

The Psalms at the Daily Services

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IN A PREVIOUS article¹ some of the broader issues relating to the proposed Series 3 forms of Morning and Evening Prayer were discussed. It was noted that no specific changes were suggested there in the method appointed for the use of the psalms at the weekday services. Note 7 in fact directs: 'The psalms to be read each day are as appointed in the Book of Common Prayer, or in the Tables appended to *Morning and Evening Prayer, Series 2 Revised*.'² These Tables in fact originated in the Joint Liturgical Group's *The Daily Office*,³ and will be referred to in this article for convenience as the 'Daily Office System'. It is understood that the Liturgical Commission are giving consideration to a modification of this system, one suggested form compressing the 13-week cycle to a 10-week cycle. The time is therefore ripe for a thorough re-appraisal of the use of the psalms in the daily services. This article seeks to draw attention to some of the principles that should be considered in this matter, and a completely new system is offered as a suggestion of how they might be met. It is hoped to offer some further considerations about the weekday lectionary in a subsequent article.

The recitation of the psalms in numerical order over the course of the secular month was an innovation of the 1549 Prayer Book, along with the reading of Holy Scripture in course according to the secular calendar. Until very recently only two modifications have been made in this method. One was the abandonment of the monthly course in favour of proper psalms on certain days; the short list of such days in 1552 had by 1928 been extended to include every Sunday, so that the monthly system in practice applied only to the weekday offices. The other was the omission of certain verses or occasionally of whole psalms (58 and 83 in *Series 1*) which were felt to be unsuitable for use in Christian worship, since the sentiments expressed in them towards enemies fell embarrassingly below the ethical level of the Sermon on the Mount. But in 1968 the 'Daily Office System' made its first

appearance, and it has acquired high topical significance since its provisions have been published in the Almanacs generally used in the Church since 1972. The Sunday Table of Proper Psalms of 1928 gave way in Series 1 to that currently in use, but this too is now under reconsideration. However it is the weekday or ferial system with which we are concerned in this article, and no further consideration will be given here to the provision of proper psalms for the Eucharist, or for the Office on Sundays and Holydays.

The 'Daily Office System' has several points of merit. The most significant of these is the departure from using the secular calendar as the basis of the table of psalms, a step which was taken in respect of the lectionary as early as 1922. The secular calendar has no liturgical significance beyond the occurrence of a number of (mostly minor) festivals on calendar dates, while the liturgical year revolves around Easter, which occurs always on a Sunday. The use of the Sunday Collect during the following week also establishes the week rather than the month as the natural liturgical division of time within the year, and the provision of a ferial psalter based on a number of weeks from Monday to Saturday is to be welcomed, not least for the practical reason that the proper Sunday psalms no longer interrupt the regular sequence.

There are also several minor features of this system which are to be welcomed. The omissions have been extended to cover two other categories besides that of the 'cursing' psalms, viz. psalms or portions of psalms which occur twice in the Psalter (14, 108), and a few passages which are felt to be unsuitable for use in Christian worship not because of ethical defects but because they envisage circumstances which are no longer relevant (e.g. the closing section of 89). More controversial has been the removal of the three long historical psalms (78, 105, 106) to the lectionary, though portions of each are retained also in the Table of Psalms. The use of psalms as lessons is a novelty in Anglican worship, and has met with widespread disapproval. But this is a more complex question than is sometimes realised, and we shall return to it below. Finally the new table takes a few cautious steps away from strict adherence to the numerical order of the psalms—a question which must receive much more thorough consideration.

In spite of these merits, however, the 'Daily Office System' suffers from several grave defects which must surely render it unacceptable as a permanent contribution to the Anglican Office. Attention may be drawn to the criticisms of Canon D. R. Jones in *Theology* LXXII (1969), pp. 547f. The division of indivisible psalms is indefensible; in addition to the instances cited by Canon Jones one should note the special cases of 9-10 and 42-43 which, though now separate, were probably originally single psalms, and in the Prayer Book Psalter were at least recited consecutively at the same service. The wise words of G. C. Darton⁴ on the essential unity of most of the psalms should also be heeded.

