position that, this writer is happy to note, he had reversed in his post 9/11 book, *Restless Gods*. Nevertheless, while the decline has been halted, there is not yet any sign of a return to the attendance rates of the pre-BAS church.

### **Parish Building**

Alan Hayes raises an interesting point for investigation when he says, “...in recent years I have found that some of our healthiest and most growing Anglican Churches are ones which provide a service of the word on a regular basis.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, he cites two interesting examples: St Michael’s Church in New York City, and St. Agnes Long Branch.

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 119

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, 113

<sup>11</sup> Hayes, 26

St. Michael's had very few members in 1976. A new rector instituted services of Morning Prayer on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays of the month. Ten years later they had a full Church on Sundays, and an overflow at principal feasts. Hayes notes that after the change, St. Michael's attracted a surprisingly large number of Anglo-Catholics, and some Roman Catholics. The rector's answer, when asked why the strategy had proven to be successful, was that in his opinion 2/3rds of Episcopalians respond enthusiastically to an alternating pattern of Eucharist and Morning Prayer.<sup>12</sup>

After reading Alan Hayes little book, I discovered the article to which he had referred, *Liturgical Evangelism or Whatever Happened to Morning Prayer?* The Rev. Frederick Hill acknowledged that Holy Communion is the central act of worship. "However", he said, "having said this, there should be room for that which is 'eccentric' to a tradition and that has proved to be of enormous value."<sup>13</sup> He went on to remark that the old vision of St. Michael's left out of the equation the evangelistic aspects of our liturgy, which were a significant aspect of the High Mass and Choral Matins. His argument was that the genius of full-blown Morning Prayer and Solemn High Mass - formal dinner parties - reach non-family people. As implemented, they attracted large numbers of the general population, many of whom joined the church.<sup>14</sup>

St. Michael's made a decision that the worship, not community or service programs, would be the agency for attracting new members. Accordingly, they put extraordinary time, resources and talent into the services; and they decided to make the principal services inclusive of the total genius of Anglicanism, in the belief this inclusivity would be key to their evangelistic efforts. Accordingly they established a pattern for the

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 27

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Hill and Robert L. Barrows, *Liturgical Evangelism or Whatever Happened to Morning Prayer?*, in "Anglican and Episcopal History" 60 No 2 Je 1991, 185-90, (Austin: Historical Society of the Episcopal Church), 188.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

11:00 am service of alternating between the Eucharist and Morning Prayer.<sup>15</sup>

St. Michael's looked long and hard at who they attracted and why. The remnant of the old 1976 congregation - native black and white West-Siders - has flourished. New members were predominantly in two categories: prosperous mainline Protestant families, and singles - both black and white - from 'hometown USA'. There was also a surprisingly large number of Anglo-Catholics, together with some Roman Catholics.

For catholic-minded parishioners, St. Michael's has a catholic atmosphere in the absolute centrality of worship.<sup>16</sup> The Eucharist was the full Western rite with three sacred ministers, vestments appropriate to the formality of the occasion, incense at principal feasts; and a full sense of music and drama necessary to make real the 'communion of saints'. Morning Prayer was offered as a full Choral Matins in the collegiate style; followed by Holy Communion in the Chapel. A constant third of the congregation received on such occasions.

It must also be said that the 11:00 am service did not remain the only service offering. There were ten Eucharists a week, of a less formal nature, that had to do with the existing parish as a family; but at 11:00 am on Sunday morning St. Michael's looked outward as well, and that seemed to call for something more in the nature of a 'dinner party' for the congregation and their guests.<sup>17</sup>

As the Rector remarked, "... main-line church America at St. Michael's, not having been deprived of Morning Prayer, comes to love the Eucharist in its fullest Western rite sense... At the same time Anglo-Catholics and Roman Catholics of St. Michael's, who have ten

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, 186

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 187.

opportunities a week to celebrate the Eucharist, demonstrate quite an affection for Morning Prayer.”<sup>18</sup>

“Is it not also possible”, he asked, “that a considerable portion of the membership decline of the Episcopal Church is owing to the formerly “Morning Prayer parishes” discarding their tradition of the Eucharist *and* Morning Prayer as principal services?” In the case of his parish it would certainly seem so. By re-establishing the “traditional” balance of services, he rebuilt his parish.

The tradition that he established, however, did not survive his time at St. Michaels. Today the parish is still flourishing, with some 600 families on the parish rolls; but the Sunday services are now entirely Holy Communion.<sup>19</sup> Morning Prayer survives, in conjunction with Holy Communion, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. I did email the new rector to inquire about the change, but he did not reply. I suspect that with a rehabilitated parish, the present incumbent finds little need for continuing evangelism.

