

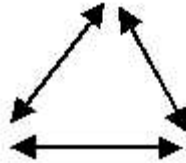
# Threefold Rule of Prayer

*Continue in the breaking of the bread and the prayers*  
BCP p.304

HOLY EUCHARIST  
*The Gifts of God for the people of God, BCP p. 364*

DAILY OFFICE

*Day by day we bless you; We praise your  
name forever, BCP p. 98*



PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

*That in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not  
forget you, but may remember, BCP p.100*

Our worship tradition as Episcopalians is based on a three-part structure. Michael Ramsey, the one-hundredth Archbishop of Canterbury, referred to it as the “Benedictine triangle.” Martin Thornton called it the “Catholic Threefold Rule of Prayer.” I have found myself referring to it as the “Prayer Book Way of Prayer.” The three elements, Eucharist, Daily Office, and Personal Devotions, comprise the fundamentals of a disciplined Christian spirituality in the Anglican tradition.

The use of this pattern can help individuals and parishes move away from the attempt to base our prayer life on a self-made, unintegrated list of “rules” toward an integrated Rule grounded in *The Book of Common Prayer*. It is as a parish, as a local expression of the Body of Christ, that we may fully participate in and offer this threefold pattern. As individuals we will at times participate in this pattern, carrying others in prayer. At other times we will be carried.

The active relationship among *Eucharist/Daily Office/Personal Devotions* can be seen in how the Office is deepened and enriched by a person’s personal devotions, how all three influence one another, and how the Office and personal devotions are focused and completed in the Eucharist. It’s common for parish leaders to think about improving something by focusing on the thing itself. So, if we want to improve the parish’s celebration of the Eucharist we might train those assisting at the altar to carry themselves with more grace and dignity, to hold their hands folded in front of the belly, and so on. Also, we might train the congregation for its participation. Both are worth doing and are likely to result in improvement. What we often miss is how dramatically our Eucharistic celebration is improved when a critical mass or even a core of those gathered has said the Office, in some form, that week and engaged in a way of personal devotions that nurtures and possibly stretches them.

What we bring to the Eucharist has a great impact on what happens in the Eucharist. This is a systems view of what happens in the Eucharist and of the process of liturgical renewal. Thornton notes the same reality, “Eucharist – Office – private prayer forms one whole balanced organic life,” and “private prayer is absolutely dependent on the Office and the Eucharist.”

Evelyn Underhill wrote of the role of Office and Eucharist:

The peculiarity of the Anglican tradition is the equal emphasis which it gives to the Divine Office and the Eucharist; that is to say, to Biblical and to Sacramental worship. Where this balance is disturbed, its special character is lost. ...It is, I believe, by the balanced and instructed development of these two great instruments of Christian worship—carrying them forward without deflection from their supernatural orientation, yet keeping them flexible to the changing spiritual needs and spiritual insights of the world—that the Anglican Communion will best fulfill its liturgical office within the Body of Christ. Here support and stimulus is given to the Godward life of the individual, while the solemn objectivity of true Catholic worship is preserved. (*Worship* by Evelyn Underhill, 1936, pp.335-336)

Underhill refers to the pattern we see in *The Book of Common Prayer*. About two-thirds of the book is taken up with the Eucharist, the Office, and materials to support those acts of worship (lectionaries, the Psalms). *The Book of Common Prayer* isn't a book of personal devotions, but its spirituality does assume that the Christian will find ways of personal devotion that are appropriate to their own personality and growth in love. The "equal emphasis" that she writes of isn't the distortion that many Anglicans fell into of making use of the Office as an alternative to the Eucharist on Sundays. She's affirming a balance that is more to be seen in a parish that celebrates the Holy Eucharist each Sunday as its primary expression of worship and offers Morning, Noonday or Evening Prayer on all, or most, of the other days of the week.

Above from *Fill all Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*, Robert A. Gallagher, Ascension Press, 2008.