Even more unsatisfactory is the drastic reduction in the quantity of psalmody to be used at each service. It would not be too much to say that the whole character of the office has been effectively changed by this reduction in psalmody. The Anglican office has always avoided the mistake of letting the psalmody predominate to the substantial exclusion of lections and prayers, as in the mediaeval Western office, but it has hitherto maintained a proper emphasis on the praise of God by making the psalmody, together with the canticles, a major element in the service and not merely one item among many. Has the desire to make Sunday Evensong 'popular' by reducing the psalmody been allowed to corrode away the heart of the ferial office, which is not likely to be attended except by the devout? It is not surprising that few cathedrals have adopted the new system. Why should one of the chief glories of Anglican worship be pared down for no better reason than that 'the provision of long passages from the Psalms does not encourage the regular recitation of the Office'?^a It would be more to the point if ordinands and clergy were helped to a better understanding and prayerful use of the psalms.

Some further defects in the 'Daily Office System' may be briefly mentioned. It makes little attempt to match the subject-matter of the selection of psalmody for any particular service, nor is care taken to ensure the use of morning psalms (3, 30) at Mattins and evening psalms (31 v. 6, 141) at Evensong. The dispersion of Psalm 119 over most Saturday evenings of the cycle is artificial, and open to some degree to the general objection against the division of psalms. Even though 119 is too long for any one service, there is a cumulative effect in its use on a number of consecutive days which is worth conserving. Finally, there will always be differences of opinion about the suitability of particular verses for omission, and it is unrealistic to hope that any system will satisfy everybody. In the new proposals submitted below there have been some further omissions in addition to those in the 'Daily Office System', but some verses omitted there have been re-prieved! This kind of detail should probably be settled ultimately by a small committee working on returns from a wide survey of opinion based on extended use.

But we are concerned here with questions of principle. If the 'Daily Office System' is found to be inadequate, should we simply revert to the monthly cycle of the Prayer Book, modified by omissions as in *Series I*, or is it possible to devise a new and better system? Some creative work has been done in this field, of which little notice seems to have been taken by the Liturgical Commission. The recently produced systems of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Anglican Franciscans are both excellent in their way, though because they both provide for more than two daily services neither could easily be adapted for the Anglican daily office. It is significant that neither of them follows the numerical order of the psalms. Among older constructive

proposals Harold Riley's *The Revision of the Psalter* (1948) deserves special mention. Although many of his detailed suggestions are unsuitable, there are some wise and far-sighted considerations in the Introduction which do not merit the neglect they have suffered. Reference may also be made to the judicious survey of recent thought on the Anglican use of the Psalter by I. D. L. Clark and B. A. Mastin.*

An attempt has been made in the new proposals below to conserve the merits and avoid the defects of the 'Daily Office System'. The most radical feature is the total abandonment of the numerical order of the psalms. It is of course true that certain psalms are placed in close relation to others with which they have a real affinity, and this has not been lost sight of in the new table. But the Hebrew Psalter as a whole represents an amalgam of smaller collections, and there is no very obvious order in the actual numerical arrangement. Some account has been taken of modern Form-Criticism in the new proposals, but this has been only one factor among several in the new groupings. This approach is not as novel as it may seem at first sight, since both the Synagogue Liturgy and the mediaeval Western offices departed from the numerical order of the psalms! The new approach here is suggested as the logical corollary of that adopted in lectionary revision since 1922. Whatever may be thought of these particular proposals, very serious attention needs to be paid to the important question of principle raised here.