St. Agnes’ Long Branch, in Etobicoke, had an average Sunday attendance of 18 in 1994. One year later that had been raised to 167. The new incumbent, the Rev. Myles Hunter was a Deacon at the time; and could not celebrate the Eucharist. Accordingly, he eliminated the Eucharist from Sunday morning service completely, holding it on a different day; and replaced it with Anglican and non-Anglican hymns and chant and “absolute hardcore ritual”<sup>20</sup> Parish membership peaked at 350 in 1999.<sup>21</sup>

After Rev. Hunter left, the parish declined; however it took several years to do so. I suspect that the interim priest, and the new incumbent, changed the service mix to which Rev. Hunter had accustomed the parish.

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<sup>18</sup> Hill, 187.

<sup>19</sup> St. Michael's Church, <http://www.stmichaelschurch.org>.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Diocese of Toronto, Congregational Statistical Returns for 1999, 2000.

Based on these two, limited, examples and the writer's personal experience, Morning Prayer is a liturgy that speaks to many in a very meaningful way. Such examples lead one to wonder, in fact, whether we threw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater with our almost exclusive focus on the Eucharist.

Of further note, John Webster, in *The Service of the Word: Theological Reflections*, questions whether the evangelistic mission of the church is even well served by the Eucharist, which by its nature is exclusive. It is limited, except in the very few places where there is an "open table", to the initiates (the baptized), as opposed to the newcomer or unbeliever.<sup>22</sup> He goes on to note that the Service of the Word may be more hospitable to an outsider.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusions**

The Parish Communion Movement, which was intended to effect renewal within the Church, may, in fact, have contributed to its decline by making it less seeker friendly.

In the first instance, the Eucharist is, by definition, a celebration in which only the initiates can partake. A newcomer who is not a baptized Christian will be very obvious – and, therefore, potentially uncomfortable at a Eucharist service. At a Service of the Word, on the other hand, there would be little to distinguish a "guest", with the exception of some initial unfamiliarity with the service book. Over a relatively short period that would be overcome, and the seeker could participate fully in the worship of the community. With the Eucharist, he or she would always feel, and be made to feel, an outsider during the second half of the service – the Liturgy of the Table.

Although the opportunity is available for an outsider to seek baptism, and thus become a member of the community, one needs to ask

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<sup>22</sup> John Webster, *The Service of the Word: Theological Reflections*, in Alan L. Hayes and John Webster, *What happened to Morning Prayer*, (Toronto: Wycliffe College, 1997), 35

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 36



how many depart without taking that step because there is no service alternative available for exploring a closer relationship without significant risk and discomfort.

Moreover, with the closed circle policy that the Eucharistic emphasis implies, together with the recent emphasis on the catechumenate - a program of discernment and education before baptism - one must question whether we are, in fact, approaching a degree of gnosticism.

To this writer, at least, there would appear to be grounds for considering whether the Parish Communion Movement, as implemented through the vehicle of the BAS, has actually contributed to the marginalized position of the Church for which the BAS was prepared; rather than effecting the renewal it intended.

There is also another consideration. As Ken Leech notes, the Office demands no clerical presence. Anglicans pioneered a democratic office for the whole people of God, and are now in danger of throwing away much of their heritage.<sup>24</sup>

That is a sentiment echoed by Edouard Fontenot:

*...I sometimes feel as if I'm starving at a liturgical banquet. I realized that the central issue for me is not whether or not to use Morning Prayer on Sundays three times a year-frankly I don't think it really makes that much difference-but why as a parish we seem averse to making use of the great liturgies of the church contained in the prayerbook. There seems to be an implicit belief that only Eucharist is real worship and the rest is substandard. Now, there are many good liturgical arguments for not using Morning Prayer as our principal service. But one of these is not that Morning Prayer is not authentic worship. Morning Prayer is not second-class worship tarted up with bottled sauce. It's not a canned substitute-the liturgical equivalent of non-dairy whipped topping-but an ancient and venerable mode of divine worship that stands on its own as one of the great acts of common prayer of the church. And yet we never use it.... I realize now that Morning Prayer on Sunday*

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<sup>24</sup> Leech, 181.

*morning is subversive of something that troubles me greatly - clericalism .... Morning Prayer opens up the possibility, once or twice a year, for the laity at St. John's to exercise liturgical leadership and that subverts clericalism...<sup>25</sup>.*

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<sup>25</sup> Fontenot, op.cit.