“The prayer and life of each member is wholly dependent on the health of the total organism”  
 “Eucharist – Office – private prayer forms one whole balanced organic life” and “private prayer is absolutely dependent on the Office and the Eucharist” Martin Thornton

	Eucharist	Daily Office The Daily Prayers of the Church John MacQuarrie – “built chiefly out of the psalms, the scriptures and the prayers of the Church”	Personal Devotions Thornton sees three forms -increasing our knowledge, love & communion with God (mental prayer) -saying our prayers – petition, intercession, etc. (colloquy) -momentary acts of prayer throughout the day; practicing the presence of God (recollection)
Martin Thornton <i>Christian Proficiency</i>	“Living heart of the Body of Christ”  ”Centered on our Lord Jesus Christ”	“Its continual beat or pulse”  “”objectively ‘give’ to God Almighty”	“circulation of the blood which gives life and strength to its several members”  “inspired by the Holy Spirit”  “that prayer done physically alone, according to ones unique gifts, personality and temperament”
John MacQuarrie	“The Eucharist sums up in itself Christian worship ..It seems to include everything. It combines Word and Sacrament; its appeal is to spirit and to sense ...; it is communion with God and communion with man .... Gathers up in itself the meaning of the church; its whole action implies and sets forth our mutual interdependence in the Body of Christ; it unites us with the Church of the past ...; an anticipation of the heavenly banquet.” In <i>Paths in Spirituality</i>	“...a way by which we keep ourselves in constant awareness of the divine order; an order of love and justice which embraces and underlies all order .... “The cantus firmus is the recurring rhythmic pattern which serves as the basis for the music, giving it a unity and consistency. ...it is the recurring cycle of prayer and communing with God which gives, as it were, the dominant ‘set’ to life. But over that cantus firmus all kinds of distinct melodies may be heard interweaving in a complex texture” .... “...the offices keep us in touch with the whole church. They do not impede the individual’s spiritual growth, but both nourish it and supply a standard by which it is to be judged” .... “..we need immersion too in Christian truth if we are rightly to interpret life and culture” In <i>Paths in Spirituality</i>	“..the modes and times of prayer, and the balance of prayer and action, are matters which each has to work out for himself. ....The aim of all is the vision of God and communion with God – or rather, we should say an ever-deepening vision and communion, for we have seen that the Christian pilgrimage does not come to an end but always keeps its dynamic character. We would agree with St. Gregory of Nyssa: “The perfect life is the one whose progress into perfection is not limited by any boundary.’ And he gave a very good reason for this teaching: God is inexhaustible, and there can be no end to our participation and exploration in him.” <i>Principles of Christian Theology</i>

<p>Evelyn Underhill</p>	<p>“For the fully Christian life is a Eucharistic life: that is, a natural life conformed to the pattern of Jesus, given in its wholeness to God, laid on His altar as a sacrifice of love, and consecrated, transformed by His inpouring life, to be used to give life and food to other souls.” <i>The Mystery of Sacrifice: A Meditation on the Liturgy</i></p>	<p>“The real significance of the Divine Office is that in its recitation the individual or group enters the ancient cycle of prayer, by which day by day and hour by hour the church in the name of all creation adores and implores the eternal God” Evelyn Underhill In <i>Paths in Spirituality</i>, MacQuarrie</p>	<p>“The touch of God upon the soul, which is the prevent cause of all worship, is received by us as we are: creatures of sense and spirit, at various stages of enlightenment and growth. Our response to it is and must be conditioned by our here and now human situation; and by our particular education, capacities and temperament. We use what we have, and realize what we can; and since no two souls process an identical equipment, this is the general reason for the various kinds and degrees of prayer ...” <i>Worship</i></p>
<p>Kenneth Leech</p>	<p>“We share the Eucharist in order to be able to share the world. God feed us so we can help to recreate the world. It is the vision of a recreated, transformed world which lies behind – and beyond – the sometime elaborate ritual which has come to surround the celebration of the Eucharist .. candles, incense, brightly colored vestments, bells ...” <i>True Prayer</i></p>	<p>“The value of the Office is its objectivity. It is a means by which we pray with the whole church, uniting our prayer with that of millions of other Christians living and dead. This is true whether one is alone or in a group, for the Office is essentially a corporate act. It is objective too in that it does not depend on our feelings, but gives our prayer life a regularity and a disciplined framework.” <i>True Prayer</i></p>	<p>“...prayer must involve the unifying of the personality, the integration of mind and heart into one center.... Without self discovery there can be no further progress. ‘In order to find God whom we can only find in and through the depths of our own soul, we must first find ourselves.’ Without self-knowledge our love remains superficial.” <i>Soul</i></p>