We have seen that the chief merit of the 'Daily Office System' is the adoption of the week as the basic unit of the cycle, and that its most serious defect is the inadequate quantity of psalmody allocated for each service. The cycle extends over thirteen weeks, and this allows it normally to be used four times in a year, though the proper psalms for Holy Week interrupt the cycle, and the occasional year with a fifty-third week raises problems. The shape of the liturgical year is itself uncertain at the present time. The old year lent itself readily to division into cycles of three weeks, while the new structure is perhaps more easily adaptable to cycles of four weeks. But experiment has shown that unless an undue proportion of the Psalter is disused the psalms could only be covered in periods of three or four weeks by increasing the average number of verses per service beyond that of the 'Prayer Book System'. As a matter of interest the average number of verses per service in the 'Prayer Book System' is nearly 42, that in the 'Daily Office System' a little over 13, and that in the new proposals below nearly 34. The number of verses in any particular service ranges from 21 to 73 in the 'Prayer Book System', from 6 to 26 (if the whole of Psalm 136 is used; otherwise the highest figure is 24) in the 'Daily Office System', and from 26 to 44 in the new proposals. In no service in the new proposals are more than four psalms appointed for any one service. The cycle in fact extends over five weeks, giving exactly the same number of days (thirty) as the 'Prayer Book System'. While the

liturgical year is less readily divisible into cycles of five weeks than into cycles of three or four, a five week cycle could at least be used ten times in the year if special arrangements were made for Easter Week and the occasional fifty-third week in addition to the proper psalms for Holy Week. It is in any case desirable that after Holy Week (and Easter Week) the cycle should be resumed at the point where it was broken off. If an extra week were ever needed the third week of the cycle would probably be the best one to repeat.

A further point may conveniently be raised here, which is relevant to any system adopted. Should the *Gloria Patri* be said at the end of each psalm, and each portion of Psalm 119, as required in the Prayer Book, or should it come once only at the end of the whole selection of psalmody appointed for the particular service? This may be an area for legitimate variation of practice. But there is certainly something to be said for regarding Psalms 9-10 and 42-43 as single psalms in this respect, and not inserting the *Gloria* at the end of 9 and 42. Similarly the *Gloria* might well be used once only at the end of a group of sections of Psalm 119 appointed for any one service.

This is also a convenient place to return to the question of the historical psalms (78, 105, 106). The real difficulty here is that these psalms are on the borderline between material suitable for psalmody and material suitable for reading as lessons. What seems to have been overlooked in recent Anglican thought is that there are a number of poetic passages elsewhere in the Old Testament, which to a large extent partake of the nature of psalmody, and in some cases are explicitly called psalms. Some obvious examples are 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Isaiah 38:10-20, Jonah 2:2-9, and Habakkuk 3:2-19. The list could be extended considerably, but some (e.g. Judges 5 and the Lamentations) are certainly more suited for use as lessons than as psalmody. A collection of such passages was already made and appended to the Psalter under the title 'Odes' in the Septuagint. It is with this kind of material that the historical psalms have most affinity. Hitherto in Anglican worship the distinction in use has been governed solely by the external criterion of inclusion in the Hebrew Psalter; poems occurring in the Psalter have been used solely as psalms, while poems occurring elsewhere in the Old Testament have been used solely as lessons. It is not so in the new Roman Catholic System, where an Old Testament canticle is always appointed among the psalms for Lauds.

Clearly further thought needs to be given to this question. Experience may suggest that it may be resolved clearly one way or the other. But the innovation of the 'Daily Office System' in using these three psalms both as psalms and as lessons seems to have been an experiment worth making. It also seems worthwhile to extend it in the other direction by occasionally using as psalms some of the poems from other parts of the Old Testament. These would continue to be

used as lessons, as would the three historical psalms (though without division), but they would also be used to form an extra week of psalmody which would in fact be suitable for Easter Week and the occasional fifty-third week. A possible table is appended as a basis for discussion and experiment.

	MATTINS	EVENSONG
Monday	Exodus 15:1-18	1 Samuel 2:1-10
Tuesday	Isaiah 25:1-9	Isaiah 26:1-19
Wednesday	Jonah 2:1-9	Isaiah 38:10-20
Thursday	Psalms 105	Psalms 106
Friday	Prayer of Manasseh	Psalms 78
Saturday	Habakkuk 3:2-19	Isaiah 12

When we come to consider omissions from the cycle of psalmody, we find that they fall into the following categories:

- Psalms which have a regular place elsewhere in the service (95, 100, 134).
- The historical psalms (78, 105, 106) for which other provision has been suggested.
- Those which are doublets within the Psalter. In addition to 14 and 108 which are omitted in the 'Daily Office System' for this reason, 70 should be omitted as a doublet of the closing verses of 40.
- Those which are unsuitable for use in Christian worship. This category proves the most difficult, not only because of the inevitable differences of judgment about the suitability of particular psalms or portions of psalms, but also because it is not always practicable simply to remove offending verses without damaging the sequence of thought. Occasional emendations of conjunctions are necessary to smooth over the gaps. Occasionally too, isolated verses of high quality occur in contexts which as a whole have to be rejected. These last however may be rescued from oblivion and put to a new use as additional opening sentences for general use before 'O Lord, open thou our lips'. The following verses seem suitable for this purpose:

As for me I will behold thy presence in righteousness: and when I awake and see thy likeness I shall be satisfied with it (17:16).

The Lord liveth, and blessed be my Rock: and praised be the God of my deliverance (18:48).

I will give thanks unto thee O Lord among the nations: and sing praises unto thy name (18:51).

Let them be glad and rejoice that favour my righteous cause: yea let them say alway, 'Great is the Lord, who delighteth in the prosperity of his servant'. And as for my tongue, it shall be talking of thy righteousness: and of thy praise all the day long (35:27-28).

An offering of a willing heart will I give thee: I will praise thy name O Lord, for it is good (54:6).

Unto thee O my Strength will I sing: for thou O God art my refuge. My God will shew me his goodness, and that right early (59:9-10a).

As for me I will sing of thy power, and will praise thy mercy betimes in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto thee O my Strength will I sing: for thou O God art my refuge and my merciful God (59:17-18).

We, that are thy people and sheep of thy pasture, will give thee thanks for ever: and will alway be shewing forth thy praise from generation to generation (79:14).

As for me I will give thanks unto the Lord with my mouth: and praise him among the multitude (109:29).⁷

Table of Psalms and portions of Psalms omitted

(a) Psalms totally omitted: 58, 59, 60, 79, 83, 109, 120.

(b) portions of Psalms omitted:

<i>Psalm</i>	<i>Verses</i>	<i>Psalm</i>	<i>Verses</i>	<i>Psalm</i>	<i>Verses</i>
2	9-end	35	1-8, 19-end	101	9
5	9-11	44	10-25	135	8-14
6	10	54	5, 6, 7b	136	10-22
7	13-17	55	9-16, 24-25	137	7-end
11	7	63	10-end	139	19-22
17	9-end	68	21-23	140	8-10
18	33-end	69	24-30	141	7-8
21	8-12	75	9-10	143	13
28	4-5	89	37-50	149	6b-9a

It remains to say a little about the principles on which particular psalms have been grouped together and assigned to particular times in the week. The use of psalms that can be referred to the Passion on Fridays is an obvious example. Similarly psalms celebrating God's universal sovereignty have for the most part been assigned to Thursday mornings in connection with the Ascension. The provision for Saturday evenings and to some extent also Saturday mornings has been governed by the choice of psalms expressing preparation for or delight in worship in the sanctuary. Psalm 104 (with its references to creation and to man's daily work) has been assigned to a Monday morning. Care has been taken to assign morning and evening psalms appropriately, and they are grouped together in the early part of the fourth week. Most of the royal psalms (with potentially messianic significance) are grouped together at Evensong in the second week (overflowing on to the third Monday), while the major psalms on the mystery of suffering are used at Evensong in the fifth week. Psalm 119, accompanied and introduced by Psalm 19 with whose middle section it has close affinities, is used at Mattins in the third week. Penitential psalms have mostly been assigned to Evensong, while a preponderance of psalms of praise are appointed for Mattins. It would be tedious to go into further detail here, but a little study will show that in many cases there is a close similarity of theme between the two or more psalms appointed for a particular service. In the table below certain

psalms appear in italics; these are psalms where certain verses are omitted as already noted.

A PROPOSED FERIAL PSALTER

	MATTINS	EVENSONG
<i>Week 1</i>		
Monday	92, 103	113, 114, 115
Tuesday	16, 17, 36	117, 118
Wednesday	29, 33	135, 136, 149
Thursday	47, 93, 96, 98	85, 124, 125, 126
Friday	22	32, 40
Saturday	107	13, 23, 34
<i>Week 2</i>		
Monday	145, 146	20, 21, 28, 61
Tuesday	147, 148	11, 52, 82, 101
Wednesday	18	2, 110, 132
Thursday	68	89
Friday	69	6, 51, 130
Saturday	42-43, 57, 63	84, 121, 122
<i>Week 3</i>		
Monday	19, 119 (1-16)	45, 72
Tuesday	119 (17-48)	65, 67, 127, 128
Wednesday	119 (49-80)	7, 12, 35
Thursday	119 (81-112)	54, 55, 56
Friday	119 (113-144)	38, 39
Saturday	119 (145-176)	46, 48, 87
<i>Week 4</i>		
Monday	104	141, 142, 143
Tuesday	3, 5, 30	4, 31
Wednesday	44, 74	91, 140
Thursday	76, 77	41, 64, 123, 131
Friday	102, 144	88, 90
Saturday	66, 116	15, 24, 26, 133
<i>Week 5</i>		
Monday	8, 139	9-10
Tuesday	1, 111, 112, 138	37
Wednesday	50, 81	49, 75
Thursday	97, 99, 150	53, 73
Friday	80, 129, 137	62, 94
Saturday	71, 86	25, 27

One major practical objection can be raised to such a scheme as this. It would be intolerably cumbersome to follow this kind of system using an ordinary psalter in which the psalms were printed out in full and in numerical order. It would only be practicable if a liturgical psalter were printed, with the psalms arranged in order of use and without the verses scheduled for omission. This is not so radical a suggestion as it sounds. The Prayer Book has always printed the Epistles and Gospels with the Collects, and the psalms and lessons in the occasional

offices. The 1549 Prayer Book printed the Introit Psalm with each Collect, Epistle and Gospel. In the days before we became accustomed to frequent changes of lectionary and order of service most clergy used a 'Daily Service Book' in which the Sunday and weekday lessons were printed out as an appendix to the Prayer Book. It is to be hoped that before long stability in this area will be achieved once more, and that lectionary changes (including modifications in the kind of psalter here proposed) will occur subsequently only at fairly infrequent intervals (say of twenty or twenty-five years), so that it will again be practicable to print and use Office Books of this kind. The Roman Catholic Church has printed its new Offices in this way (including the lessons as well as the psalms), and there is no reason why the Church of England should not do the same. It would certainly be wrong to refuse to consider the merits of this new approach to the Psalter solely on grounds of expense.⁸

¹ Vol. 89, no. 1, pp. 58-65.

² GS 215: *Alternative Services Series 3 Morning and Evening Prayer*, p. 7.

³ Ed. R. C. D. Jasper, SPCK and Epworth Press, 1968.

⁴ 'The New Abuse of the Psalter,' *Theology* LXXIII (1970), pp. 23-26. Note especially the first paragraph on p. 26.

⁵ *The Daily Office*, p. 32.

⁶ *Church Quarterly Review* CLXVII (1966), pp. 413-424.

⁷ The text follows that of *The Revised Psalter*, with minor modifications necessitated by taking the verses out of context. The verse enumeration used here and in the subsequent tables is that of *The Revised Psalter*. This will facilitate direct comparison with the Table printed in *Series 2 Revised*.

⁸ I should like to express thanks to Dr. Jasper for drawing my attention to the Office of the Anglican Franciscans and to Brother Colin Wilfred for lending me a copy; also to the Rev. C. P. M. Jones for drawing my attention to the new Office of the Roman Catholic Church, and to the Rev. Dr. J. McHugh for lending me a copy.